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# **Smart Power In Small States' Foreign Policy: A Case Study Of UAE's Smart Power <sup>(1)</sup>**

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## Abstract

The study seeks to analyze the importance of smart power in small states' foreign policy by applying the smart power strategy followed by UAE after 2011. Small states, including the UAE, have always followed a strategy based largely on soft power to protect their survival in the first place. However, soft power does not provide sufficient protection or guarantee for the survival of small states from the threats of stronger states. Moreover, the variables of the international system after the Cold War imposed several new challenges on small states, such as international terrorism, which has become an existential threat to small states, and it is not feasible to confront them by relying only on soft power. Therefore, small states need to follow a smart power strategy that provides them with more guarantees of survival and protection. After the Arab Spring, the UAE faced dangerous and unprecedented security challenges, the most dangerous of which was the rise of political Islam represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, and the growing Iranian threat. As a result, the UAE has adopted a strategy based on smart power to confront these challenges. The study confirms that the UAE, as a small state, has greatly succeeded through smart power in mitigating the Iranian threat and undermining the influence of political Islam to a very large extent. Hence, the UAE represents one of the most prominent cases that demonstrate the importance of the smart power of small states in providing the greatest guarantees to protect their survival and enhance their interests and influence.

**Keywords:** UAE, Smart Power, Soft Power, Iran, Terrorism, Muslim brotherhood, Yemen

## المخلص

تسعى الدراسة إلى تحليل أهمية القوة الذكية في السياسة الخارجية للدول الصغيرة بالتطبيق على استراتيجية القوة الذكية التي اتبعتها الإمارات بعد 2011. طالما اتبعت الدول الصغيرة بما في ذلك الإمارات استراتيجية قائمة إلى حد كبير على القوة الناعمة لحماية بقائها في المقام الأول. ومع ذلك، لا تقدم القوة الناعمة حماية أو ضمانة كافية لبقاء الدول الصغيرة من تهديدات الدول الأقوى. علاوة على ذلك، فرضت متغيرات النظام الدولي بعد الحرب الباردة عدة تحديات جديدة على الدول الصغيرة كالإرهاب الدولي أصبحت بمثابة تهديد وجودي للدول الصغيرة، لا يجدي التصدي لها عبر

الاعتماد على القوة الناعمة فقط. ومن هذا المنطلق، تأتي أهمية أن تتبّع الدول الصغيرة استراتيجية قوة ذكية توفر لها المزيد من ضمانات البقاء والحماية. واجهت الإمارات بعد الربيع العربي تحديات أمنية خطيرة غير مسبوقة، كان أشدها خطورة صعود الإسلام السياسي متمثلاً في جماعة الإخوان المسلمين، وتزايد التهديد الإيراني. وعلى إثر ذلك، قامت الإمارات بتبني استراتيجية تقوم على القوة الذكية لمواجهة هذه التحديات. وتؤكد الدراسة أن الإمارات كدولة صغيرة قد نجحت عبر القوة الذكية بشكل كبير في التخفيف من وطأة الخطر الإيراني، وتقويض نفوذ الإسلام السياسي بدرجة كبيرة جداً. ومن ثم، تمثل الإمارات أحد أبرز الحالات التي تبيّن أهمية القوة الذكية للدول الصغيرة في توفير أكبر قدر من الضمانات لحماية بقائها وتعزيز مصالحها ونفوذها.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الإمارات، القوة الذكية، القوة الناعمة، إيران، الإرهاب، الإخوان المسلمين، اليمن

## Introduction

Smart power is combining hard and soft power in a specific strategy to achieve foreign policy's aims more effectively. Due to their limited hard power, especially the military power. Small states have often adopted realist various strategies such as balance alliance and strategic hedging, which of course secure their survival but also undermine their independence and choices in foreign policy. Therefore, to escape the dependency trap, some small countries like Norway and Panama, have excelled at using soft power.

However, soft power as Nye argues is inappropriate in many cases. For small states, in particular, it cannot provide a full guarantee of survival in light of the new serious challenges in the world. Therefore, several successful models have emerged of small states that employ smart power strategies in foreign policy like Singapore. Smart power for the latter provided wide guarantees for survival and contributed to increasing its influence.

## Research Problem

UAE is a small state. Since its foundation, it heavily relied on the alliance with the US to secure its survival from the threats of regional power, especially Iran. In addition, it excelled at using soft power to garner more influence and status. UAE faced since Arab Spring in 2011, serious strategic and security threats, represented specifically by rising Iran and Muslim brotherhood threats. These threats coincided with the US's declining role in the Gulf. To face these threats, UAE developed smart power strategies.

The study represents a case study of the significance of smart power in the foreign policy of small states by applying it to the UAE. **Hence, the research problem centres on what are the challenges of UAE's foreign policy after 2011 as a small state?. And why and how UAE employs smart power policies to face these challenges?. And to what extent has UAE's smart power succeeded in facing these challenges?.**

## Methodology

**The study uses the "measuring national power approach".** It is an approach reached by researchers at the RAND Corporation, which measures or examines in detail the state's national power resources in three stages, and the possibility of converting these resources into tangible potentials, and how the results of that lead to achieving state's foreign policy objectives, as follows:

### A. Power-in-being

This stage aims at measuring or identifying all the resources and capabilities available to the country under study and their developments, whether hard military, economic, or soft capabilities. Accordingly, this stage will be employed in determining the elements of smart power available to the UAE, whether hard or soft, as well as the development of these elements, such as plans to develop the military capabilities, economic development plans, or agreements to enhance cultural cooperation or establish international universities and others.

### B. Conversion Process or national performance

This stage aims at measuring the actual embodiment of transforming these power elements into real, tangible power on the ground. For instance, the ability of the state to exploit its human and military power to turn into a combat-armed force ready for war. Hence, this stage will be employed in studying how the UAE transforms its soft and hard power resources into tangible power on the ground, and how it employed it regionally and internationally in its foreign policy. Through the use of available indicators and activation on the ground, such as military intervention in Yemen and Bahrain, financial aid to some Arab countries, support for "moderate Islam and combating extremism" programs...etc.

### **C. The power in outcomes**

This stage is concerned with the success or failure of these outputs in achieving the objectives of the state's foreign policy and its effectiveness in supporting the state's power or vice versa. Accordingly, this stage is used to study the outputs of the UAE's smart power towards the areas and regions directed or the extent of its capabilities to achieve foreign policy goals in issues such as undermining Iranian influence, besieging political Islam, and strengthening the influence of the UAE externally and others.

### **Literature Reviews**

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#### **The literature reviews are composed of three categories:**

##### **A. Smart power in foreign policy in general**

- 1. Study of Shekofti, A.S. and Shahandeh, B.(2018). Entitled "Explanation of the Position of Smart Power in China's Foreign Policy", *International Quarterly of Geopolitics, Vol 14, No. 51.***

According to the study, China is one of the leading countries in applying smart power in its foreign policy. Smart power has become a mainstay of President Xi Jinping's new foreign policy, which extensively focuses on strengthening China's international position as a great responsible power and defending China's core interests. In addition, maintains the slogan of peaceful rise, alleviating China's neighbours' fears of Chinese rise, and challenging the US smoothly.

Accordingly, Xi Jinping's foreign policy has witnessed a parallel activation of all the tools of Chinese power. For instance, modernization and increased military spending, strengthening the Chinese economy and expanding its global scope, expanding the employment of Chinese soft power, especially in Asia, forming security and economic arrangements, strengthening China's role in international institutions, and playing a leading role in international crises.

As such, the study concluded that employing smart power has become, from the perspective of China's strategic thinking, the best strategy for benign hegemony over the international system. Since smart power, in short, provides China with two strategic advantages: first, a calm rise as a leading power and undermining of the US hegemony smoothly without harsh escalation. Second, protecting its core interests and security when necessary.

## **2. Study of Pitsuwan, F.(2014). entitled "Smart Power Strategy: Recalibrating Indonesian Foreign Policy", *Asian Politics & Policy*, Vol. 6, No. 2.**

The study discusses the motives and goals of Indonesia's use of smart power in its foreign policy, and to what extent it has succeeded in achieving these goals. Indonesia had no choice but to adopt a smart power strategy against the backdrop of several variables and challenges such as the escalation of intense competition between the US and China in Southeast Asia, and the emergence of extremism and terrorism. Its smart power strategy has centred on, for instance, maintaining its security partnership with China and the US as strategic hedging, creating a climate of liberal openness that attracts foreign investments and trying to export its moderate Islamic model to contain extremism. Indonesia, not only has greatly overcome these challenges but also has become an important power in Southeast Asia and the world thanks to its smart power.

### **B-Smart power in small states' foreign policy**

#### **1. study of Chong, A. (2015), Entitled "Smart Power and Military Force: An Introduction", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.38, No.3.**

The study devoted a section to Singapore as one of the leading small countries in employing smart power in its foreign policy. Singapore has long relied, due to its weak national capabilities, on employing its soft power, specifically in the domain of governance and management. That enabled it to establish a great international reputation. However, smart power has begun to be thought of as a strategy in foreign policy, with China's escalating arrogant behaviour in the South China Sea.

Singapore's smart power strategy, included, for instance, the building of military force and equipping it with the latest weapons and fighters, and the purpose, according to the study, is not to balance Chinese power, as it is almost impossible, but to deter and incur it more losses in the event of any military confrontation. And strengthening the military alliances with the US and Southeast Asian countries. On the other hand, Singapore sought to revitalize its diplomatic role in most of the regional arrangements to ensure more external manoeuvring. As for soft power, Singapore has sought to play the role of the responsible international power and enhance its reputation, by

exploiting the development of its armed force to send units to the UN. That, in return, enhances Singapore's protection of Alliance Networks.

As such, the study concluded that Singapore's approach to the use of smart power is a rich and successful case for a small country in the international system, especially since its use was thoughtful, integrated and successful. Soft power and building reputation are not sufficient to protect the survival of small states. It must be employed with hard power tools for more guarantees, or mitigation and deterrence of threats, not for absolute protection in a changing world.

**2. study of Johnson, E.E. (2010), Entitled "Weak Or Smart?. A Smart Power Analysis of Taiwan's Elbowroom", Master's Thesis, University of Oslo.**

The Taiwanese case is similar to Singapore's case in terms of the main threat (China), and the tools or strategy for employing smart power. Taiwan has long relied on building alliances, especially with the US, as almost the only strategy to protect its survival and independence. However, President Maying-jeou considered that insufficient in light of the repeated Chinese threats to annex the island. So, he began thinking about adopting a smart force strategy. That is based on, for instance, buying smart deterrence or defensive weapons, and of course not to defeat or challenge China, but rather to impose huge costs on China in the event of an invasion. Also, Taiwan focused on developing its economy greatly until it became one of the top twenty global economies, and this in itself represents a protection factor because it attracted investments from international companies even from China. As for soft power, the study referred only to the generous humanitarian and economic aid of Taiwan, as Taiwan's most important soft weapon, which provided it great international respect and influence.

The study concluded that Taiwan's smart power strategy does not provide full protection from China's threat. However, it has greatly mitigated that threat, with the persistence of US protection as an actual deterrence to China. Accordingly, smart power has become imperative for small states.

**C. Smart power in UAE's foreign policy**

**1. Study of Ennis, C.A.(2018), Entitled, "Reading Entrepreneurial Power in Small Gulf States: Qatar and The UAE", *International Journal*, Vol.73, No.4.**

This study is one of the important, comprehensive and recent studies that dealt in detail with the smart power of both the UAE and Qatar. UAE the actual employment of a smart power strategy for the UAE began in the wake of the so-called (Arab Spring). This was followed by several challenges that necessitated not relying on soft power alone. The most prominent of which is the challenge of the unprecedented growth of the Iranian threat to the Gulf security, the decline in the role of the major regional powers allied to the UAE, Egypt in particular, the growth of political Islam (the Muslim Brotherhood) and radical Islam, signs of the US retreat from its commitment to protecting the Gulf security, and striking a nuclear with Iran.

Regarding UAE's smart power strategy to counter these challenges. At the level of hard power, it was represented in a mixture of tools, including increased spending on armaments and the development of the UAE armed force, direct foreign military interventions as an indication of the expansion of its external influence, and control of regional conditions by force. And besieging Iranian influence and political Islam, including military intervention in Bahrain and Yemen, participation in the international coalition in Libya, and the international coalition against ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

The economic power was represented in strengthening its economic capabilities by attracting more foreign investments, especially in non-oil sectors, and increasing its abroad investments, such as investments in sovereign funds. Soft power, for instance, was presented in working to increase the UAE's international reputation by building branches of the world's largest universities, and promoting the principle of tolerance and caring. Also, working to spread the ideas of moderate Islam to fight political Islam. The study concluded that thanks to its smart power since 2011, UAE could overcome its main challenges especially political Islam, and limit Iran's threat. As well as, it could relatively compensate for the decline of the US role and other powers in MENA, by becoming a decisive power, and a country with great weight and reputation on the international scene.

**2. Young, K.(2017). Entitled "New Perspectives on UAE Foreign Policy". *Special Edition, Journal of Arabian Studies, Vol 7. No.1.***

The study discusses the development of UAE's foreign policy after 2011, which was based on smart power. Such a development has been a result of the UAE's existential fear arising from Iran's expansion of sectarian and hostile policies, the threats of political and violent Islam, and finally the

growing doubts about the continued commitment of the US to protect the gulf security after the election of President Trump. UAE's smart power was centred on, for instance, building military capabilities, and strengthening and diversifying its economic capabilities. Also, diversifying the global and regional economic partnerships. In addition to exploiting the soft assets to achieve several diverse goals, such as reinforcing the state's reputation and influence, and attracting more economic benefits.

Accordingly, the study concluded a noteworthy conclusion that the adoption of a comprehensive foreign strategy based on benefiting from all the hard and soft assets of the state, as in the case of the UAE, represents the greatest guarantee for expanding the influence of the state, strengthening its independence and protecting its national security. For example, the UAE employing or building its military force and activating its external military role has mitigated its national security threats and raised its shares as a regional partner, or a reliable ally of the Europeans and Americans. Additionally, UAE has been able, through its new foreign policy, to break the mould of the classification of the small country, thanks to the expansion of its regional and international influence.

**3. Study of Traub, D et al., (2023), entitled "The Road to Normalization: The Importance of the United Arab Emirates' Neoliberal Foreign Policy in the Normalization with Israel: 2004-2020", *Digest of Middle East Studies, No.32, Wiley Periodicals.***

In the context of the study dealing with the causes and development of normalization between the UAE and Israel. The study also has discussed the development of the UAE's foreign policy since 2011 through the tools of soft and hard power. Or the new foreign policy that combines neorealism and neoliberalism. That was motivated by, for instance, the growing threat of fundamentalist terrorism in the region, such as the ISIS movement, and Iran and its proxies. Furthermore, was driven also by UAE's willingness to enhance its international reputation. Hence, the study concluded that such a new foreign policy has made the UAE more assertive towards regional conflicts such as Yemen and Syria, as well as towards Iran. Moreover, it was the main driver for the normalization with Israel. Also, by soft power tools, which highly was developed, the UAE could have furthered its influence globally and regionally.

### ***The difference between the previous literature reviews and this study***

The previous studies covered many important aspects of the main problem of the study, specifically the answer to why and how the UAE employed smart power in its foreign policy since 2011. However, previous studies are limited in details and analyses regarding the success of UAE's smart power in achieving foreign policy goals.

Accordingly, the main addition to this study lies in the comprehensive treatment of the UAE's smart power, in terms of its tools, and how it was transformed or employed and developed into tangible power. and what are the most prominent goals and challenges of the UAE's foreign policy, and the areas of employing smart power specifically in the Middle East and the Gulf region. and above all, providing a comprehensive assessment of the extent to which the UAE's smart power has succeeded in achieving its goals and undermining its challenges as a small country and in what areas and regions exactly.

## **1. Theoretical framework**

### ***A. Smart Power Theory***

Joseph Nye designed the smart power concept due to the decline of the popularity of the US due to the excessive reliance on military power within the war on terror. Also, thanks to the new variables and challenges in the international arena. (Jansson, 2018, pp.343-344). That threatens the US primacy, especially the war on terror. Therefore, the US cannot rely on one power only to win but by employing the tools of the two powers together. Such as public diplomacy, economic integration and security alliances. (Ivanov, 2020, p.52).

Consistent with the above, it was one of the main causes for Nye to put forward smart power is to counter the misperception that soft power alone can produce an effective foreign policy. (Nye, 2009, p.160). As soft power has limits. It cannot be a solution to all problems as it is just one component of power. (Nye, 2021, p.10).

Hence, Nye defined smart power: as "An integrated strategy to achieve the goals of the state's foreign policy based on combining the use of the state's (soft) and (hard) power tools". Therefore, he called it (smart), because it allows more options for the state, and uses the resources in the most efficient way to reach a favourable outcome. According to Nye, over-reliance on one power brings some risks and does not allow for dynamism in policy-

making. (Nye, 2011, pp.1-2). He contends the twenty-first-century smart power narrative is not about maximizing power, but rather finding ways and means to integrate the resources into smart strategies corresponding with the new context of power diffusion. (Nye, 2011, pp.207-209).

In short, smart power is an integrated strategy combining both hard and soft power to ensure the effective achievement of the foreign policy's goals. Especially, in the new era of the international system in which inappropriate to rely only on one power, due to its very complex and changeable nature.

### ***B. Smart power in small states' foreign policy***

Nye put forward smart power to justify that soft power, even for superpowers like the US, is insufficient to achieve foreign policy goals or deal with new challenges such as international terrorism. This proposition is more important to small states that usually extensively rely on soft power. Undoubtedly, some small states through the good use of soft power were able to enhance their relative power and exercise their influence over others. A country like Singapore expanded its international influence through its distinguished trade and administrative system. However, soft power is impossible to be fully sufficient to secure their survival as it is the ultimate aim of small states (Wagner, 2010, p.409).

Despite the supremacy of the liberal order and interdependence in the international system since the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, realist logic, especially anarchism is still persistent in the international system. Accordingly, small states' survival is still vulnerable. In other words, small states are still not in a real safe from the ambitions and threats of the powerful states. also, they are still victims of the interactions and conflicts of the major powers. Hence, it is inevitable for small states to employ smart power strategies to maximize their relative power and to provide the greatest possible guarantees, not a full guarantee, of their survival. (Long, 2016, p.2; Kamrava, 2017, p.109). Further, the new challenges and threats in the international system like international terrorism have become a threat to the survival and security of small states. That forces them to adopt smart power strategies to confront them. (Hoxhaj, 2017, pp.2-3).

Norway, for instance, has developed its role as a peace broker and donor of development aid in parallel with its accession to NATO. Another example is Qatar, which hosts the largest US military base in the region and

has worked in parallel to support its influence through the power of the Al-Jazeera Channel, which usually criticizes US policies. (Nye, 2011, p.210).

Based on the above, smart power is a very necessity for small states to secure their survival from the threats of big powers and new challenges of the new system. This occurs through significantly strengthening their economy and military power, in parallel with employing sources of their soft power, according to the context used and the desired goal. It is worth noting that the use of smart power by small states will not completely protect them from the threats of powerful neighbours. However, by strengthening their military power and building alliances, while strengthening their regional and international prestige by employing their soft forces. This will provide small states with a relative deterrent against the threats of the major powers.

## **2. Pillars of UAE's Smart power and their developments since 2011**

### **A. Soft Power**

Since the eighties of the last century, the UAE began to develop a serious strategy to exploit and develop the country's sources of soft power. This was driven by three main determinants: the desire of the political leadership to strengthen the country's international status, work to attract foreign investments in light of fears of depletion of oil in the future, exploitation of soft power as a compensatory tool due to the absence of hard power to protect the security and survival of the country in a very tense region and regional powers' serious threats. The first milestones of that strategy began with the UAE promoting itself as a global financial hub and a safe haven to attract capital, by facilitating all investment procedures (Zeineddine, 2017, p.213; Callen, 2015, pp. 40.41; AL Sharabani, 2007, p.49).

Since the nineties of the last century, the UAE has focused on three main sources or pillars to develop its soft power:

### ***Humanitarian Aid***

Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan had established concern for "humanity" as an important aspect of Emirati identity. It has been institutionalized as "humanitarian diplomacy" as part of the UAE's foreign policy (Gokalp, 2020, p.3). According to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the value of UAE foreign humanitarian and development aid exceeded 28.5 billion dirhams in 2018, targeting 42 countries around the world. This made

the UAE among the largest donors in the world (The UAE's official government portal, 2020).

### ***Promote tolerance and coexistence model***

Proceeding from the well-established culture of tolerance and coexistence of the Emirati people, the UAE has given special focus to promoting a culture of tolerance and openness and rejecting isolationism and religious extremism. The state culminated that by issuing in 2015 the "Law on Combating Discrimination and Denouncing Hatred and Defamation of Religions", which is the first of its kind in the region. In addition, the UAE has allowed multicultural immigrants to freely practice their culture and religious rituals, including building houses of worship (AL Ketbi, 2017). To consolidate this trend, the UAE established in 2016 a ministry of tolerance. Further, the UAE declared 2019 the "Year of Tolerance". In this regard, the UAE organized a massive campaign to promote tolerance as a global concept sponsored by the UAE as the capital of tolerance. The campaign also focused on a tolerant society that rejects extremism and promotes coexistence and openness to different cultures (Nisbett, 2021).

### ***Good Governance***

The concept of good governance refers to the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage state affairs at all levels through mechanisms, processes and institutions that allow individuals and groups to achieve their interests. The UAE is keen to practice a culture of good governance by trying to apply the values of equality, justice, transparency and integrity, strengthening the rule of law and combating corruption, through a set of laws that ensure the realization of these values, and through a set of initiatives that support them (Al Shamsi, 2020, 20.21).

Since 2011, UAE leaders are working to develop the UAE's soft power powerfully and continuously in parallel with the development of its hard power, within the framework of a vision to transform the UAE into one of the world's largest leaders in soft power. This is through developing and penetrating new areas and working to achieve global leadership in them. By 2021, UAE's leadership aims to transform the country into one of the top 10 countries in terms of competitiveness in the areas of institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomics, health care, basic education, labour market efficiency, innovation and sustainable development. And one of the top thirty

countries on the level of health care quality index (Alketbi, 2017; Golebiowski, 2020, p.164).

To support and motivate that, UAE established in 2017 UAE soft power council, which aims to achieve a strategy with four main objectives:

1. Developing a unified identity for the state in all humanitarian, economic, tourism, media and scientific fields.
2. Strengthening the position of the UAE as a gateway to the Arab region and its cultural repository, and as the capital of the Arab world for culture, art, media, tourism and science.
3. Developing effective international networks with individuals and institutions around the world to serve the state's goals and interests.
4. Consolidation of the country's reputation as a modern, open, tolerant country for all peoples of the world (The UAE Soft Power Strategy, 2022).

Indeed, UAE since then has achieved amazing success in these areas. According to the Global Soft Power Index for 2021 the UAE ranked first in the Middle East, and 17th globally, preceded by old countries in the field of soft power, such as Finland and Italy. The index attributed that rank to the great progress achieved by the UAE in the areas of governance, education, science and high welfare for the Emirati people. In addition, UAE enhanced its traditional soft power tools, especially humanitarian aid and tolerance (Global Soft Power Index 2021).

In the artistic and cultural sphere, UAE, for instance, established branches of the Louvre and Guggenheim museums, as well as a new opera house, which greatly contributed to elevating the UAE's global reputation and attraction as a model of culture and tolerance. Moreover, a big income the UAE has gained as a result of museum tourism (Nisbett, 2021; Hertog, 2017, p.15). In the educational field, UAE worked to build branches of the world's most prestigious universities, to achieve a comprehensive educational renaissance in the country (Ehtesham, 2017).

In the technology and innovation field, UAE has become a hub of attraction for major international media and technology companies, such as Microsoft, Facebook, Oracle and HP. Thanks to owning the UAE the largest media cities in the world Dubai Media City, and Dubai Internet City (Callen, 2015, pp.131.132). Additionally, The UAE has made great strides in space science. For instance, it launched the Mars project, as well as, Hazzaa Al

Mansoori became the first Emirati astronaut to successfully launch during an eight-day space mission in 2019 (Jeong,2020).

Lastly, in the health domain, The UAE has emerged as a global leader in the distribution of vaccines, or what can be called "virus diplomacy" that it has pursued since 2011. by entering into partnerships with several global drug manufacturers such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to support the distribution of survival vaccines in areas that need them most, especially in Helping to eradicate diseases like polio and malaria worldwide (Soubrier, 2021).

### ***B. Hard Power: Development of UAE's military power***

Since 2011, UAE undertook an unprecedented program of developing and modernizing its armed forces. It built an advanced air and missile defence system. It also shifted its military doctrine to be ready for tasks abroad (EL-Dessouki and Mansour, 2020). The UAE's arms purchases rose from \$3 million in 2011 to \$69 million in 2012, reached 135 million in 2015, and increased from 160 million in 2019 to 191 in 2020. (United Arab Emirates Weapons Sales, Trading Economics, 2021).

In 2011, UAE established a developed presidential guard composed of land, air and sea forces. In 2016, it created the position of Minister of Defense. It also worked to establish an infrastructure for military industrialization that contributes to expanding the independence of the political decision. (Mawlana, 2019).

UAE invested large money in training its military personnel in the most prestigious military training institutes. It has also been developing its educational capabilities through the establishment of the National Defense College to graduate military personnel with strong skills in strategic military planning. (Dalton and Shah, 2021, p.5).

In a remarkable step, UAE implemented the mandatory conscription program in 2014 to increase the manpower of its armed forces. (Mawlana, 2019). The UAE also aims that strengthen a strong sense of belonging, consolidate the collective identity of the union, and protect Emirati youth from fundamentalist extremism. (Ardemagni, 2016, pp. 56-57).

UAE's tendency to establish external military bases has become one of the most important new tools to reinforce its hard power. Also, to strengthen its position as a strong regional player, and strengthen its geopolitical influence in the region and Africa against its competitors,

especially Turkey and Iran. (Telci and Horoz, 2018, p.144). In 2016, UAE built an airstrip on Perim Island in Yemen as a nucleus for building a larger military base to strengthen the UAE's influence in Yemen and the Red Sea (Vertin, 2019, p.5). In 2017, under a 30-year lease contract, UAE established an advanced military base in the Eritrean city of Assab. (Slijper, 2017, p.27).

### **C. Economic Power**

A state's economic power is defined in terms of several potentials, such as natural resources, industrial production, financial wealth, agriculture... etc. UAE's economic power concentrated on two main factors: energy resources and financial wealth.

UAE is one of the ten largest Oil producers in the world, it has the sixth-largest proven reserves of oil exceeding 100 billion barrels. Energy exports provide the vast majority of the UAE's national income. It exports approximately 3 million barrels of oil per day (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2022). This, in return, grants UAE great weight in the international energy market, which plays a very influential role in the geoeconomic and geopolitical world balances. Especially, UAE is overlooking the most vital sea oil and commerce passages in the region like the Bab Al-Mandab Strait, which enhanced UAE's energy and geopolitical significance (Coutte, 2021, p.26).

On the other hand, UAE's sovereign wealth funds have increased by about 250 billion US dollars in 2021. To reach the total reserves of the funds at the end of 2021, more than one and a half billion dollars, due to the increase in oil profits and economic diversification plans (Greenstone Placement Management FZ-LLC, 2022). According to Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute SWFI, UAE's sovereign wealth funds top the list of the twenty largest sovereign wealth funds in the world. For instance, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority has ranked fourth in the world and first in the region in 2022, with reserves equal to 750 billion US dollars. While Abu Dhabi Developmental Holding Company has ranked fifteenth in the world (Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, 2023).

The UAE has been working since 2011 to diversify and renew its sources of economic power by entering into new fields such as military manufacturing and renewable energy, diversifying its economic partners and expanding its abroad investments. That contributed to an increase in the number of its international partners, who have become more reliable and

dependent on the UAE in several fields, especially the economic field. Further, it has become a major contributor to the strengthening of the global economy, and a major contributor to achieving the goals of international economic organizations (BTI 2022 Country Report).

### **3. UAE's Security Challenges and threats Since 2011**

#### ***A. US's declining focus in the region and reluctance to protect Gulf security***

The 1991 Gulf War revealed to the GCC countries three key matters that radically affected their security options. First, the weakness of the Gulf armies. The extent of the serious threat that the Gulf regional powers can pose to the security and stability of the small Gulf states. Finally, the strength and reliability of the US as a key ally of the Gulf countries. Accordingly, the Gulf War established a firm conviction among the GCC countries that there is no alternative to protecting the security of the Gulf except for the establishment of a stable security alliance with the US. (Barany, 2020, p.16).

After the second gulf war, the military cooperation between the US and UAE witnessed rapid steps. In 1994, the two countries signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement that formally provided for the U.S. military use of UAE territory in exchange for US assurances of protecting the UAE from its regional enemies. (U.S.-U.A.E. Business Council, 2019).

The US shale oil revolution and China's growing rise have prompted the Obama administration to reassess the strategic significance of MENA. Asia, in particular, has become strategically more important than MENA to the US. (AL Ketbi, 2020, p.392).

In Obama's State of the Union address in 2014, he made clear that the US would limit its military involvement in conflicts in the world. This showed GCC the desire of the US to reduce its attachment to the region. In addition, the Obama administration viewed Iran as an important player in the region. (Janardhan, 2020, p.3).

Obama embarked on a set of policies that exacerbated the suspicions of the Gulf states about the US commitment to protecting Gulf security, due to its contradiction with the foundations and premises of Gulf security. That included, support for Brotherhood, engaging in negotiations with Iran over the nuclear program, and the withdrawal of a large number of US forces from Iraq and Afghanistan. (Wehrey, 2014, p.2).

The milestone that cemented the UAE's conviction of the difficulty of continuing to rely entirely on the US to protect the UAE, was Obama's bias toward the popular revolution that ousted the US's ally Mubarak in 2011. Therefore, the UAE has since adopted a unilateral approach to military force in the region (Steinberg, 2020, p.14).

UAE officials publicly expressed, especially after Obama's efforts to reach a deal with Iran, their doubts about US's continued commitment to the Security Alliance. According to a senior Emirati official, we should no longer rely on the US to protect our security. As Iran and the US are about to make a wide diplomatic breakthrough that would undermine the importance of the UAE to the US, and also would leave Iran controlling regional security. (Sadjadpour, 2011, p.20).

The Iranian nuclear agreement of 2015 was deemed by UAE as one of the most important clues of the US abandonment to protect Gulf security. The GCC states were not summoned by the US to be part of the agreement, and also its terms did not take into account GCC's concerns. The agreement triggered a major rift between Washington and Abu Dhabi, which ended with the withdrawal of Trump from the agreement in 2017. As UAE did not hide its concerns about the agreement. It viewed it as a green light from the US to Iran to continue its expansionist policy in the region. Indeed, since 2015, Iranian interventions have increased significantly in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon. (Almezaini, 2020, p.209; Steinberg, 2020, p.14).

Despite the Trump administration's bias toward Gulf visions and interests, including withdrawing from the nuclear agreement. Nonetheless, the administration also exacerbated the concerns of the GCC regarding the US's continued commitment to Gulf security. This was demonstrated by Trump's reluctance to use armed force to deter Iran's provocations against the interests of the Gulf states in 2019, such as targeting Saudi oil facilities via drones. (Barany, 2020, pp. 21-22).

### ***B. Iran's threats and provocations to UAE since 2011***

Emirati-Iranian relations have been characterized by tension since the founding of the UAE, due to the dispute over the three islands "Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb". The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was a turning point in the increase of hostility and tension. Iran's hostility to the UAE has intensified, due to UAE's resistance to the Islamic Revolution and its alliance with the US. UAE's fears of the Iranian threat also grew as a result

of a successive set of measures starting with Iran's support to the region's Shiites, and its insistence to acquire a nuclear weapon to bolster its hegemony in the Gulf (Alexander, 2021).

Although the close commercial has strengthened the rapprochement between Tehran and Abu Dhabi. However, this did not remove the UAE's fears and suspicions about the ambitions and threats of Iran. UAE officials have long stated publicly that Tehran remains the greatest threat to their national security. For instance, A decade before the Arab Spring, UAE Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash stated that Iran's main goal for hegemony in the region remained a constant goal. (Sadjadpour, 2011, pp.9-10).

Iran took advantage of the chaos of the Arab Spring, in addition to the declining role of the US in the region to pursue a sectarian interventionist policy. This was clear in Iran's strong intervention to support its Shiite political factions in Iraq to consolidate Iranian hegemony over Iraq. It also supported the Houthis in Yemen and the Shiites of Bahrain. (Poulis, 2015, p.97). Such an interventionist, especially in Yemen, caused high concern and anger among the Gulf states. As an unprecedented expansion of Iran's influence to achieve the ambition of complete hegemony over the Gulf, at a time when the Gulf states felt that Obama had abandoned them to complete Iran's nuclear agreement. (Vakil, 2018, p.3). For its part, UAE clearly expressed its deep concern about Iranian interference and the activities of its proxies in Yemen, Iraq and Bahrain. Also, it expressed particular concern about Iran's development of long-range missile capabilities that target all of the UAE. (Ibish, 2017, p.25).

Iran's sectarian agenda in the region, which revolves around supporting the region's Shiites; led to the increase in UAE's fears of Iran's efforts to challenge the sectarian balance in the country and fueled the political demands of the UAE's Shiites. The UAE ruling monarchy is Sunni and Sunnis are 85% of the original people of the Emirates. However, the UAE's concerns stem from a large number of Shiite expatriates in the country, most of whom are Iranian. There are also Shiite sleeper cells from the Lebanese Hezbollah. (Sadjadpour, 2011, p.12). In 2007, the former Iranian consul in Dubai revealed that Iran has maintained a network of sleeper cells in the GCC countries since 1979. In 2009, the UAE deported 44 Lebanese people linked to the Lebanese Hezbollah, against the background of sending cash to Hezbollah. (Gervais,2012, p.25).

The most provocative and challenging for UAE, was in 2012 when Iran suddenly raised tension over the three islands. In that year, Iranian President Ahmadinejad visited Abu Musa Island in an attempt to assert Iranian sovereignty over the island, and the Strait of Hormuz. The UAE condemned this visit as a "provocation" and a "flagrant violation" of the UAE's sovereignty. It also recalled its ambassador from Iran. (Gervais, 2012, p.7).

The UAE Foreign Minister, "Abdullah bin Zayed," also described Ahmadinejad's visit "as a flagrant violation" of the UAE's sovereignty over its territories and a setback for the efforts made to find a peaceful solution to the issue". The UAE also proposed referring the issue of the three islands to the International Court of Justice, but Iran did not accept this proposal. This contributed to a great deterioration of the relations between the UAE and Iran (Zacharias, 2012).

Against the backdrop, Iran's threat to UAE's survival and security has increased to a very extensive and unprecedented degree after 2011. Accordingly, UAE had no choice but to adopt smart power policies, instead of the soft power-based strategy, to mitigate, not fully eliminate, Iran's threat.

### ***C. Political Islam and Muslim brotherhood Threat***

UAE views political Islam as a very dangerous threat to the region's stability and the cohesion of the UAE federation. UAE does not see a distinction between moderate, and jihadi political Islam, such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda. UAE sees them all as intellectual movements stemming from the extremist "Brotherhood". (Cafiero, 2018). In particular, Mohammed bin Zayed considers Brotherhood as the "source of extremism" and the most serious threat to the UAE due to its anti-monarchical ideas and its emphasis on reviving the "Islamic Caliphate". bin Zayed also sees political Islam as a tool used by his regional opponents, including Iran and Qatar, to weaken the Gulf monarchies (Salisbury, 2020, p. 15).

The UAE's fears of the Brotherhood's threat have increased after it seized power in several countries after 2011. UAE concluded that the control of the Brotherhood in countries that were characterized by moderate secular regimes, such as Egypt and Tunisia, would contribute to increasing extremism in the region and establishing a new generation rejecting the monarchy regimes. Especially, following the successes of the Brotherhood in the region, the Islamic Reform Society affiliated with Brotherhood sought to exploit this

success to destabilize UAE and establish an Islamic state. In the years 2011-2012, the UAE arrested 94 members of the association. During their trial, they admitted to establishing a secret organization with an armed wing to seize power and establish an Islamic state with the help of the Brotherhood. What is dangerous about this for the UAE is the US support to the new regimes controlled by Brotherhood. In 2012, a delegation from the Egyptian Brotherhood was invited to the US to meet senior White House officials, including "Hillary Clinton", who according to UAE enabled the Brotherhood to reach power in Egypt (Davidson, 2019, pp.84.85).

Therefore, UAE's persistence in countering Brotherhood and its regional supporters was aggravated. Turkey and Qatar have greatly supported Brotherhood in several countries to enshrine radical Islamic rule in the region which serves their interests and bolsters their influence. (Mashino, 2021, pp.2-3). In 2014, UAE classified Brotherhood and Hezbollah as terrorist groups, and it also dismantled the Islah Association (Salisbury, 2020, p.16).

#### **4. UAE's Smart Power Strategy to Counter Its Challenges and threats**

##### ***A. Smart power and UAE as a rising middle power: overcoming the US decline, and smallness challenge***

In several academic literatures, the UAE has become characterized as a rising middle power. Due to the prominent regional and global status and influence that UAE has reaped by its smart power strategy since 2011.

Strengthening the UAE's position and influence is a major goal of the UAE leadership, long before 2011, especially through soft power. The UAE has achieved very advanced positions in international soft power indicators, and some other global indicators such as global competitiveness, and transparency. The UAE's determination to achieve this goal increased after 2011 in the context of activating its smart power. The most important thing in this matter is that maximizing and deepening this goal, especially for small countries, can only be achieved through smart power, and not soft power alone.

Arguably, despite the importance and effectiveness of soft power to enhance small states' strength and status regionally and internationally. However, what small states acquire of prestige and influence is limited -and sometimes temporary- compared to the wide and solid international prestige and influence that they gain through smart power. Small states' employment

of smart power strategy that involves developing their military capabilities and projecting them abroad would enhance their positions and influence due to their increasing importance. Having military power in general or from a realistic perspective enhances the strength, prestige and respect of the state, and always makes it in a position of relative power in the face of others. Also, the possession of military power by small states provides them with more confidence and renders the partners more dependent on them. As they will be able, through their military power, to contribute to solving problems and conflicts or facing serious threats and challenges such as international terrorism. In addition, facing some contemporary global problems and challenges requires employing a strategy of smart power rather than soft power, which means more involvement of small states in facing these challenges. Accordingly, gaining more prestige and influence. Therefore, smart power represents a sustainable guarantee for maximizing the status and influence of small states internationally and regionally (Medeiros and Pinto, 2014, pp. 14-16).

Moreover, the importance of smart power in the foreign policy of countries, whether small or great, stems from the fact that hard or military power is indispensable to support and protect soft power or support its credibility and influence. In other words, the more countries that depend largely and fundamentally on soft power support this power with some policies and manifestations of military power, such as building military alliances or pumping economic aid, the more guarantees they provide for the success of their soft power. Because the countries or regions targeted by soft power also need more security protection guarantees or economic aid from the country that employs its soft power, which gives it a positive image. For example, President Trump's isolating strategy, which centres around reducing US military commitments and defecting from military and security alliances with allies, has contributed to the erosion of the power and credibility of US soft power. Perhaps this is the main reason for reorienting UK's foreign strategy towards more foreign military presence in parallel with strengthening its soft power (Younane, 2019).

Based on that, the UAE's combination of smart power and its careful and active use has contributed to strengthening the UAE's position and influence globally and regionally. Rather, it transformed the UAE, which is classified as a small country, from a marginal power into a rising or middle

power in the international system. Through soft power, UAE enhanced its legitimacy and positive image worldwide and rendered it an attractive model. And through its economic power, UAE reinforced its status and autonomy, and its influence in the region and on its partners. Besides, it contributed to enhancing its soft power, given that the UAE's economic model has become an inspiring and attractive model. UAE's advanced and efficient military power has enabled the UAE to enhance its credibility, and gain unprecedented influence in the region, which permitted UAE to impose its vision and secure its interests, and actively participate in political and security alliances. As well as, to enhance its soft power (Hassan, 2020, pp.187.188; Coutte, 2021, pp.42.43).

This has been demonstrated, for example, through the recognition of the UAE by both NATO and the US as a major responsible security partner able to take part in facing global security challenges, especially countering terrorism. Especially, after the strong and effective participation of the UAE in the international coalition to fight ISIS in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (BTI 2022 Country Report).

On the economic level, the UAE has used its economic power to expand its influence and economic ties in the world. The gross domestic product of the UAE in 2016 reached about \$340 billion, making the UAE one of the 20 largest world economies. This was reflected in the expansion of the UAE's influence in Asia in particular, which has become the global economic, commercial and industrial centre of gravity. The UAE has deepened its economic and trade ties with most Asian countries and has become one of the largest trading partners for China, India and Russia in various fields, primarily oil, weapons and raw materials. The UAE has also deliberately expanded its investments in Asia in new areas and eased procedures and restrictions on the transfer of Asian investments and labour to the UAE. This gave a broad impetus to the UAE's influence in Asia. So, the UAE's experience in Asia confirms that the smart employment of economic power makes a big difference in the level of influence and prestige for small countries (Mason, 2020, p.174).

As such, UAE's smart power enabled UAE to overcome its weaknesses as a small power and to overcome and counter its challenges that emerged after 2011. In particular, through enhancing and empowering its military power, the UAE has relatively overcome the challenge of the US's

security protection. Rather, it shifted to an indispensable security partner to the US. According to the US State Department, the UAE plays a unique role in the security architecture of the Middle East because it possesses a professional military force with advanced capabilities. Therefore, the US seeks to build sustainable partnerships with strong regional partners such as the Emirates, to help the US to achieve its security goals in the region, address common regional challenges, ease tensions and enforce the law. Furthermore, through its soft and economic power, the UAE managed to establish a network of regional and international alliances, which compensated for the decline of US protection and strengthened the UAE's situation in facing other challenges, especially the Iranian threat and political Islam' challenges. Plus, to support UAE's internal cohesion and stability (Zaga, 2022, p.3; US Department of State of 2022).

### ***B. UAE's Smart Policies to Mitigate the Iranian Threat***

Due to the wide hard power gap with Iran, UAE adopted since 1979, besides the security alliance with the US, a strategy based on soft power and economic engagement to limit Iran's expansionist ambitions. UAE contributed to the burgeoning Iran's economy by attracting Iranian investors to work in UAE in several fields. To confront the growth of Iran's threat after 2011, UAE was forced to shift this strategy to a smart power strategy, which included reinforcing and modernizing its military power and using it abroad. Indeed, one of the leading reasons that forced the UAE to do that is the US's clear determination to abandon its traditional role in protecting Gulf security. (EL-Dessouki and Mansour, 2020; Machrouh, 2020, p.3).

### ***UAE's military intervention in Bahrain and Yemen to Contain Iran's Influence***

The UAE's vision united with the rest of its partners in the Gulf over Iran's involvement in igniting the Shiite uprising in Bahrain, which extended its demands to abolish the Sunni monarchy in Bahrain. The GCC countries saw in the uprising an Iranian plot to overthrow the monarchies in the Gulf region. This has exacerbated the GCC states' conviction that there is a major Iranian blueprint to support its influence through its Shiite proxies in the region. Especially, this uprising coincided with Kuwait's discovery of a spy network working for Iran, which prompted Kuwait to expel Iranian diplomats accused of espionage, and Kuwait explicitly accused Tehran of establishing a spy network on its soil. In 2010 and 2015, Kuwait dismantled two terrorist

cells accused of working with Iran. A large group of Iranian and Shiite immigrants in Kuwait linked to Iran. That's why the UAE decided without hesitation to participate in the "Peninsula Shield" forces with 500 soldiers within a military force of 1,000 soldiers that quelled the Shiite uprising against the Al Khalifa family. Accordingly, it restrained Iran's sectarian and expansionist agenda (Keay, 2020, p.98; Gervais, 2012, p.26).

Similarly, the UAE's vision united with the rest of the council on Iran's standing behind the Houthi group to overthrow the legitimacy in Yemen and take complete control of the country. In alliance with former President Ali Saleh, The Houthi group in 2014, overthrew the legitimate government led by President Hadi Mansour and controlled the capital 'Sanaa'. (Slijper, 2017, p.25).

With Saudi-Gulf sponsorship, a new government was formed in Yemen, which was accepted by the Houthis. Nevertheless, Houthis kept their attempts to impose their full control over Yemen. Amid Iran's flagrant political and media support. This solidified GCC's conviction that the Houthis are an Iranian tool to consolidate its hegemony and destabilize the GCC states. On this basis, the UAE participated in the "Decisive Storm" coalition to undermine the Houthis' gains on the ground. UAE's participation was the largest in the coalition after Saudi Arabia. (Al Taweel et al., 2021, pp.30-35).

UAE military operations highly contributed to limiting the Houthis' expansion on the ground in Yemen. Accordingly, it has relatively undermined Iran's hegemonic blueprint in the Gulf. (Machrouh, 2020, p.4). UAE also sought to establish a powerful military front in south Yemen to balance the Houthis. It supported and trained tribal militias in south Yemen. (Steinberg, 2020, p.25). Training foreign forces has become UAE's consistent approach to enhancing its influence. For instance, it trained the Somali army in 2014 to face piracy in the Red Sea. (Ribe, 2020, p.11).

UAE also enhanced its soft power efforts in south Yemen along with its military presence. It poured huge money into humanitarian aid and reconstruction projects. (Ulrichsen, 2017, p.208). And established solid ties with the Sothern Yemen tribes, which led to the rise of UAE's influence in the red sea. That is also necessary to reinforce its strategic position as a small state. (Miller and Verhoeven, 2020, p.16). Also, UAE sought to confront Iran's influence and its Shia agents in Iraq by bolstering its economic presence in Iraqi Kurdistan. (Gokalp, 2020, p.5).

UAE activated other assertive policies. UAE publicly supported the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal of 2015. And participated in US'S severe financial sanctions on Iran after withdrawal, which included blocking Iranian companies' money transfers. UAE financial sanctions can be deemed a radical shift in UAE's traditional policy towards Iran which was based on economic engagement, which was also the outlet for Iran to mitigate the international sanctions. (Vakil, 2018, p.13). In this way also, UAE through sanctions has worked to cripple Iran's economy and increase Iran's isolation. (Machrouh, 2020, p.4).

It seems that this shift had an effective return for UAE. Where Iran did not incite its agents in Yemen to launch military attacks on the UAE's infrastructure in 2019 as it did on Saudi Arabia's oil infrastructure to keep UAE sanctions outlet and to maintain strong economic ties with it. The latter is the third-largest export market to Iran. (Alexander, 2021). It's noteworthy that, UAE participated in the international maritime coalition to protect the Strait of Hormuz, which was formed in 2019 in the wake of a series of Iranian attacks on oil tankers. Hence, UAE's participation represents a huge evolution of UAE's power projecting toward Iran's provocations, and its maritime strategy and influence in the Red Sea. (Dalton and Shah, 2021, p.3).

UAE's bold step to normalize its relations with Israel in 2020, can be considered a smart step to counter Iran's threat. By this step, UAE secures the continuation of US protection, and importing the US's modern weapons, as well as benefits from the military and technology cooperation with Israel. (Eilam, 2021, p.4).

Within its smart power strategy, the UAE has set since 2011, very ambitious agendas in various fields, which can be considered as indirect guarantees against the Iranian threat as well as the political Islam threat. UAE sought to be one of the world's greatest pioneers in soft power. According to the Global Soft Power Index for 2022, The UAE ranked fifteenth in the world, and the first in the Middle East, ahead of Israel, which ranked 23 in the world. This is due to the background of distinction in the field of business and trade, which was confirmed by the success of Expo 2020. In addition to the very rapid growth and improvement in the field of education and science, and the focus on a high-tech economy. Additionally, the UAE's success in overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. It is known that soft power provides several multiple guarantees of protection and survival for small

states. With soft power, a small state attracts global investments, makes a network of friends and allies, and enhances its global status and position, which lead to deterring its enemies (Global Soft Power Index 2022).

UAE through its economic and financial power sought to be an international economic player. It has become an active actor in international financial institutions, which bolstered its influence and its significance to major powers. That, in return, provides more guarantees for protection for UAE. (AL Ketbi, 2020, p.394).

UAE also worked to diversify its strategic partnerships, which included strategic allies to Iran such as China, Russia and India. This policy can be deemed UAE's political and economic strategic hedging. Providing small states like UAE a huge influence, more economic choices, and a large margin of manoeuvrability in foreign policy, especially against the US. Furthermore, UAE's engagement with China and Russia certainly mitigates Iran's threat. (Sherwood, 2017, p.154).

Undoubtedly, in terms of hard or military power, there is a huge gap between Iran and UAE. Nevertheless, UAE by its smart policies has been able to mitigate, not fully eliminate, Iran's threat. In other words, the UAE by especially the use of military power has been able to improve its relative power against Iran. And UAE's smart power is still in great development. Under realist thought, the big states are rational actors and don't make dangerous decisions when the balance of power is not completely tilted in its favour. Therefore, UAE's military power development certainly will deter Iran's threats and aspirations. In short, despite the huge threat from Iran after 2011. However, The UAE as a small state did not stand idly by. It empowered a smart power strategy, which proved that it is an inevitable choice for small states to provide the greatest possible guarantees for survival and protect national security.

#### ***4. UAE's Smart Policies To counter political Islam and Muslim Brotherhood***

The experiments in countering the threat of terrorism and radical groups have proven that relying on one power only is not the ideal option. The excessive use of military power greatly weakened these groups, but it cannot eliminate their radical ideology, which they use to recruit new jihadists and justify their violence. On the contrary, the excessive use of soft power can debunk and reduce these groups' radical thoughts, but it cannot eliminate

their threat completely or in the long term. Because these groups have firm convictions of the validity of their extremist thoughts and they can justify and legitimize them easily. Moreover, these groups are used and supported by many powers as proxies to achieve their aims. For these reasons, smart power is the ideal option for counter-terrorism and radical groups. This is what UAE has begun to do after 2011, which was relying on a pure soft power approach to counter-terrorism. (Gibbins, 2017). Since 2011, using violent military power has become a mainstay in UAE's strategy for countering terrorism. UAE actively participated in the international coalition to fight ISIS in Syria and Iraq in 2014. It also trained and supported anti-ISIS groups in Syria (Dalton and Shah, 2021, p.4).

In the region, UAE employed several smart policies to fight Brotherhood. UAE's financial might in form of aid and investments has been one of its key weapons to counter political Islam's influence and to amplify its influence in the region. (Ribe, 2020, p.13).

UAE had given Egypt financial aid estimated at 5 billion dollars after the June 30 revolution that ousted the Brotherhood-affiliated President Mohamed Morsi. Thereby, UAE cemented the legitimacy of the new Egyptian moderate rule, which was facing a deteriorating economic situation. Also, it gained an important ally within its strategy to eradicate radicalism and the influence of the Brotherhood in the region. (Szalai, 2022, p.194).

In Tunisia, UAE exerted huge efforts since 2011 to support pro-secular parties and to undermine the influence of the Brotherhood's Ennahda Party. In 2013, UAE threatened to withhold financial aid to oust Ennahda from power. This led to Ennahda making painful concessions that highly downsized its power, represented in agreeing to a technocratic government and drafting a new constitution. (Gaub, 2015, pp.24-28). In 2019 UAE granted Sudan huge financial aid to support the legitimacy of the new secular regime and to undermine the attempts of Turkey and Qatar to extend their presence in Sudan. (Mashino, 2021, p.5).

In Libya, in particular, UAE's military power was present. UAE was a proactive partner in pro-Haftar collusion in Libya, which included Egypt, France and Russia. Abu Dhabi supported Haftar financially and militarily against Islamic forces supported by the government, which extensively enabled Haftar to maintain control over eastern Libya and increased his legitimization in the domestic political area, as well as UAE's influence in

Libya against Pro-Brotherhood: Turkey and Qatar. (Hedges, 2021, pp.419-420). UAE also backed and trained anti-Brotherhood Salafi militias in eastern Libya. Also, in Yemen such as the "Abu al-Abbas" group. (Boubtane, 2021).

Soft power was a key pillar in UAE's efforts to counter political Islam and Brotherhood. In particular, to enshrine a moderate model of Islam. The most prominent step was the UAE's support of Al-Azhar University as the most important Islamic platform in the world advocating for moderate Islam. In 2015, UAE supported a new plan for the university to eradicate extremism in the curriculum and spread the true teachings of Islam worldwide. (Ibish, 2017, p.40).

Supporting these moderate plans constitutes one of the key instruments of UAE's soft power, which rendered it to possess a leading role in the world in fighting radicalism. In this regard, UAE established in 2012 "Hedayah Center" to provide advanced training and research regarding fighting extremism. In 2015, the U.S. and UAE launched the "Sawab Center" which aimed at countering extremism in social media. (U.S.-U.A.E. Business Council, 2019).

Also, in 2019, UAE launched a new alliance of virtue to promote and enshrine the shared values of the Abrahamic religions such as tolerance and freedom. For that, UAE supported Sufi scholars such as Saudi Sheikh "Al-Habib Ali al-Jifri" who promote a calm and apolitical form of Islam (Ulrichsen, 2020).

UAE's smart policies greatly contributed to containing political Islam and Muslim Brotherhood in the region. In Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, for instance, the political power of political Islam and brotherhood has extensively receded. On the other hand, UAE's experiment has proved that it is necessary to empower soft and hard policies to eliminate the threat of political Islam. UAE by soft power, in particular, that supports moderate Islam has greatly debunked the false and radical thoughts of political Islam among the young. UAE used financial incentives and military power along with soft power as a necessity to support each other. Because soft power, alone is not sufficient to fully contain the power of political Islam.

## Conclusions

Nye introduced smart power to prove that one power only, especially the soft power cannot achieve all state's foreign policy aims, as well as face all its challenges and threats. This premise may be more obvious to small states, especially when they rely only on soft power to face security challenges.

UAE represents a case of small states that proved that adopting a smart power strategy has become very necessary to achieve foreign policy aims and to face and undermine security threats. In other words, it proved that dependence only on soft power is not a sufficient option to fully face its security challenges. accordingly, to fully secure its survival.

Since 2011, UAE faced unprecedented security challenges represented by the growing threat of Iran and political Islam. These challenges also came at the time the US Obama-led has begun to disavow its full commitment to protecting Gulf security. This commitment has been constituting the main pillar of protection for the UAE as a small state.

To confront these challenges that constitute an existential threat to UAE, UAE had no option but to adopt a set of smart power policies. To counter the political Islam's threat and brotherhood, UAE supported financially and militarily anti-Muslim brotherhood regimes and groups in parallel with increasing its soft power efforts to support moderate Islam. That greatly contributed to containing political Islam's threat in the region.

To mitigate Iran's threat, UAE modernized and developed its military power. As well as intervening militarily in Yemen and Bahrain to undermine Iran's proxies. It also participated in sanctioning Iran economically and diplomatically to impose more isolation on it. Also, it developed a set of smart policies that constituted a powerful guarantee against Iran's threat. It worked to be a global pioneer in soft power and to be an influential global economic player, as well as diversified its strategic partnerships. That has greatly mitigated Iran's threat to UAE, but of course, has not entirely eliminated it. Due to the huge gap in military power.

In addition, smart power has shifted UAE to a rising middle power, which contributed to UAE overcoming the challenge of the US's declining role in the Gulf, as well as overcoming the smallness or weakness challenge as a small power. As such, UAE's smart power case represented a valuable addition to prove that, small states, through their smart power, can occupy a

high position equal to that of big powers in the international system, which makes it difficult to classify them as a small state according to the literature of traditional international relations for small states, which is based on quantitative measurement of power capabilities such as population size and state area.

In nutshell, UAE's smart power experiment has proven that smart power has become an inevitable necessity for small states to provide more guarantees of protection and survival and to maximize influence. In this vein, the study encourages further research regarding the development and evaluation of the UAE's smart power.

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