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QATAR AND THE UAE IN PEACEMAKING AND PEACEBUILDING

Courtney Freer

LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series | 60 | March 2022

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Abstract

This paper seeks to highlight ways in which Qatari and Emirati peacemaking/peacebuilding engagement is qualitatively different from other states' or international organisations' efforts in this sphere. The main questions I explored were how Qatar and Emirati approaches to peacemaking/peacebuilding are unique, whether or to what extent their engagement has been useful to the resolution of conflicts, and how the FCDO can leverage these states' interest in this sphere.

Through my research, I uncovered five main characteristics of peacemaking/peacebuilding done by these small but wealthy states. First, small states, unlike regional or global superpowers, tend to have fewer direct links to the conflicts themselves, and so they can be selective about cases in which they become involved. Second, the fact that both states benefit from immense hydrocarbon wealth undoubtedly aids their ambitious goals abroad. Third, efforts at peacekeeping in the states analysed here tend to be guided by a desire to distinguish themselves abroad, something of statebuilding through foreign policy. Fourth, the trend towards the involvement of Qatar and the UAE in regional peacemaking/peacebuilding, as well as potential build-up of military capacity, is likely to accelerate, given perceptions of UK and US withdrawal from the region. Fifth, a lack of institutional depth in these small states means that policies are at times abandoned quickly and without explanation and that personal ties are of critical importance.

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About the series: The Global Transitions series looks at fragmentations in the global order and how these impact peace and transition settlements. It explores why and how different third-party actors – state, intergovernmental, and non-governmental – intervene in conflicts, and how they see themselves contributing to reduction of conflict and risks of conflict relapse. The series critically assesses the growth and diversification of global and regional responses to contemporary conflicts. It also asks how local actors are navigating this multiplicity of mediators and peacebuilders and how this is shaping conflict outcomes and post-conflict governance.

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Key Findings

I find the following key characteristics featured in the peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which are elaborated on below.

- As small states rather than global superpowers, Qatar and the UAE can be and in fact are selective about where and how they become engaged in peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts. Where and in what ways they become involved in conflicts, then, indicate a great deal about their foreign policy interests more broadly. For Qatar, these selections are made often on the basis of shared religious beliefs or shared Arab heritage, and for the UAE, decisions are made based more commonly on strategic economic interests or to bolster secular nationalist groups.
- Both Qatar and the UAE are distinct as small states, since they are hugely wealthy, enabling them to engage in chequebook diplomacy in attempting to mediate conflict – a policy which is oftentimes short-sighted and unsustainable in the longer term due to a lack of implementation mechanisms and institutionalised systems to support peacemaking/peacebuilding. More positively, however, these funds can be used to help finance or research the prospective use of new technology such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in the peacemaking and peacebuilding field.
- Both Qatar and the UAE, as relatively new independent states, use their foreign policy decisions as statecraft or part of national branding. As a result, at times, gaining media attention through the signing of an agreement or the completion of investment contracts is privileged over seeking long-term results and conflict mitigation through addressing the roots of conflicts in both the Middle East and Africa.
- Given current geostrategic considerations in the Gulf, Qatar and the UAE will likely become more involved in the peacemaking and peacebuilding space. The perception of UK and particularly US withdrawal from the region has fuelled ambitions to take foreign policy decisions into their own hands through more independent policy-making abroad.
- Although both Qatar and the UAE have spent years in the peacemaking space, both have systems that are highly personalistic and under-institutionalised. Personal relationships and individual personalities often have an outsized influence on decisions about which parties to back in a variety of country contexts.
- For Qatar and the UAE, peacebuilding specifically is often translated into the contribution of aid money to states undergoing or recovering from conflict. This use of chequebook diplomacy demonstrates ways in which peacebuilding strategies do not follow a liberal model of focusing on introducing a certain type of peace or government system, and also again shows the prevalence of economic capacity in guiding these states' conceptions of their role in the peacebuilding sphere.

- There is, notably and importantly, a general overlap of interests between the West and Qatar/UAE to help build up peacemaking/peacebuilding capabilities and engagement, particularly within the Middle East. Because efforts tend to be directed by these individual countries, however, competition can result, and so more focus on the desired outcomes of enhancing stability and security should be emphasised.
- Religion appears important in driving efforts at conflict mediation for Qataris, many of whom view conflict mediation, particularly in Muslim countries, as a religious duty. This conception in turn has led to their willingness to engage with Islamist groups when mediating. For the Emiratis, Arabism and nationalism trump the importance of religion, leading the UAE to engage with nationalists over religious parties which they tend to regard with suspicion.
- While Qatar and the UAE do hope to expand their capabilities in peacemaking/peacebuilding and thus share some common goals with regional bodies, they differ when it comes to the importance of democracy or instilling democratic ideals. For these two nondemocratic states, stability and security are privileged over government type, a distinction which has in the past led to tension with regional bodies outside of the Middle East, namely the African Union.

Recommendations

- The FCDO should encourage longer term interaction with peacemaking and peacebuilding agendas, rather than the practice of chequebook diplomacy or a focus on reaching a high-profile agreement that fails to address entrenched issues.
- The FCDO should continue to encourage long-term investments in states which are in need of economic assistance and in which such investment could in turn spur movement towards peace and stability.
- The FCDO should take advantage of Qatar's unique ability and willingness to engage with non-state actors due to its lack of legislation banning negotiations with terrorist groups. Working through Qatar's contacts can help to ensure that actors, even if they have engaged in violence, do not become more violent and extremist by being left out of peacemaking negotiations.
- The FCDO should engage with Qatari and Emirati policy-makers about possibilities for training programmes and the exchange of best practices in the diplomatic and specifically peacemaking and peacebuilding spaces to help ensure that practices become less personalistic and more institutionalised, which will in turn enhance the capacities of these states to become more helpful partners in peacemaking and peacebuilding.

Introduction: The Emergence of Small States into Peacemaking in the Gulf

Since the reign of Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani (r. 1995–2013), Qatar has become increasingly involved in regional affairs, specifically as a peacemaking/peacebuilding actor, focusing particular attention on conflict mediation. Beginning with its involvement in negotiating settlements in Lebanon, Darfur, Yemen, Iraq and between Hamas and Fatah in the early 2000s, Qatar has made a reputation for itself within the peacemaking and peacebuilding community. In more recent years, Qatar has hosted the leadership of Hamas and the Taliban in hopes of using its unique links with both these groups and with Western powers to build peace in the broader Middle East and North Africa region.

The specific goal of peacemaking within Qatari foreign policy is in fact enshrined in its constitution, passed in 2003 during the reign of Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, again demonstrating the way in which it has consciously been a goal of Qatari foreign policy since the early 2000s. Article 7 of the Constitution states that 'foreign policy of the State is based on the principle of maintaining international peace and security by encouraging the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means, and supporting the people's right to self-determination and non-interference in internal affairs of the State, and cooperation with peace-loving nations' (Article 7, Qatar's Constitution of 2003).

Qatar has endeavoured to involve itself as a productive neutral partner in regional issues yet became increasingly involved in operations on the ground in Libya and Syria following the Arab Spring, leading to questions about its initial perceived neutrality in the Arab world. Some commentators claim that Qatar is 'playing all sides' (Worth, 2008), while others accuse it of backing an ideological Islamist agenda, particularly since the Arab Spring protests of 2011 (Hammond, 2013), which in turn led to a serious diplomatic rift between Qatar and its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) neighbours, perhaps most markedly the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Through its initial phase of mediation in the early 2000s and its more recent foreign policy activism since the Arab Spring, Qatar has demonstrated the ability of a small state to wield considerable power in regional relations and thus is an interesting case of a small state advancing peacemaking and peacebuilding in a unique and global way. Its neighbour, the UAE, has since the Arab Spring increasingly sought to engage in peacemaking and peacebuilding on an international level as well, proving how small states of the region are increasingly coming to the fore. Further, both states have used the contribution of aid to help enhance peacebuilding in the longer term.

This research was undertaken through reviewing existing scholarship on the topic, as well as through interviews with Qatari and Emirati academics and policy-makers. Throughout my investigation, I endeavoured to highlight ways in which Qatari and Emirati peacemaking/peacebuilding engagement is qualitatively different from other states' or international organisations' efforts in this sphere. The main questions I explored were how Qatar and Emirati approaches to peacemaking/peacebuilding are unique; whether or to what extent

their engagement has been useful to the resolution of conflicts; and how the FCDO can leverage these states' interest in this sphere.

Through my research, I have uncovered five main characteristics of peacemaking carried out by these small but wealthy states. First, small states, unlike regional or global superpowers, tend to have fewer direct links to the conflicts themselves, in that they tend not to be funders or allies of the states in question. They also, unlike states like Egypt and Saudi Arabia which have long been powerhouses in the region, come to the international scene with less baggage and fewer set expectations (Kamrava, 2011, p. 542). Further, small states are not forced to mediate, given that they are usually not superpowers; as a result, they can decide when to become involved (Barakat, 2014). Due to these dynamics, it is instructive to analyse in which countries and regions these states have chosen to assert themselves as peacemaking actors.

Second, the fact that both states benefit from immense hydrocarbon wealth undoubtedly aids their ambitious goals abroad. Notably, Qatar benefits from vast natural gas resources and in 2006 became the world's largest producer of liquefied natural gas (LNG), as it contains the third largest proven supply of natural gas in the world. The UAE, meanwhile, continues to exploit its vast hydrocarbon resources while also profiting from tourism, financial services and real estate. Both countries have used these resources to further peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts on the ground, leading to accusations that they engage in 'chequebook diplomacy' or '"business diplomacy" – combining diplomacy with massive infusions of investments – to secure agreement among disputants and, equally importantly, among potential spoilers (such as Syria or Libya)' (Kamrava, 2011, p. 552).

This wealth sets these states apart from other small states which lack similar resources. Indeed, as Harpviken and Barakat (2017, p. 4) point out, 'Small state mediators typically rely on trust and communication to mediate, while Qatar is unique in its willingness to draw on a vast financial capacity to back up agreements with a variety of "carrots" that provide leverage over conflicting parties – even through the sustainability of this approach to mediation has been questioned.'

In addition, these states have used their ample funds to help further the use of technology in peacemaking/peacebuilding. For instance, Qatar has partnered with the UN's Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs through the Qatar Computing Research Institute to facilitate and finance new means of global conflict resolution, particularly through the advancement of new technologies (Qatar Computing Research Institute, 2019). For its part, the UAE at a UN Security Council debate about technology and peacekeeping in August 2021 suggested the use of technologies like Unmanned Aircraft Systems and Unmanned Aircraft Vehicles for peacekeeping and intelligence gathering; it also emphasised the potential use of renewable energy to mitigate security and environmental risks for peacekeeping missions (*Khaleej Times*, 2021). The UAE's representative confirmed: 'It is imperative that the UN's operations in the field have access to the technological tools critical to the success of their mandates' (Ibid.). The fact that these states can afford to finance both traditional peacekeeping missions and efforts, in addition to

new technologies to aid peacekeeping, allows them to surpass our expectations of them as small state actors. It is also significant that such efforts are pursued as part of broader multilateral engagement with international bodies, suggesting that, while non-armed peace measures tend to be conducted bilaterally, discussion about armed peacekeeping missions remains within the purview of the United Nations.

Third, efforts at peacekeeping in the states analysed here tend to be guided by a desire to distinguish themselves abroad, something of statebuilding through foreign policy. Both Qatar and the UAE are relatively young, small and, in many ways, similar. As a result, they have tended to have distinct foreign policies, particularly since the Arab Spring, to distinguish themselves from one another (Roberts, 2020). What appears to be an ideological distinction and has been described as such in analysis of these states' foreign policies is in fact an effort at statecraft through international activism. The fact that these states are using international missions to distinguish themselves, and back different parties within those missions, has made it difficult for them to work together, as each seeks to promote its own 'brand' on the world scene.

Fourth, the trend towards the involvement of Qatar and the UAE in regional peacemaking/peacebuilding, as well as potential build-up of military capacity, is likely to accelerate, given perceptions of UK and US withdrawal from the region – the UK due to Brexit and the US due to the Biden Administration's hesitation to assert itself in the region thus far and its thus far failed attempts to restore the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran. Rather than waiting for Western powers to take the lead, then, Qatar and the UAE will continue to exert their own authority, particularly regionally, moving forward.

Fifth, a lack of institutional depth in these small states means that policies are at times abandoned quickly and without explanation. In my own conversations with Qatari members of the diplomatic community, when I asked them how they vetted different Islamist groups acting in the Syrian civil war, they said that it was often through personal contact and confirmed that no one at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been specifically tasked with finding appropriate partners (Author's telephone interviews with members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). For instance, the al-Sallabi brothers in Libya had a personal tie to Qatar and it is widely believed that this is the main reason they received state backing after the fall of Muammar al-Qadhafi from power in 2011. There is an overall lack of institutionalisation, which means that policies can be enacted quickly, but also means that they are sometimes implemented without being well thought out.

In such a system, personal ties become particularly important:

> Qatar's mediation efforts have been intensely personal, capitalising on the personalities of the Emir and other chief policy-makers who have acted as objective, dispassionate, well-informed and well-intentioned mediators interested in turning intractable disputes into win-win scenarios. This has been extremely effective in getting the disputants around the negotiating table and motivating them to move the negotiations forward (Kamrava, 2011, pp. 555–6).

Initial phases of mediation can be aided by personal ties and personal enthusiasm, but institutional mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure longer term success (Ibid.). It is unsurprising, then, that many of Qatar's initial peacekeeping successes have not been followed through with meaningful engagement after the initial news of success.

Background Literature on Qatar and the UAE

As noted above, Qatar began to turn to peacekeeping in the 1990s. Sultan Barakat describes three related events as having pushed its involvement in the global sphere: the ending of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 which allowed Qatar to develop its North Field gas reserves with Iran; the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which demonstrated the need for a regional approach to peacebuilding; and tensions with Saudi Arabia which opposed a more independent Qatar (Barakat, 2014, p. 6). Further, the influx of money from the production and sale of LNG in the 1990s allowed Qatar to provide one of the most handsome welfare packages in the world for its citizens, in turn providing domestic stability. The peaceful domestic environment allowed Qatar to be more inventive in terms of external engagement (Ibid., p. 7).

One way that Qatar distinguished itself was by keeping open channels of communication with all parties. For instance, in the early 2000s, it famously maintained an Israeli trade office as well as communication with Iran about its shared gas field. In conversations with Qatari diplomats, this trend of maintaining communication with all sides comes up repeatedly. They affirm that keeping contact is the best way to maintain leverage, as well as a means to engage on issues rather than on the basis of personalities (Ibid., p. 8.).

Qatar's perceived independence when it first came to the fore globally also aided its rise in peacemaking; it lacked the baggage or history of a country like Saudi Arabia. As a result, at least until the Arab Spring,

> As a new player in Middle East politics without a history of diplomatic of military involvement in the region, Qatar is perceived to be an honest broker, an image that it proactively cultivates. 'We're only interested in peace,' a Qatari diplomat maintained in a confidential interview, 'and they come to us because we don't have any other agendas or ulterior motives' (Kamrava, 2011, p. 543).

Qatar, unlike its larger neighbours in the region, came to the peacekeeping field without preconceived notions about its position; as a small state, it was also seen as less threatening than regional superpowers from the start. Once it became an established actor on the international scene, however, Qatar's reputation shifted from being a neutral arbiter to being a promoter for Islamist causes in the region.

One reason that Qatar has been linked to Islamism is its belief that maintaining contact is the best way to maintain leverage – hence its hosting of groups like Hamas and the Taliban. Importantly, it is not constrained by counterterrorism legislation from interacting with non-state groups that the West has difficulty dealing with directly (Harpviken and Barakat, 2017, p. 4). As a result, Qatar's roster of contacts includes both state and non-state

actors, and many of the most powerful non-state actors in the region happen to be Islamists, leading to a fear since the Arab Spring that Qatar backs Islamist causes, rather than being interested solely in maintaining peace and stability in the region.

While Qatar does not share an ideology with Islamists, Barakat points out, as has been confirmed by my own interviews, the extent to which mediation is seen as a part of Islamic culture and tradition for Qataris. In his words, 'Qatari officials are quick to point to religious and cultural motivations, noting that the Holy Quran encourages parties to use *wasata* (intermediation), *sulh* (traditional reconciliation) or *musalaha* (conflict mediation), in order to resolve disputes, given the emphasis placed on *sulh*, or traditional Arab forms of reconciliation, in Quranic teachings and Prophetic *ahadith* (sayings) as a religious duty, it is unsurprising to hear some Qatar officials deny any motive for mediating conflicts between Muslims save pleasing Allah' (Barakat, 2014, pp. 11–12). Where Emirati officials, discussed below, tend to cite the cause of Arab unity as driving their peacekeeping efforts in the Middle East, then, Qatari officials cite religion, showing one critical difference in their motivations and revealing how Qatar has come to be seen as a backer of Islamist causes. In recent years, particularly since the end of the GCC crisis in 2021, however, Qatar has become more selective in its participation in peacekeeping efforts abroad, having abandoned efforts in Yemen and scaled back involvement in Libya and Syria, choosing to focus instead on engagement with non-state actors which it hosts, namely the Taliban.

For the UAE, motives for engaging in peacekeeping appear to differ, although for both Qatar and the UAE, issues of survival and prestige remain important. Mehran Kamrava has posited that 'the primary motivation for Qatari mediation efforts is a combination of small state survival strategies and the desire for international prestige' (Kamrava, 2011, p. 540). He further specifies that Qatar engages in mediation with two main approaches: the use of 'intense personal diplomacy' and 'implied or explicit promises of vast financial investments once the dispute is settled' (Ibid.). And while Qatar has been successful in mediating conflicts, it has been less successful in resolving or ending the same conflicts. The fact that both states' mediation efforts have been very public shows that branding is important (Ibid., p. 542).

This desire to draw public attention to peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts is where the rivalry between the two states has become evident. As David B. Roberts has explained, the two states 'are in a fight amongst themselves to define precisely what a newly emergent small, rich, go-getting Arab Gulf monarchy is or can be. Both have varied strings to their identitarian bows, but Qatar is using simply to grasp, redolent religious tropes, while the UAE is striving to forge an entirely novel concept decoupling religious power from authority' (Roberts, 2020, pp. 231–2). As a result, each country has backed different actors abroad: Qatar more willing to engage with Islamists and the UAE with nationalist movements (Ibid.). By severing ties with Qatar in 2017, the UAE helped to demonstrate the ways that they are distinct from one another, despite sharing many similar goals and attributes.

The UAE's constitution sets out its goals in foreign policy like the Qatari document, but they are more directed regionally rather than expressing an ideological commitment to mediation. According to article 12 of the 1971 Constitution, 'The foreign policy of the Union shall be

directed towards support for Arab and Islamic causes and interests and towards the consolidation of the ties of friendship and co-operation with all nations and peoples on the basis of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and ideal international standards' (Article 12, United Arab Emirates's Constitution of 1971 with Amendments through 2004). The primacy of aiding Arab causes over religious ones has been cited by several Emirati officials as driving their involvement in the region in my interviews (Author's interview with Emirati think tank academic and member of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

Initially, in the 1990s, the UAE raised its profile by participating in a series of international UN-led operations including sending a peacekeeping force to Somalia in 1992 to assist US operations; airlifting wounded Muslims out of Bosnia in 1995; sending a force to the Balkans in 1999 to protect the Kosovars; and becoming one of three Arab countries to join NATO forces in Afghanistan with a peacekeeping mission in 2002, as a means of demonstrating its commitment to fighting terrorism in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in which two Emirati nationals had been involved (Carvalho Pinto, 2014, p. 238). Rather than making itself a platform for peacemaking, then, the UAE was eager to demonstrate to the West its enthusiasm for becoming involved in already existing programmes.

It is worth noting also that the UAE's government structure means that its seven constituent emirates are not always aligned on foreign policy – a crucial difference from the Qatari case. Most commonly in recent years, particularly since the rise of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Shaykh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, Abu Dhabi, the capital, has tended to direct foreign policy, while the other leading emirate, Dubai, has followed its lead. In the past, however, these two most powerful emirates have clashed over foreign policy – with Dubai eager to maintain pragmatic business ties and with Abu Dhabi keen to expand Emirati presence and branding abroad.

On the whole, the UAE has taken a more militaristic approach to foreign policy development through the acquisition of impressive military kit, which led former US Defense Secretary James Mattis to dub the state 'Little Sparta' since its military capacity and increasing involvement appear to far outstrip its small size. The UAE's military presence along with its military spending has increased markedly since the Arab Spring when it contributed military forces to actions in Bahrain, Libya and Yemen.

In 2018, the UAE played a critical role, alongside Saudi Arabia, in mediating a peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea. In 2021, the Emiratis assisted negotiations between India and Pakistan, leading to an announcement that they would respect their 2003 ceasefire agreement. Some analysts consider this diversification away from dealing with Middle Eastern conflicts as deliberate, given the limited success of regional efforts: 'Most of the regional conflicts through which it has sought to advance its interests militarily, either directly or through proxies, are resolved or stale-mated, or have otherwise passed the point of diminishing returns' (Ibish, 2021). As a result, we see the UAE having diminished its troop presence in Yemen as of 2019 and Libya as of 2021.

The UAE's recent efforts have focused on reengaging with Syria's Asad regime and with Iran, both in the name of maintaining peace and security. In November 2021, the Emirati

foreign minister met with President Bashar al-Asad in Damascus. As diplomatic advisor to the Emirati President Anwar Gargash explained, 'The UAE continues to build bridges, boost relationships, and connect what was cut off...and will be keen to spare the region further congestion and continuous conflicts' (Reuters, 2021). The UAE reopened its embassy in Damascus in 2018 and has called on the Arab League in 2021 to readmit Syria; Jordan and Egypt have also taken steps to normalise ties with Asad (Ibid.). In December 2021, Shaykh Tahnoon bin Zayed al-Nahyan, brother of the president of the UAE, visited Tehran to meet with the head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and President Ebrahim Raisi. Emirati National Security Advisor Shaykh Tahnoon bin Zayed al-Nahyan has also had at least one meeting with the head of Israeli Mossad (Karimi and Gambrell, 2021).

The UAE's new policies mirror those of Qatar in its early days of mediation, yet differ in an unwillingness to deal with non-state entities, particularly Islamist groups like Hamas. Qatar, on the other hand, remains involved in regional peacemaking and increasingly in broadening its portfolio to Africa, which appears in many ways to be the new site of intra-GCC competition. Indeed, 'as one Gulf official put it: "If you look at the future of Africa, it's clear – China is in. The Arab countries are in. The U.S. is not"'(International Crisis Group, 2018).

Case Study: Involvement in Africa

Outside of the MENA region, Qatar and the UAE have become increasingly involved in attempting to resolve conflicts in Africa, as well as increasingly investing in the Horn of Africa as a means of bolstering political and social stability. In recent years, particularly since the Arab Spring, there has been a tendency to use economic investment to facilitate peacebuilding, since economic stability is positioned as a prerequisite to political and social peace. Nonetheless, these investments have often gone to different, and sometimes competing segments, leading to further inflammation of conflict rather than its resolution. Qatar and the UAE, then, seem to consider peacemaking/peacebuilding in Africa increasingly as a business proposition rather than as a long-term political commitment.

Qatar began its involvement in peacekeeping in Africa earlier than its neighbouring states by facilitating, in 2008, talks between the Sudanese government and rebel movements in Darfur, and between Eritrea and Djibouti in the 2008 border conflict. These efforts led, respectively, to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur in 2011 and Eritrea-Djibouti peacekeeping mission on the ground until 2017.

Qatar's success in Darfur has been muted. Qatar became involved in 2008, nearly five years after the start of the conflict, after the country was named the Arab League representative to mediate the talks between the Sudanese government and various rebel groups. In February 2010, the Sudanese government and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) signed a ceasefire framework agreement, while a collection of smaller rebel groups later signed a ceasefire agreement – all of these are collectively referenced as the Doha Agreements. Then-Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmed bin Abdallah al-Mahmoud was personally invested in the process, having spent months meeting various international stakeholders to understand the conflict before meeting with conflict parties themselves

(Barakat, 2014, p.19). Both track one and track two negotiations were held in Qatar, which promised to invest $2 billion and establish a development bank if talks proved successful; the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), Qatar's sovereign wealth fund, also brokered a deal to develop farmland in Sudan for food exports to Qatar (Ibid.). While the signing of a ceasefire was a critical development, implementation has lacked follow-through: violence has resurfaced and the underlying drivers of the conflict have been left unaddressed (Mahmood, 2020). In August 2019, after a new government was sworn in, South Sudan has assumed the role of mediating talks in Darfur (Ibid.).

Qatar sent a peacekeeping mission along the border of Eritrea and Djibouti to enforce the border agreement reached by the two countries in 2010, having mediated initial conflict in 2008; the country finally fostered a peace agreement in 2016, but ultimately withdrew in 2017 after both countries sided against Qatar in 2017 when its neighbours cut off ties with the country (Ibid.). The African Union responded to the resultant power vacuum by sending its own fact-finding mission to the border to resolve the years-long conflict over the status of Dumeira Mountain and Dumeira Island (BBC News, 2017). In 2018, Eritrea and Djibouti agreed to normalise their relations pending the release of prisoners of war – notably, without Qatari assistance.

Since the muted success of its peacekeeping efforts in the early 2000s and Arab Spring (discussed below), Qatari involvement in Africa has been linked to investments more than to conflict mediation and peacekeeping. In interviews with officials, it became clear that Qatar considers economic stability and prosperity as a stepping stone for political stability and peace, thus inverting the liberal model and normative approach to peacemaking/peacebuilding (Author's interviews, December 2021 and January 2022); they also serve another purpose of providing potentially lucrative investments for the country's sovereign wealth fund, in addition to aiding Qatar in achieving food security. Demonstrating its commitment to the region, in May 2021, the Qatar Investment Authority announced plans for a Sub-Saharan Africa Fund to focus on infrastructure and renewable energy projects worth some $2 billion (Mieu, 2021). This investment came on the back of several other developments including Qatari Airways' 60 percent stake in Rwanda's new Kigali airport as of 2019 (Uwiringiyimana, 2019), a $200 million investment from QIA to telecommunications giant Airtel Africa as of 2021 (Kene-Okafor, 2021), and progress towards installing an LNG terminal in South Africa (International Finance, 2019).

In addition to investments, the Qatar Fund for Development has contributed grants and loans to several East African countries amounting to over $4 billion between 2011 and 2019 (al-Khater in Fenton-Harvey, 2019). Qatar through the Qatar Red Crescent Society also provided aid to Sudan in the aftermath of flooding in 2020 (Relief Web, 2020), in addition to investing $500 million in 2018 in Sudan's agricultural and food sectors through Hassad Food, a QIA subsidiary (Dabanga Sudan, 2018).

Somalia has emerged as a space of intra-GCC competition for influence, however, which has ultimately been detrimental to peace and stability. The UAE has backed governments of the federal states of Somaliland, Puntland and Jubaland since 2017, while Qatar and Turkey have

backed the central government in Mogadishu – a split that became exacerbated during the UAE's blockade of Qatar between 2017 and 2021. Emirati and Qatari investments in Somalia have followed this rift, further solidifying their division both in political and economic terms (Freer, 2021). This trend has proven detrimental to peace and stability, as funding for non-state actors fuels questions about authority. In Somalia, Abu Dhabi has tended to deal with Somaliland and Puntland directly to weaken the central government in Mogadishu which has close ties with Qatar (Fenton-Harvey, 2019). These moves have exacerbated pre-existing centre-periphery tensions (Mahmood, 2020). Indeed, Dubai Ports World bypassed the Somali central government to sign a deal with the semi-autonomous Somaliland to develop Berbera Port under a $442 million deal, which the central Mogadishu government tried to block (Butt, 2021). In the words of Spokesperson for the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah al-Khater, 'As for Somalia in particular, we reaffirm Qatar's commitment to supporting the nation as it works relentlessly to fulfil its peoples' hopes and aspirations and we look forward to continuing to further and deepen cooperation on trade, development and other sectors' (al-Khater in Fenton-Harvey, 2019).

More positively, in 2018, the UAE and Saudi Arabia helped to bring about Ethiopia-Eritrea peace accords through shuttle diplomacy and subsequent economic support to Ethiopia. The UAE has long been involved in Eritrea, which otherwise is diplomatically isolated in the region, with the UAE even having established a military base there to assist with its war in Yemen (Fick and Cornwall, 2018). Illustrating again the importance of chequebook diplomacy, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed deposited $1 billion to Ethiopia's central bank after the rapprochement with Eritrea was reached, while also awarding Ethiopian President Isaias Afwerki and Prime Minister Ahmed Abiy the Order of Zayed, its highest civilian honour (Mahmood, 2020). The reconciliation appeared primarily driven by tactical thinking. Indeed,

> The reconciliation between Ethiopia and Eritrea provides the UAE an opportunity to minimize opposition to its existing military facility in Assab, Eritrea by reducing disapproval from Horn actors like Ethiopia and because the lifting of UN sanctions on Eritrea removes obstacles to financial and military support. It also provides potential economic opportunities to connect Eritrean ports to the world's most populous landlocked country in Ethiopia—though little concrete activity has materialized to date (Ibid.).

As of 2018, the UAE proposed the Ethiopia-Eritrea oil pipeline and provisions of $200 million to Sudan's agricultural sector which would expand its economic footprint (Obulutsa and Fick, 2021).

As of 2020, the UAE had established military bases in Djibouti, Eritrea, Somaliland and Socotra Island. The base in Assab, Eritrea, was instrumental in the Yemen war but was dismantled in February 2021. Ultimately, 'having that hard-power deployment exposed them to more risk than the Emiratis are now willing to tolerate' (Gambrell, 2021). We expect similar drawdowns in Emirati military investments throughout the Horn of Africa, and potentially less meddling in internal African politics.

Perhaps the best example of Emirati moderation of its involvement in Africa is in Sudan. There, the UAE's backing of the Transitional Military Council (TMC) along with Saudi Arabia after the overthrow of Islamist leader Omar al-Bashir in 2019 was driven by fears of Islamists, a desire to keep Sudanese troops in Yemen and a wish to contain the spillover of popular movements (Mahmood, 2020). Most analysts agree that 'support like the provision of economic aid to the TMC was less focused on conflict resolution, and more to bolster one side. Yet the involvement of Western nations like the US and public backlash following the violent break-up of the protest sit-in ultimately played a role in helping moderate this behaviour in favour of a more balanced outcome' (Ibid.). The Sudanese example shows us again the use of chequebook diplomacy and its unique drawbacks, as well as ways in which the GCC crisis affected foreign policy decisions abroad.

Saudi Arabia's creation of the Red Sea Alliance in 2020 focuses on maritime security and notably excluded Qatar and Turkey, suggesting a desire to maintain separation from these states and their interests. It also leads to questions about the extent to which the motivation for greater involvement in Africa is indeed the achievement of maritime peace and stability or projection of authority. Over a year after the end of the GCC crisis, Qatar has still not been invited to join the Alliance, suggesting that competition may remain.

It is also worth noting that Qatari and Emirati incursions into the Horn of Africa have not always aligned with regional interests, even when they have entered conflicts with the stated aim of resolving them. Indeed,

> at times there has been a tension in the approach of Middle Eastern actors and institutions like the African Union, which has placed a stronger focus on multilateralism, institutionalization and democratic values. This tension was apparent through the backing provided by the UAE and Saudi Arabia to the military in the initial phase of Sudan's transition (Ibid.).

When it comes to normative stances on African politics, neither the UAE nor Qatar is looking to promote democracy and in that sense their engagement could come to resemble Chinese involvement in the region more recently, which is focused on economic gains above all else. As a result, we expect to see the continued use of chequebook diplomacy in Africa and less focus on the ideological position of allies in that region.

Case Study: Involvement in the Middle East and Ideological Competition since the Arab Spring

When pro-democracy protest movements emerged throughout the MENA region at the end of 2010 and picked up momentum in 2011, Qatar and the UAE became involved in trying to stem the tide of regional instability, as Libya, Syria, and Yemen devolved into civil war; they also had a vested interest in ensuring that similar such protests did not emerge in their own countries. In this case, then, domestic political legitimacy was at stake for these countries, and ideological competition came into play in a way that has been less relevant in the African cases.

Qatar began mediation efforts with a view to maintaining relationships across ideological boundaries, keeping ties at the start of the 2000s, for instance, with both Iran and Israel. Following the Arab Spring, this stance has been considered to have taken an ideological turn, with charges that Qatar made decisions about which parties to support in the Middle East based on their links to Islamist parties.

In all interviews with Qatari officials that have been conducted in the past nine years, none has ever made any claims of ideological affinity spurring foreign policy decisions after the Arab Spring. Rather, these decisions appear to have been taken largely because of (a) existing personal ties, reflecting the lack of institutionalisation in this area and the continued prominence of personal relationships; and (b) as a means of distinguishing itself from its most powerful neighbour, Saudi Arabia, which acted swiftly against pro-democracy protests in the Middle East. As one advisor to Shaykh Tamim told me,

> Qatar felt like an underdog in the Arab order which is traditionally dominated by Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Saudis felt that Hamad [bin Khalifa al-Thani, amir between 1995-2013] was rejecting their paternalism [....] He is the only Arab leader who looked at Arab public opinion. He saw that Islamists were most popular, so he supported them. He supported many liberals and secularists too. Many secular opposition leaders were taken in by Qatar (Interview notes).

Another interviewee cited Qatar's willingness to negotiate with Hizballah and Iran as evidence of its deeply rooted multilateralism (Interview notes). Still another posited that Qatar backed Islamist parties as a means to 'mitigate criticism that it is pro-US' (Interview notes). Thus, Qatar's engagement with Islamists after the Arab Spring appears to have been part of broader efforts to change its foreign policy to distinguish itself from its neighbours, to engage with Arab public opinion and to exert independence from its close American ally.

Three countries emerged as battlegrounds for the ideological struggle between Qatar and the UAE after the Arab Spring: Libya, Yemen and Syria. While an international coalition initially united to remove Muammar Qaddafi from power in Libya in February 2011, since that time the country has become a battleground for Qatar and the UAE. In initial phases of the conflict, Qatar was particularly active in backing rebel forces, using cleric Ali al-Sallabi who had been exiled to Qatar as 'the key conduit for the channelling of money and arms to Islamist groups in Benghazi' (Roberts, 2019, p. 3). The UAE meanwhile extended material support to military officer Khalifa Haftar, to the consternation of the UN which was managing the peacemaking process. As of January 2021, however, the UAE agreed to cooperate with the UN process and scale back its support for Haftar – signalling a trend toward Emirati military drawdown and toward less Qatari foreign policy adventurism (Al Jazeera, 2021).

In Yemen, the GCC initially came together to ease the transition of power away from President Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011 to Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi – a rare case of cross-GCC cooperation in the peacemaking space discussed in greater detail in the chapter about international institutions. When, however, years later, President Hadi began losing authority and territory to Houthi insurgents, a coalition led by Saudi Arabia launched a campaign of economic sanctions and targeted air strikes against Houthi insurgents,

with US assistance and with troops supplied by Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Sudan. The GCC has not participated in the mediation process since that time, although several UN efforts to mediate have failed.

The Syrian experience since the civil war emerged in 2011 showcases the potential pitfalls of (a) chequebook diplomacy; and (b) a lack of a systematic approach to engagement in peacemaking after the Arab Spring. Indeed, while not launching a long-term strategy or hosting mediation talks, Qatar has been accused of spending millions of dollars to support groups such as Al Nusra Front (Norfolk, 2021), as it, alongside Turkey between 2011 and 2013, supported militias ranging from the Free Syrian Army to Islamist groups like Al Nusra Front (Roberts, 2019, p. 4). Saudi Arabia was also accused of having funded a number of groups in Syria, potentially fuelling further conflict. Over the past year, the UAE has led the charge in facilitating normalisation with the Asad regime as a means of reaching stability in the longer term.

Findings: The Rise of Peacemaking/Peacebuilding as Statecraft

Unlike in the early 2000s, it is impossible to speak about peacemaking/peacebuilding in the Middle East today without mentioning Qatar and the UAE, which perhaps signals the success of their very public efforts to advance operations in this field. As one academic working in Doha put it, 'Qataris have made their security important to everyone else by being very involved' (Interview notes). Both Qatar and the UAE as small states have increased their importance internationally and enhanced their nation branding through their involvement in regional conflicts – a trend which is likely to continue given geopolitical dynamics.

The recent diversification away from involvement in peacemaking solely in the Middle East is likely to continue, as indicated by Emirati involvement in the India-Pakistan ceasefire in March 2021 and Qatari involvement in evacuations from Afghanistan. There remains a question of longevity of (a) chequebook diplomacy; and (b) statecraft through foreign policy, since this policy has only been used for a relatively short period.

Another issue of concern is the general lack of systematisation and a knowledge-based approach to conflict mediation. As one interviewee explained, despite over a decade of experience in the field, 'The Qataris don't seem to have a systematic approach, but it is based on opportunity [....] operations are hardly documented; events are not recorded, and there is little bureaucracy. The personality-driven system grants Qataris flexibility, but there is little knowledge base, diplomatic base is small and doesn't have skills' (Interview notes).

Continued engagement with the Qataris and Emiratis on efforts on which FCDO and local interests align, however, could help to enhance local capabilities and build up UK networks and reputation in the Middle East and potentially in areas of Africa in which these states are increasingly involved.

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Qatar Emir Shaykh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani talks to Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Doha, Qatar, 21 February 2022.
Source: Iranian Presidency via ZUMA Press Wire/Alamy

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