



## The Role of the UAE and Qatar in Regional Diplomacy of the Middle East: A Comparative Analysis

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*This article explores the shifting diplomatic roles of the two Gulf states – the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar – in the Middle East as a whole. Although both are small and relatively small in both population and geography, both have evolved as valuable diplomatic players. Still, their strategies differ: the UAE has a more structured, state centered pragmatic foreign policy, focusing on security cooperation, economic intervention and regional military incursions, while Qatar prioritizes mediation and relies on soft power, humanitarian diplomacy, and relations with several disparate embedded actors. This counterpart analysis attempts to detail their foreign policy goals and means, instruments, case studies on diplomacy, achievements and limitations, and how their relations influence regional order and coordination. Their resources project order, but the disparity in the means and order of their deployment results in diverse engagements; the risk and scope to which these alter the Middle East, are also different.*

## 1. Introduction

Historically, The Middle East is and has been one of the most politically and geopolitically complicated areas of the world as the result of a multitude of conflicts, histories, and factors involving religion, economics and politics. Recently, The Middle East and particularly the Gulf states, including the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, have been witnessing and participating in a myriad of conflicts and realizing geopolitical and governmental transformations as a result of the involvement and conflict of internal and external players, new balances of power, emerging new influential players and the conflicts that follow (Diwan, 2021). The aforementioned new influential players emerging in The Gulf states are the United Arab Emirates and Qatar (El Amine, 2023). The two are of a small size politically and geopolitically, both in population and geopolitically (Diwan, 2021). However, Qatar and particularly the UAE have developed and refined their foreign policy (Al-Kubaisi, 2022). The two states have close geographical and economic relations (El Amine, 2023). Internationally, and particularly in The Middle East, the two countries, particularly the UAE, have developed different and strange new foreign relations policies as a primary result of their geopolitical and economical differences and qualitative disparities achieved in the different strategies of foreign policies (Ahmad et al., 2024). To grasp the contemporary geopolitics of the Middle East, particularly the role of smaller Gulf states in reshaping regional influence away from larger powers, like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Egypt, one must understand the diplomatic relations between the two states in question.

The recent developments in foreign policy theory outlined by small states theory is especially useful in the case of the foreign policy formulated by the UAE and Qatar (Szalai, 2021). Due to a small territory and population size small states tend to also wield a small influence in regional and global politics (Ahmad et al., 2024). However, in the case of the UAE and Qatar, motivated, and strategic flexible niche diplomacy, and constellation efforts, merit region of the world small state tier diplomacy, Qatar in particular exemplifies global tier small states niche diplomacy (Al-Khulaifi, 2024). Qatar strives to develop relationships based on mediation, as an intermediary who can freely communicate and engage with disparate and antagonistic actors, including Islamist groups, regional actors, and Western states and powers (Alqashouti, 2021). The focus inherent in each of these positions indicates that small states are, nevertheless, inactive participants in the global politics and international relations game and yet, through the execution of effective foreign policies, are able to reshape regional norms, alliances, and, security architectures.

Pragmatism and assertiveness best characterize the UAE's foreign policy. As the political power center of the UAE, Abu Dhabi engages regionally and internationally geared to the UAE's interests and boosts political security (Fawn, 2020). Interests in the geopolitics of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden civil conflicts and military engagements in Libya and Yemen showcase Abu Dhabi's willingness to expand its security locus. Through military and political alliances, the UAE marshals its regional muscle (Fawn, 2020). The investments in civil and military infrastructure and direct investments underscore Abu Dhabi's ambition to shape the regional continental security architecture and, in the process, advance political influence. Over the years, Abu Dhabi has advanced its economic interests in Africa and South

and South-East Asia, expecting returns in political influence and modern treaties, as in the 2020 Abraham Accords. Through calculated political and economic engagements, Abu Dhabi aspires to be the leading political regional pointe in the Mid East, as the 2020 normalization of relations with Israel demonstrates.

In contrast, Qatar has cultivated a unique diplomatic identity based on mediation, neutrality, and the use of soft power. Given its small population and military size, Doha has Non-Conflict Foreign Strategies consolidating its international prestige and influence, minimizing the possibility of a hostile encounter. Qatar's mediation of the Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, and Afghanistan conflicts and peace negotiations, illustrates the importance Qatar places on being seen as an unaligned and competent peace facilitator (Barakat, 2024). Qatar's diplomatic influence is further expanded through soft power instruments like the Al Jazeera media network, global sports sponsorships, and humanitarian aid. The 2017 Gulf diplomatic crisis showed the world Qatar's isolation resilience and independent decision-making. When the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Egypt placed a blockade on Qatar, Qatar economically and politically withstood the blockade by reinforcing international ties, political, and diplomatic ties with the blockade setters. Qatar's economic and political isolation showed the world its strategic diplomatic autonomy (Kinnimont, 2019). In the reboot portion, The UAE's isolation and political attack on Qatar merely highlighted the emptiness of the isolation and the resilience Qatar's political and economic diplomatic ties with the non-isolation countries. In contrast with the UAE's political and economic isolation on Qatar, Qatar's political and economic ties showcase Qatar's resilience. The difference in Qatar's mediation strategy and the UAE's political direct approach showcase the diversity in the means of influence.

Historically, the diplomatic relations of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar depict the different types of diplomacy of small Middle Eastern states (Khalaf, 2021). The two states have similar economic wealth and face the same geopolitical, however, the different policies, the United Arab Emirates with interventionist policies and Qatar with neutral policies showcase different ways of getting to prominence (Al-Rawas, 2023). On one side, the militarily and economically aligned United Arab Emirates show high willingness to take reputation and geopolitical hits to get what they want (Khalaf, 2021). On the other side, Qatar seems more focused on the diplomatic zone of Qatar's soft-power which is more important because Qatar needs to win the long-term game with resources and overextending Qatar's diplomacy (Naier, 2021). Unlike external powers that have geopolitical shifts with Qatar, Qatar's policies being misaligned and her long-game thoughts on diplomacy make the whole middle eastern regional diplomacy so unstable (Hashish, 2025). Also, these two states exhibit how smaller gulf states confront and deal with these complex regional challenges with agency, despite the proximity of more regional and global powers (Al-Rawas, 2023).

These foreign policies constitute an extraordinary case of the interplay of agency, structural and resource constraints, and strategic choice. Hence, it illustrates the point that small states particularly engage in the setting, mediation, and multilateral activities of international norms. This exemplifies the policies of the small states, which reflects to an emerging new face of Middle Eastern diplomacy. Having the capacity to employ costly instruments of foreign policy, smaller states are able to affect larger-spanning enduring impacts. The diplomatic

relations of the UAE and Qatar highlight the geopolitics of the Middle East and the particular small state challenges in unstable regions of the world. This is important for scholars, advocates, and practitioners in the domain.

This article seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the foreign policy approaches of the UAE and Qatar in the context of the Middle Eastern region?
2. In what ways do their tools of diplomacy differ (i.e. military/security cooperation, economic diplomacy, mediation, soft power, and institutional diplomacy)?

## 2. Literature Review

Research on the Gulf states' foreign policy in the last decades focuses on how smaller states deal with external threats, utilize their wealth, and try to pursue niche positions. Looking at the case of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates and focusing on their foreign policy and geopolitical position, one is able to understand how smaller states are able to gain influence in the region. A study on SpringerLink describes how Qatar and the UAE strategically 'overcome smallness' by adopting different foreign policy options in response to regional structural challenges. The author illustrates most concretely how borders in the Middle East (and the states' foreign policy) are different by highlighting the differing domestic priorities, historic legacies, and strategic objectives of the two states (Ulrichsen, 2019).

The role Qatar plays in diplomatic humanitarianism continues to develop in Qatar's scholarly activities. As a smaller state, Qatar has also begun to dabble in peace broker activities. Qatar's use of Qatar's financial capital, diplomatic relations, and visibility via international media in conflict mediation in Sudan, Lebanon and Afghanistan has been documented in a Cambridge University Press & Assessment study. Qatar's role in conflict mediation serves to increase Qatar's international visibility and, as a result, Qatar's diplomatic soft power which negates the use of military force or hard power as a means to gain international influence (Kamrava, 2011).

Research into the 2017 Qatar diplomatic crisis provides comprehensive insights into the scale and magnitude of Gulf intra-regional divisions. It also assessed the impact of the blockade on the entire Middle East. According to Kinninmont (2019) at Chatham House, the blockade on Qatar imposed by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt was a reaction to Qatar's independent foreign-acquisition and mediation activism. The documented analysis also reported the diplomatic- resilience shift in Qatar prompted the formation and consolidation of new allies which undermined the UAE counter strategy focused predominantly on Saudi Arabia's regional vision of the GCC and consolidation of the blockade. The apparent differences in the geopolitical strategies of the smaller Gulf states exemplify the need to recognize and carefully manage the stability of the entire region. More literature analyzes the actions of small states in the context of regional organizations and security cooperation frameworks like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), focusing on Qatar and the UAE. Research available via DergiPark shows both states manipulate such frameworks to solidify their relative positions within joint decision-making and adopt bilateral and multilateral relational strategies outside the GCC. These actions captures an advanced recognition of the

dynamics of institutional power Zarras 2021 It shows also how minor states with inadequate military capacity can also impact and redirect the regional security policy and politically marginalize the agenda \citep{Zarras 2021} Yet the literature still provides a thin coverage of a systematic comparative examination of the diplomacy of the UAE and Qatar in the rest of the Middle east and the rest of the zone outside the Gulf Cooperation Council GCC. Most of the literature focuses on one case study and on bilateral relations. This remains an important gap in the literature because it remains essential to understand the different foreign policy paradigms of these two states in order to understand the different geopolitical configurations of the whole region.

Looking at Qatar's mediation and soft power efforts as opposed to the UAE's practical security and alliance-driven approaches provides the scope to illustrate the varied diplomatic options available to the other smaller states in the Middle East.

### 3. Methodology

This research utilizes qualitative comparative analysis using secondary sources: peer-reviewed articles, policy papers, statements by governments and the media, and case studies on diplomacy. It also analyzes certain aspects of diplomacy conducted by Qatar and the UAE, such as their mediation, security relations, and conflicts, and the tools, purposes, results, and drawbacks of regional diplomacy. Although quantifying foreign aid and the number of diplomatic missions are not the primary concern, the research focuses on strategic action through process tracing. In light of limited access to internal decision-making, the research relies on publicly accessible information while recognizing that the multifaceted nature of diplomatic achievement includes, among others, influence, standing, and the impact on security.

### 4. UAE's Role in Regional Diplomacy

#### 4.1 Security and Military Involvement:

Developed within the context of a strategic pragmatic approach, foreign policy practice in the UAE „, has been politically and diplomatically steady and executed, as well as cooperative, across the region and to and within the gulf midlands. Ensuring security and military footprint, to a degree, has also focused the demands of military engagements which the UAE has normalized the demands of realignments to focus the management of military deployments. For instance, the UAE, alongside Saudi and other partners, has directly militarily supported the Yemeni government during the Yemeni civil war, particularly focused against the Houthis. Rising Iranian power militarily embedded in the Arabian Peninsula is seen from the UAE as the Houthis and the UAE government resorted to military support with concerns to counter the gradually increasing militant power of the Houthis as proxies for Iranian expansionist aims (Gause, 2010). In addition to Yemen, the UAE managed the militarization of secured and closed diplomatic relations which included the interlocking and cooperative militarization of the coalition transcending the Arabian Peninsula, military laws, and also inclosed militarization of the gulf.

Although, compared to other Middle Eastern nations, the UAE lacks a large and powerful military, the self-confident and militaristic approaches taken by the UAE carry unique

concerns and risks. Perilously overextending militaristic approaches in peripheral geographies and inexplicable egregious acts in conflicts may lead to compromised regional relations and adverse militaristic conditions. As much as potential overreaching militarization in politics may lead to compromised relations, it may also lead to lowered respect in the Gulf, directed to the UAE. Even militaristic policies consist of a broad integration of diverse, non-militaristic practices as a form of Middle Eastern diplomacy. On the whole, the UAE's diplomacy demonstrates confidence, portraying the Union as an active regional state and militaristic diplomacy as a coherent geopolitical initiative to embrace a key geopolitical role, so integrating economic, geopolitical and political diplomacy to consolidate its leadership role in the Middle East.

#### 4.2 Economic and Development Diplomacy

The economic development and international relations diplomacy that the United Arab Emirates participates in provides the basis for the development of its foreign policy. This has been in the form of investments and aid extended to countries in the Middle East and other regions of the globe. This enables the UAE to increase its influence and soft power as a country. This form of diplomacy advances the UAE's reputation within the international community as a regionally constructive and progressive country, and as a security-oriented international actor that achieves its goals without the use of military force. From the UAE's perspective, these investments target economic development of the recipient countries, and development of political relations, and provide the UAE with political leverage as a partner in the region's development and modernization reconstruction initiatives. This has also been the case in the provision of development aid in the reconstruction of the war affected areas of Lebanon and humanitarian aid in Syria and Palestine.

Through its considerable inputs towards the rebuilding of infrastructure, development of the healthcare and education sectors, and the overall economic revitalization of recipient countries, the UAE has successfully extended its soft power and influence within the regional political sphere (Ulrichsen, 2014). Furthermore, attempts at development diplomacy by the UAE are motivated by a desire to counter the influence of geopolitical rivals, particularly Iran, while advancing a UAE-vision of governance, stability, and modernization to the recipient countries. Such development initiatives are often undertaken in collaboration with multilateral development partners, NGOs, and the private sector to pursue what has been described as a 'networked' model of diplomacy and development (Gause, 2010). Much development and economic diplomacy has been undertaken by the UAE in such a way as to influence the agendas of recipient countries. This in turn fosters 'goodwill' within a country and enables further collaboration and cooperation in the geopolitical spheres of security, politics, and the economy. Such a perspective indicates a third way of influencing the contemporary Middle East, apart from conventional method of military interventions, namely, development in socioeconomic, humanitarian, and political spheres. The UAE's development projects, investments, and aid are thus a means to achieve its national objectives of consolidating its influence, building relations with recipient countries, and asserting its role as a geopolitical leader in regional diplomacy.

Moreover, the UAE has the opportunity to promote soft power and reputation as a stabilizing player focusing on sustainable development, and regional development

collaboration on stability. The UAE also relies on a sophisticated strategy as the integration of economic and development diplomacy with the geopolitical frameworks of its security and political diplomacy revolves on a multi-dimensional approach of soft and hard power in the Middle East. The reputation of the UAE constitutes a genuine asset. To conclude, the development and economic diplomacy of the UAE in Africa and the Levant has a foremost role in the development and economic strategy of the UAE in the construction of soft power in order to strengthen its position as a dynamic and sophisticated actor in regional development.

#### 4.3 Strategic Alliances

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has developed strategic partnerships as the focal point of its foreign policy. Partnerships with some key regional and global players are critical for improving influence, protecting UAE's interests, and ensuring the stability of the region. Through strategic alliances the UAE has developed a strong partnership with Saudi Arabia, as well as Egypt and the West, especially the United States and, more recently, Israel. This enables the UAE to be at the center of the geopolitical position of the Middle East. The partnerships, especially the one with Saudi Arabia and the US, grant the UAE the ability to make important national decisions when the small size and population of the UAE is taken into account (Gause, 2010).

The strategic combination of military and political initiatives has enabled the UAE and Saudi Arabia to expand the scope of their diplomatic engagement in both active conflict zones and regional geopolitical decision-making (Kamrava, 2011). The UAE's strategic proximity to Egypt ensures influence in North Africa and the Levant, and participation in greater initiatives of the Arab League, both of which allow the UAE to position itself in regional development and political legitimization in the Gulf vis-a-vis pan-Arab claims, a political discourse constructed around the UAE's 'Arabness'. The militarily advanced Western allies of the UAE provide the country with the means of influence to extend its regional reach through military modernization that is complemented by coalition participation in the U.S.-led operations in Yemen and Libya (Ulrichsen, 2014). In 2020, the signing of the Abraham Accords not only normalized diplomatic and military relations with Israel, but also provided the UAE with a new array of strategic assets and a role as a middleman between Arab countries and Israel. These alliances have a reconsideration impact on the UAE's position as a regional actor in the geopolitical conflict of the Middle East and the North Africa region by maintaining a narrative of self-stability, and self-credibility, and counteracting regional influence by militarily enforced stability.

Having developed strategic partnerships in its vicinity as well as far away actors, the UAE is able to implement a multispectral foreign policy comprising of military, economic, and diplomatic measures. Along the UAE's consolidating the military, economic, and diplomatic measures the UAE redefines the relations in the Middle East. The UAE has to do diplomatic construction of military economic and political. This flexibility and degree of manoeuvre the UAE demonstrates is a result of the diplomatic balancing of the opposing and rival partnerships. This is also the case when explaining the strategic partnerships of the UAE with Saudi Arabia and Egypt and the West, as they cumulatively provided the UAE the foremost position in the Middle East, and the ability to influence globally the geopolitics as well as the

power and economics and security of Middle East, and the complexity of its foreign policy (Gause, 2010; Kamrava, 2011; Ulrichsen, 2014).

#### 4.4 Challenges

The distinctiveness of the UAE's integrating military diplomacy, economic, and development assistance has appeared most recently and most of all, the most integrated, the most developed, and the most multi-channelled apparent. However, this integrated, multi-channelled system also comes with challenges of its own. The primary one being, the potential for overstretch, considering one of the most consequences of over-committed military and political actions are resource problems and negative consequences of a varying nature. An example of this could be the financial, logistical, and human resource drain the UAE over-committed with direct military engagement, rebuilding expense, and support to proxy-local militias in Yemen. Such resource dependant actions would most definitely be detrimental to the strategic objectives of the UAE and expose operational designs to negative- humanitarian consequences and associated operational failures (Gause, 2010). Other than resource dependant challenges, overstretch against military enemies has, in some ways, overstrained the UAE's immediate and wider neighboring relations. The nature of the concern is to do with how the UAE has placed its military engagement and, how the regional countries anticipate such involvement to be unruly military intervention of an aggressive unilateral nature (which they fear would aggravate the situation to an already volatile and discorded region).

Possibly the most representative criticism of the UAE's geopolitical actions comes from its support of certain warring parties in Libya, which affected the control that rival states held over the regional diplomacy, and ultimately, caused further fracturing of the diplomatic terrain.

As discussed in the previous sections of this paper, the UAE's presence in active conflict zones demonstrates the value that the UAE places on diplomacy, and most importantly, demonstrates overreach and the reputation costs that the region stands to lose from complex, unbalanced, and dysfunctional regional interdependencies.

Defensive reputation actions will likely remain from the UAE's regional ties, and will consist of the containment of overreaching diplomacy whilst soft-power strategies will be employed primarily to counter the loss of reputation, and to balance the costs of diplomatic, military, and economic overreach.

#### 4.5 Qatar's Role in Regional Diplomacy

##### 4.5.1 Conflict Mediation

Neutral mediation in both regional and international disputes is one of the main components of Qatar's foreign policy and the primary aspect of its diplomatic persona. Qatar continues to maintain its small-country status with regard to its population and its territory. Qatar's mediation has been pivotal in resolving conflicts in the Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Darfur cases. In Darfur, Qatar is credited for mediating diplomatic humanitarian assistance and alleviating suffering brought on by the civil war. Ulrichsen (2014) notes that Qatar both

sponsored and facilitated negotiations between the combatants with logistical assistance on the civil war's humanitarian side, thus positioning itself for the first time to assess, constructively and dispassionately to the small state, the complex and multifaceted influences of state- and non-state actors in the civil war's dynamics. Lebanon's conflict also benefited from Qatar's political mediation of civil negotiations between rival political factions and moving action on the stabilization of government institutions and reconciliation to the post-war reconstruction phases.

Increased cooperation from conflicting parties was possible because of the financial aid and developmental assistance reinforcing the legitimacy of the mediation processes (Kamrava, 2011). Most notably, Qatar mediated United States and Taliban discussions in Afghanistan by providing a neutral location for the peace talks. For these talks, Qatar was positioned to facilitate the dialogue necessary to reach agreements regarding the de-escalation of the conflict and the political arrangements, signifying Qatar's capacity to diplomacy with key global and regional players (Gause, 2010). Qatar's conflict mediation efforts strongly connect to its other initiatives aimed at acquiring soft power, especially the global humanitarian activities, the hosting of prominent humanitarian summits and the Al Jazeera media network. All of these efforts reinforce Qatar's position as a neutral mediator. The independent mediation initiative and soft power efforts have been a source of tension with other Gulf states, mainly during the Gulf diplomatic crisis in 2017 when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt closed Qatar.

A reason given for the blockade is Qatar's foreign diplomatic independency and diplomacy with 'problematic' actors (Ulrichsen, 2014). This did not mean Qatar is not expected to understand and respond to an exceptionally complicated and reactively provocative regional political landscape. Qatar continues this diplomatic political willingness, to retain the mediation identity, and keep an unwavering and broad range of relations with rival and western state actors and non-state actors. This is the first time Qatar has commendable opportunistic mediation conflict engagement. Qatar's mediation conflict efforts has gained an unprecedented geo-strategic role Qatar an internationally accepted and recognized neutral diplomatic broker - in Qatar's diplomatic efforts and willingness Qatar has enhanced her geo-strategic role and influence in the diplomacy sustained from geo-regional conflict collapse. This acknowledgement and acceptance with and for Qatar's diplomatic efforts and neutrality has come to deeply affect her role and relevance in ever changing and challenging conflict situations and relations.

#### 4.5.2 Soft Power Instruments

The use of soft power to expand and increase Qatar's diplomatic reach is a unique element of the country's foreign policy. While some nations may expand their influence through military and economic means, Qatar has been able to reach and influence far beyond what is expected of a state of its size and population through the media, humanitarian work, and the sponsorship of other entities. Qatar's media abilities have been largely provided through Al Jazeera, which has been available to Qatar since the end of 1996. Al Jazeera has provided Qatar the ability to shape and influence perceptions and opinions, making it a legitimate player in global media, and allowing it to dominate coverage in the Arab world (Gause, 2010). Qatar's deliberate media presence has enabled it to dominate coverage of

international and regional conflicts, politically sensitive issues, and international relations in ways that promote its interests of diplomatic dialogue, intervention, and reconciliation. Qatar has been able to consolidate its position even further by providing resources and facilities to international bodies and mediating geopolitical disputes during international conferences and forums.

Being the center of attention in multilateral dialogues and peace talks strengthens Qatar's image as an unbiased trained specialist in mediation which enhances their diplomatic reach in the region and globally (Ulrichsen, 2014). Qatar's Evans School of Public Policy and Governance Barin's and Other's 2022 peace negotiations about the Taliban and the Afghanistan crisis is an astounding example of the soft power in complicated bargaining with significant world players. Qatar's soft power source is mostly from the sporting activities and humanitarian aid, as well as the culture. It leaves an informal diplomatic relations and positive image within the populations of those countries.

This reputation is solidified even more by the Qatar's humanitarian and humanitarian development aid in conflict regions in Gaza, Sudan and Lebanon (Kamrava, 2011). More so, the reputation of Qatar in international relations, as constructive, is boosted when Qatar engages humanitarian and development aid in conflict regions. It is Qatar's limited military and economic power which most makes its strategic use of soft power more relevant. Qatar's influence combines engagement in media, hosting institutions, and humanitarian work which provides Qatar networks of influence that extend reach to regional and global polities.

Nonetheless, there are criticisms regarding the use of soft power; Al Jazeera's independent editorial choices and coverage sometimes create friction with bordering Gulf states, especially during the 2017 diplomatic crisis when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt blockaded Qatar, during which the influence of media coverage and Qatar's foreign policy independence were cited concerns (Gause, 2010; Ulrichsen, 2014).

#### 4.5.3 Independent Foreign Policy

Part of Qatar's foreign policy is the distinct way in which it engages with both state and non-state actors regionally, which includes competitors and even with non-state actors and movements. This sense of autonomy allows Qatar to assume a mediator's role in complex and sensitive issues. Notably, Qatar's policy of disengagement from the Gulf Cooperation Council member states and, particularly, pivoting towards the Qatar and Western Axis (Gause, 2010) is unlike any other. In fact, Qatar's disengagement policy is the reason the country has emerged as a neutral diplomatic facilitator; other regional players would be seen as partisans. This has even been proven true with the mediation and conflict resolution activities with Iran where Qatar, unlike other mediation states, has no obstacle with Iran and is thus able to resolve conflicts that involve Iran and other transnational Islamist actors (Kamranava, 2011). This was most evident during the 2017 Gulf diplomatic crisis. Recall that Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt blockaded Qatar primarily to get Qatar to cap its unrestrained and compatible foreign policy and to cease relations with those actors that the blockading states view as hostiles. In the face of an economic blockade, Qatar managed to realize its diplomatic objectives of forming new alliances with states outside of the Gulf and, even, actively pursued new mediation efforts to

mitigate the diplomatic deficit and to showcase the benefits of independent relations that characterizes the country's resilience (Ulrichsen, 2014).

Ultimately, the country's resilience and independent relations serve to solidify its diplomatic standing. This is enhanced by its capacity for multi-track diplomacy, which regards being able to host peace negotiations, offer humanitarian assistance, and facilitate discussions among opposing parties without entanglement from policy constraints in any of its formal agreements. Such agency enhances the country's standing in any diplomatic negotiations it undertakes. In the case of Qatar, such independence, reliability, and flexibility in diplomacy strengthen Qatar's reputation as a resolution of disputes pragmatic partner ...

Managing relationships whereby the independence of one's foreign policy is pursued is likely to lead to antagonism of the foreign policy of one's immediate neighbors, and the potential of one being politically pressured, and the difficulty of managing relationships with some players who are disinterested, let alone opposing, Qatar's foreign strategic is independence through the positive Qatar has integrated the world with public diplomacy. Qatar's foreign policy with Iran and the complex relations of Islamist movements and diverse global actors are testimony to the integrated elements of Qatar's diplomatic practice. The rest of the world, and the countries of the region in particular, recognize this ability. The capacity to mediate in complex and tense geopolitical situations is, in the case of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, based on military and economic investments. This is disproportionate to Qatar's size and military capabilities and underlines the diplomatic uniqueness of Qatar in the geopolitical matrix of the Middle East.

#### 4.5.4 Challenges

While employing mediation, soft power, and independent foreign policy, Qatar's diplomacy lacks some security, as noted during the 2017 Gulf crisis. In June 2017, a coalition of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt blockaded Qatar and severed diplomatic and economic ties, accusing Qatar of sponsoring terrorism, and having ties to Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood. This diplomacy blockade was the 'first real test' of Qatar's foreign policy and made visible the small size, economic dependence, regional position, and constitutional vulnerabilities Gause describes (2010). While the blockade was a hit to Qatar's foreign policy, it also attacked the polity's economic position by heightening pressure to adjust foreign policy to the demands of the blockading states. While it was a test of Qatar's pivot unity, it surely acted with economic and political vision. Rather than capitulate to the demands of the blockading states, Qatar's pragmatic vision toward barriers was to trade with and ally economically with Turkey and Iran. According to Ulrichsen (2014), Qatar engaged in economic diversification to mitigate the consequences of the political vision. Qatar was a diplomatically rational actor: when faced with a blockade, it became economically and politically independent, thus avoiding political opposition and surviving with a political vision.

Crisis demonstrated the limits of Qatari soft power and mediation attempts. Engagement with controversial actors (Actors opposing the West), while used as a basis for conflict mediation, was an initial cause of punitive actions taken by Qatar's rivals. The blockade though, offered Qatar a real-world context for applying these strategies. Qatar's mediation, soft power used during the blockade, and Orientalist power relations all

demonstrated Qatar's unyielding response to the blockade. Qatar's increased resilience, strategically outshining others, and visibility demonstrated Kamrava's (2011) strategic autonomy.

**Table No 1: Comparative Analysis**

Aspect	UAE	Qatar
Foreign Policy Style	Pragmatic and alliance-driven, focusing on strategic partnerships with regional and Western powers. Policy decisions are guided by national security, economic diversification, and influence projection.	Mediative and independent, prioritizing conflict resolution, neutrality, and engagement with diverse actors including Iran and non-state groups. Emphasizes diplomacy over military intervention.
Use of Military Power	High – actively participates in military operations, such as in Yemen and Libya, and invests heavily in modernizing armed forces. Military is used to assert influence, secure strategic interests, and support allied governments.	Low – limited direct military involvement. Relies on diplomacy, mediation, and soft power tools to influence regional conflicts, avoiding direct combat engagement whenever possible.
Economic Influence	High – uses foreign direct investment (FDI), development aid, and infrastructure projects to strengthen bilateral relations, secure political leverage, and project power across the Middle East and Africa.	Moderate – strategic investments and development assistance are targeted to enhance soft power, facilitate mediation, and build networks of influence rather than primarily for political leverage.
Soft Power	Moderate levels of cultural diplomacy, economic development, and humanitarian engagement outreach for reputation and influence enhancement, although as a secondary pursuit compared to security and alliance diplomacy.	High – employs international diplomacy through self-owned Al Jazeera, Conference of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, world sports, and humanitarian activities, in addition to global visibility and visibility augmentation. Qatar Diplomacy focuses on soft power.
Regional Perception	Assertive and occasionally polarizing – military interventions and alignment with specific powers can provoke tension with neighboring states, though seen as a strong and reliable partner by allies.	Maintains neutrality while bearing the occasional possibility of conflict – known as an authentic capable mediator and an independent player, potential tensions with certain Gulf states may arise owing to ties with controversial entities and Iran.
Resilience to Crises	Dependent on alliances – stability relies heavily on support from regional and global partners, which can be a vulnerability if coalition dynamics shift.	Flexible and innovative – demonstrates adaptability in crises, such as during the 2017 Gulf blockade, by diversifying alliances, economic strategies, and

diplomatic outreach, maintaining autonomy and influence.

The blockade also highlighted Qatar's need to diplomatically engage with all the concerned parties and avoid alienating crucial neighbours which was the real lesson from the Crisis. Qatar's post-blockade emphasis on food security, transport integration, and economic diversification was a result of the crisis. The new food security strategies and developing transport integration with economic diversification. The lessons of the blockade highlighted Strategic resilience and autonomy that sought to promote Qatar as an unyielding mediator in the Middle East while also demonstrating the challenges of small state diplomacy in the region.

The incident shows how Qatar's diplomacy is shaped by its vulnerabilities and how it uses its vulnerabilities to improve its global diplomacy and standing internationally.

#### 4.6 Discussion: Comparative Analysis of UAE and Qatar in Regional Diplomacy

The analysis of case studies on Qatar and the UAE underscores the different foreign policy approaches each has designed and implemented to establish a presence in the geopolitically critical Middle-east region. Although both countries - Qatar and the UAE - remain relatively small in terms of territory and population, each state's regional foreign policy approach remains different in terms of priorities, allocation of resources, and the strategic interests of diplomacy to be deployed. While the UAE emphasizes the acquisition of a more militarized foreign policy, and the construction of a regional security integration framework with Western powers, its foreign policy remains focused on the overarching twin objectives of national security and economic diversification (i.e. the UAE is the most militarily and economically dominant member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)). The UAE takes a leading role in the construction of a newly assertive Arab coalition to pursue military objectives in countries like Libya and Yemen (Gause, 2010). By engaging in these military operations, the UAE signals its national security objectives by demonstrating the courage to utilize hard power resources. The UAE increasingly views its military involvement in coalition operations in Yemen and Libya as an appropriate assertive regional role its foreign policy dictate be pursued.

The combination of the UAE Banking network with the military and developmental role taken by the UAE in the region illustrates the extent to which the UAE has expanded its strategic role and capabilities in the region and beyond. Hence, the UAE maintains a complex and perhaps contradictory role that integrates both the use of force and the provision of developmental aid within the same region and line of Georg Tullock, embodies both the "hawk" and the "dove" within the same domain. However, the UAE's role development in the region has led to considerable apprehension from its neighbouring states and strained relations within the Gulf Cooperation Council (Kamrava, 2011).

The Qatar National Vision 2030, Qatar's strategic development plan, focuses on transforming Qatar into an advanced economy and modern state and on pursuing an aggressive campaign of soft power diplomacy. Qatar's soft power diplomacy, mainly through the Qatar Foundation and various Al Jazeera branches, has steadily grown since the mid-1990s. As a small state, Qatar has been recognized for its ability to use soft power to facilitate mediation, the development of state policies, and its role in the global arena. Qatar's positioning of itself

at the crossroads of international conflicts has encouraged global powers, including the UAE and Saudi Arabia, to participate in international mediation.

The employment of military might is a key source of differentiation between the two countries. Through the use of military force, the UAE is not only able to have a more direct influence on the balance of power, achieve their strategic objectives, and influence the dynamics of security in the region, but, also, to more direct military engagement in a region, overshadow the risks of having to stretch their resources too thin, and potentially suffer political and security challenges to their reputation. This, potentially, is a reason for their prolonged military engagement in and with Yemen, and the UAE's risks of operational military engagement in Yemen, and the UAE's having to politically justify their military engagement in Yemen to the rest of the world are Gause's (2010) focus. Conversely, Qatar, to a greater extent, chooses to use politically the influence of the military. This could be seen as more rational in direct military confrontation; however, the more indirect methods of manipulation politically, especially when morally suggestive with controversial subjects, require, to a greater extent, the use of military force, and, to a greater extent, on the controversial military power of the Iranian state. Qatar's use of independent diplomacy and balance of relations with various politically controversial and conflicting states in the Middle East has been a reference for a state to use its independent diplomacy, and, as Ulrichsen (2014) states, has allowed Qatar to act as a credible intermediary in protecting their national interest.

Differences can still be observed on the basis of economic and development diplomacy. The UAE strategically uses its economic resources to deepen alliances and contribute to growth and rehabilitation of infrastructures post conflicts in places such as Libya and infrastructure in parts of Africa. Thus, these investments become tools of influence and, simultaneously, these investments resonate with local priorities of economic diversification and integration into the global economy. For Qatar, economic investments tend to be more selective and aligned to gain soft power, where strategic investments, complex economic aid, and growth initiatives become extensions of their economic influence. The concept of hard power is not central, and the main aim is to attain goodwill, an increased position of authority in mediation, and influence, all of which aid the approach of soft power. This underscores the fact that the two sides to an argument made on the basis of Qatari influence lies with the insistence of softer, non-coercive mechanisms (Kamrava 2011; Ulrichsen, 2014).

The implementation of strategies in both states is not without difficulties, and in each case, these difficulties are of a different nature. For example, the UAE's active positions may be polarizing and Additional Research only inflame the challenges posed by regional actors, as well as create vulnerabilities based on the lopsided dependency of alliances. The Emirates achieves its objectives of influencing regional order by designing and executing military interventions, but it also incurs operational and reputational risks, as seen in Yemen and other military campaigns. The blockade by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt in June 2017 demonstrates some of the pitfalls of Qatar's conceptual flexibility and creativity. However, Qatar's ability to change and shift to more diplomatically and economically aggressive relationships with Turkey, Iran, and others, as well as different economic partnerships and trade route modifications, demonstrate her ability to be flexible and autonomous in times of crises.

(Ulrichsen, 2014). The blockade diplomatically highlighted the fragility of a small state while bowing testament to Qatar's ability to be resilient.

Within the Gulf region, the United Arab Emirates, asserts itself, is controversial, while also having a highly militarized foreign policy. In the meantime, while having more positive cross-regional standings, moderating neutrality peripheral to foreign policy, enhances all other states in the region positively. It is precisely this pattern in the region that has led to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states' policies to experience a somewhat counterbalanced regional influence. During this time, Qatar was able to moderate a heavy dependence other regional actors had upon their military, economy, and soft power resources. The differences in the states' resilience strategies are equally interesting. The UAE maintains its strategic influence through robust crisis coalitions and alliances, in contrast to Qatar, which focuses on innovative and autonomous solutions during a crisis. It is because of this reliance on crisis coalitions and alliances that Qatar maintains a large part of its strategic influence on an international scale.

The differences in the methods of diplomacy employed by the UAE and Qatar illustrate how two countries can achieve certain goals which satisfy the geopolitical requirements of the Gulf. Qatar focuses on an isolationist stance and the practice of soft diplomacy which is an antonym to the UAE's strategy which is to first use military power and then employ soft power diplomacy in economic affairs while also using soft power extensively. Qatar's diplomacy leans more toward soft power and political neutrality while the UAE is more concerned with the diplomacy of militarized political engagement which is referred to as hard power with the addition of soft. The flexible and original use and interplay of new forms of diplomacy, new resources, and strategic compartmentalization demonstrates dynamic and strategic resilience. The strategic respite from military overreach, isolation, and from overstretch in themselves, are also examples of strategic balance of an almost sublime quality. These cases, as a whole, demonstrate the influence of resources and their concentration on the likely foreign policy and the geopolitical position of these countries from the Gulf.

## 5. Conclusion

Owing to their unique foreign policy strategies, the Emirates Diplomatic Network (EDN) and the Government Communications Office (GCO) have to a certain extent, avoided 'diplomatic antagonisms' and made 'diplomatic friendships' focusing on the economic resources of their respective states. While EDN focuses on diplomacy through political and economic alliances, building relations through strategic mediating, the GCO focuses on public relations and soft power diplomacy through their connections with the people, their independent, personal and commercial contacts with the people of the states. EDN primarily relies on the hard resources of their state in foreign policy and the strategic policy of the Government Communications Office relies on soft resources focusing on public relations and connection of the people with their independent personal and commercial contacts. Through an economic perspective, the strategic 'antagonisms' and 'friendships' formed by EDN and the GCO have shown and established their impact through soft and hard economic resources of their respective states. EDN and the GCO have shown through their strategic shifting on the 'economic' belts of foreign relations the impact and the importance of soft power public

diplomacy through economic friendly relations of a state. Important questions for the future include how these nations will adjust to the changes in the positions of the US and China in the region, how they will manage their competitive and cooperative relationships with one another, how much their various development models will continue to diverge or begin to converge, and how long their strategies for maintaining diplomatic relations will continue to work in a crisis-prone region. In order to understand the changing landscape of diplomacy in the Middle East, and the new contribution of small, advanced states to the interregional order, it is necessary to understand the separate, yet complementing, roles of each of the UAE and Qatar.

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