



Determinants of the United Arab Emirates' New Assertive Foreign Policy

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Abstract:

The United Arab Emirates has adopted an assertive policy against Islamist-affiliated movements and Iran. Both are seen by the UAE as the main threats to the conservative tradition within not only the UAE but also the Gulf region. This paper examines the new assertiveness in the UAE's foreign policy and discusses the determinants of such policy and the challenges that it may face.

Introduction

When we discuss the Middle East politics, we always tend to look at the most influential players like Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran. We could hardly hear about the United Arab Emirates (hereafter UAE). But today the situation is completely different. This small country, which lies on the shores of the Arabian Gulf, has been able to create a political position for itself in the region parallel to its economic strength as the second largest economy among the Arab countries.

The role of the UAE became noticeable right after the outbreak of the so-called Arab Spring. In Bahrain, the UAE stood with the ruling family of Al-Khalifa against the popular opposition. The assumption was that if the opposition succeeded in weakening the regime, this would damage the existing traditional ruling system not only in Bahrain but also in the neighboring Gulf states. The UAE's troops in Bahrain, working within the Peninsula Shield Force, are the strongest and the largest after the Saudi military presence. In Libya, its air force took part in the NATO-led military campaign against the late Colonel

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Muammar Gaddafi's forces, and it has supported the Tobruk-based Libyan government against the pro-Islamist Tripoli-based government. It was even accused of carrying out air strikes with Egypt against the pro-Islamist militia in Tripoli in 2014. In Egypt, its political and economic supports played an important role in the elimination of the Muslim Brotherhood rule and in the rise of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. In Syria, its political and economic supports continued to the opposition seeking to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad (Katzman, 2015). At a certain point, its air forces were among the leading contributors striking the so-called Islamic State (hereafter IS) in support to the US-led coalition air campaign. The country has even allowed some allies to deploy fighter planes within its territory in order to support the campaign against IS. In Yemen, the UAE's military presence is the most prominent along with Saudi Arabia. Both states are in direct war with the Houthi movement and the forces of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, which are jointly working to impose their control on Yemen. The UAE's declared aim in Yemen is to restore the rule of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi and to stop the Houthis' advancement.

All these moves raise many questions about the logic behind the new UAE's assertive foreign behavior, and the future of such behavior. This paper attempts to answer these questions by explaining the major factors that determine the new assertive position adopted by the UAE in its foreign policy, and by providing an analysis of the future of such policy.

Leadership Perception

The UAE's assertive actions today clearly show that small states can be influential players in the international system. The UAE's assertive foreign policy in Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Libya, and Yemen runs against the assumptions made by most of the literature written on the foreign behavior of small states. According to the literature, small states tend to: 1) involve less in international affairs, 2) apply non-military tools to achieve influence, 3) respect international law, 4) adopt neutrality, 5) depend on alliance with superpower to provide protection, and 6) cooperate in order to avoid conflicts (Hey, 2003).

The UAE is small in size with respect to its geography and population. Geographically, the total area of the country is approximately 83,600 square kilometers, which is comparable to the size of the State of Idaho in the United States or the Republic of Austria in Europe. Demographically, the size of the population is estimated at around 9.2 million, which is smaller than the size of the population of the State of North Carolina in the United States or the Kingdom of Sweden in Europe. Most importantly, the vast majority of its population is comprised of non-nationals. These limitations have not prevented the UAE from seeking to become an influential regional player. The country has overcome these limitations by succeeding both politically and economically. The UAE's example makes us believe that reaching a comprehensive theory of the behavior of small states by specialists in international relations is a very difficult process. Therefore, we tend to favor the argument that the concept of Small State depends on the perception by individuals, institutions and leaders in a certain state to the size of their country and its role in the international system (Keohane, 1969).

It can be argued that the UAE's role in the regional system emerges from its leadership high perception of its country. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Vice-President of the UAE, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, has always been a notable advocate of continuous aspiration toward a chieving leadership in most aspects of economic and human developments. It is no wonder that the UAE was the most developed Arab states in human development (UNDP, 2014). The city of Dubai keeps setting higher standard of modernization across the Middle East. Today, Dubai is home to some of the most amazing projects. It has the world tallest building, the largest mall, a highly developed infrastructure, and fascinating man-made islands and resorts. Along this developmental leadership comes the political leadership of Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Crown Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, who has always aspired to lead in the military and political fields. These two aspects of leadership played a major role in creating confidence among the UAE's institutions and individuals

that the UAE is not a small state but a state with big ambition, achievements, and capabilities to play a role in the international system. Thus, it can be argued that the UAE's leadership perception forms the main analytical framework to understand its foreign behavior and endeavor to be an influential player in the region nowadays. This is one of the key factors in the interpretation of the foreign policies of states, according to the theories of international relations (Rosenau, 1971).

Explaining UAE Foreign Policy

If strategic thinking means moving within the framework of facing threats that endanger the State's national interests, then the UAE's moves in Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Syria and Yemen are reflections of the UAE's strategic thinking of its political leadership. This thinking aims to confront the perceived threats to the security of the region, particularly the threat to the traditional conservative political system that exists in the region. The most important sources of this type of threat come from the rise of political Islamic movements and the growing Iranian influence in the region. These two threats are the most dangerous to the UAE's national security according to the UAE's strategic outlook (Bin huwaidin, 2105). This, accordingly, necessitated the adoption of an active strategy to encounter such threats. As a conservative state, identity is so important in defining state legitimacy in the UAE (Almezaini, 2012; Abdulla, 2014). Therefore, any threat to the state identity must be dealt with seriously.

The threat of political Islam emerged through the success of the Muslim Brotherhood and the rise of Islamic Jihadist groups such as IS. Both managed to make themselves important players in the Middle East. Muslim Brotherhood had managed to rise up through the so-called Arab Spring and to gain some control of the governments in some of the countries in the region such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Morocco. Their success in reaching power in Egypt in particular constituted a serious threat to the conservative states of the Gulf including the UAE. Their danger stems from their ideological program that goes beyond Egypt and toward establishing an Islamic Caliphate (Grand Islamic State) throughout the Muslim world. The UAE was on

the agenda. Its successful developmental model captures their interest. Muslim Brotherhood succeeded in establishing a presence in the UAE through some local affiliated associations (Salama, 2013). The UAE's authority has arrested some leaders of Muslim Brotherhood working in the country and charged them with establishing a branch link to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt without a permit. They were accused of forming a secret organization that aimed to overthrow the regime through the support they received from their international organization (Khaleej Times, 2013). Therefore, the UAE declared war on the Muslim Brotherhood Movement and classified it as a terrorist organization. The Muslim Brotherhood Movement has become part of the UAE's foreign policy that sought to eliminate their threat. This was evident in the UAE's stand in supporting the so-called June 30 revolution in Egypt, which was calling for the resignation of Mohamed Morsi, the first elected president of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, and in its immediate backing of a military action to depose Morsi. The UAE is one of the most important proponents of the current president of Egypt Abdel Fatah al-Sisi. Today, Egypt under al-Sisi's rule is considered as a status quo state and not a revisionist state from the viewpoint of the UAE. Moreover, the UAE provides full support to the nationalist-led Tobrik-based government in Libya against the Muslim Brotherhood-led Tripoli-based government. On this ground, the UAE has also distanced itself from the Muslim Brotherhood governments in Sudan, Gaza Strip, and Turkey. From the UAE's perspective, Muslim Brotherhood constitutes a threat to the basis of Westphalian Order, which depends upon maintaining the integrity and sovereignty of the nation-states.

Threat to the conservative system in the Arabian Gulf states does not stop with the Muslim Brotherhood but also extends to include the danger coming from the Islamic Jihadist movements, particularly the threat of IS and al-Qaeda. Like the Muslim Brotherhood, the ultimate goal of IS and al-Qaida is to establish an Islamic Caliphate. This in turn means eliminating the existing nation-state system in the Muslim world. Therefore, the UAE has worked to counter such threat. Its military aircrafts worked with American planes to attack IS strong-

holds in Syria. The success of IS represents a threat to the security of the Gulf States, particularly the UAE. The openness of the country could be used by such organizations to conduct some terrorist acts to destabilize the country. Thus, containing the rise of such movements justifies the UAE's actions in countries such as Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

As for Iran, it is the main factor behind the UAE moves in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. These countries are identified as springboards for the expansion of Iranian influence in the region. The UAE-Iranian relations have always been in a state of tension. The Iranian continued occupation of the UAE's three islands (Abu Mousa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb) remains the main source of tension. The calls of the UAE's government for the Iranian withdrawal from the islands have yielded no compliance from Iran. Even the UAE's repeated calls for solving the issue through international arbitration have been met with continual Iranian rejection (Al Nahyan, 2013). Lately, the tension in the relations has been escalated as a result of the UAE's rising fear of the consequences of the growing Iranian influence in the Arab region and its efforts to destabilize the Arab countries. The UAE fears of the continuing spread of the sectarian conflicts in some Arab countries and its advancement into the Gulf states. Sectarian tension within the Arabian Gulf states could threaten the conservative values and destabilize the social harmony among the different components of society in the Gulf region. Therefore, the UAE did not hesitate to send troops to join the Peninsula Shield Force's action to support the regime in Bahrain against what was seen as an Iranian intervention to provoke Shiites against Sunnis. It also joined Saudi Arabia in the war against the Houthis in Yemen. Houthis are seen by the Emiratis and Saudis as working according to Iranian agenda (The National, 2015). WikiLeaks documents of American officials meeting with UAE's officials revealed that the latter are preoccupied with the seriousness of Iran threat to the security of the region (Katzman, 2015).

Thus, the UAE's assertive policy in supporting Bahraini regime, backing Egyptian President Abdel Fattahal-Sisi, aiding the Tobruk-based government in Libya, striking IS, and engaging in a war against

the Houthis in Yemen comes in accordance with the UAE's endeavor to achieve the following objectives:

- 1 - Strengthening the UAE alliance with Saudi Arabia. Abu Dhabi and Riyadh have elevated their relationship right after the outbreak of the so-called Arab Spring. They felt the threat of popular revolutions, especially after the overthrow of their staunch ally President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. The two states were unsatisfied with the US abandonment of Mubarak, a long-standing US ally. Therefore, they worked together to achieve strategic cooperation in order to confront the repercussions of the so-called Arab Spring by standing with AlKhalifa's regime in Bahrain and supporting President al-Sisi in Egypt. The collapse of the Al Khalifa in Bahrain will have a great impact on the security of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states as it will endanger the existing regional conservative political system. Meanwhile, the return of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt will boost the level of penetration by their followers inside the Gulf states. The Abu Dhabi-Riyadh alliance has also been founded to contain Iran. Abu Dhabi is keen on a special relationship with Riyadh because it recognizes that the kingdom is the most prominent Gulf state able to create a balance with Iran and other revolutionary forces in the Arab region. The common perception is that Iran and revolutionary forces represent dangerous threats to the nation-state system, and, therefore, have to be confronted. This convergence of interests has played an important role in forming this alliance. At some point, the UAE was concerned that after the death of King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, this perception may change with the arrival of a new king in Saudi Arabia. The UAE wanted to seize any opportunity to make sure that Riyadh does not change its position. Therefore, when Riyadh, with its new king Salman bin Abdul Aziz, decided to confront the Houthis, the UAE was the first to provide full support. This action was in accordance with the Abu Dhabi's perception that Riyadh is a very important partner in fighting the political Islamic movements and facing the Iranian penetrations in the region. These

common threats helped establishing the new joint alliance. Historically, the UAE-Saudi relationship was never at its best like today; differences over border issues and fear of Saudi domination were very important factors in keeping Abu Dhabi uneasy in dealing with Riyadh for a long period of time (Al-Alkim, 2011). Hence, this alliance is a new phenomenon in the UAE - Saudi Arabia relationship and deserves to be observed to evaluate its ability to sustain its momentum.

- 2 - Sending direct political messages to Iran, its main rival, that the Gulf countries will no longer remain silent toward Tehran's interference in the internal affairs of the Arab states, particularly in the Gulf region. UAE's actions with Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf countries in many parts of the Arab world are meant to notify Tehran that the Gulf states are able and determined to face threats without the need for direct Western support. The ultimate aim of such actions is to achieve not only a balance of power with Iran but also a balance of threat.
- 3 - Weakening the Iranian presence in the region and fighting Iran's efforts and the efforts of the Islamic jihadist groups to destabilize the security and stability of the countries of the region by their attempts to spread the concepts of sectarianism and militancy.
- 4 - Sending a positive message to the United States that the UAE is a responsible country in the international system and a reliable ally through its active participation in the war on terrorism by contributing to the US-led alliance to fight IS militant groups in Syria.
- 5 - Giving its armed forces a much needed first-hand experience by participating in actual wars; displaying its continuing military strength and capability; and demonstrating its ability to project military power in the Gulf region and beyond.

Tools of UAE Foreign Policy

In order to achieve this policy, the UAE has adopted a number of foreign policy tools including economic, political, and military tools. Economically, the UAE has used its economic and financial strengths

to support friendly regimes in the Arab world. In Egypt, the UAE has become the main provider of economic support to the President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's government, which made Egypt the largest country benefiting from the support of the UAE in 2013. The UAE has provided about 17 billion UAE dirhams (US\$4.6 billion) in the form of development projects and charitable aid to Egypt (Al khoori, 2015). It is also working on transferring its successful experience in management and development to Egypt. The UAE's model of development has become a model for states of the region to emulate, including Egypt. This is the soft power that the UAE enjoys today. According to the 7th annual ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2015, the UAE was named as the most preferred country to live in and emulate in development for the fourth year running (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2015).

The Syrian Opposition, and the Bahraini and Omani regimes also received economic support from the UAE. Bahrain and Oman were hit by a wave of internal popular protests as part of the so-called Arab Spring. To ensure the survival of the two regimes and prevent the protests from spreading to the neighboring states the other Gulf Cooperation Council states provided the two states with a generous US\$20 billion aid package (Guzansky, 2015). Such economic support has contributed to the stability of the regimes in Egypt, Bahrain and Oman. Egypt is moving steadily toward economic recovery. Bahrain and Oman were able to overcome the ramifications of the so-called Arab Spring and ensured the survival of their political systems. However, this strategy of using economic assistance did not achieve its goal in the case of Yemen. Although the UAE had always been the most prominent economic supporter of the Yemeni government, it was unable to bring security and stability to that country. This was primarily due to the large-scale corruption that was in Yemen during the time of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had spent the assistance to strengthening his position instead of developing the country.

Militarily, the UAE has been able to build advanced military forces since the 1990s, especially after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The idea has been that the state's military must become more advanced

in order to face off all threats. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed has played a key role in the modernization of the UAE's military forces. The military receives its financial support from Abu Dhabi, the wealthiest Emirate in the Federation. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed is the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, and he is the person in charge of the UAE military in his capacity as the Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. His main goal has been to develop the military to become one of the strongest in the region. Therefore, he has been diligently working toward investing in the military establishment by acquiring the latest state-of-the-art military systems. In terms of efficiency, the leadership emphasized the importance of gaining practical experience in dealing with real wars and dangers. As a result, the UAE's military personnel participated in the peacekeeping forces for the protection of civilians in conflict zones, such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia and Kosovo (Khan, S. 2014). The UAE regularly hosts two important military events, namely the International Defense Exhibition (IDEX) and The Dubai Airshow. These exhibitions are two platforms for arms makers in the world to promote their products and exchange of experiences. According to Power Rating Guide (Power Index) for 2015, the UAE occupies the fiftieth place globally in terms of power, the ninth in the Middle East, and the fifth among the Arab countries (Global Firepower, 2015). In 2014, the UAE introduced the Compulsory Military Service to all its male citizens between the ages of eighteen and thirty. This step came in order to strengthen the required military skills to deal with emergency security situations that could threaten the state. This will also help to raise the reserve military force of the state (Khan, M. 2014). In addition, the UAE has become the first Arab Gulf State to enter the world of nuclear knowledge through the establishment of the infrastructure needed for that. The acquisition of such knowledge is viewed by the UAE as a strategic necessity. On the one hand, it can provide a security guarantee to supply a dependable source of electricity to sustain the state's economic development beyond the dependence on oil, and, on the other hand, it introduces the know-how and the skills needed in the nuclear industry for the young Emiratis.

Politically, the UAE managed to use its political skills to achieve alliance with Saudi Arabia, the most prominent Gulf power, and to strengthen its relations with its global partners, especially the United States. Clearly, the UAE's support to Saudi Arabia has a great impact on highlighting the Saudi influential role and strength in the region. Without the UAE backing of Saudi Arabia in Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, and Egypt, Riyadh would have found it difficult to sustain its policy in these countries. In regard to the United States, Washington depended on the UAE for mobilizing the Arab support for many US moves in the region, as in Libya and against IS in Syria (Clinton, 2014).

With this kind of strategy, the UAE has managed to become the new active and influential player in the region. It was able to take the role that Qatar had championed during the time of the former Emir, Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. Qatar could not sustain its leading role in the region because it lacked the military power and the Saudi backing. The UAE, on the other hand, enjoy a strong military capability that can be used to achieve its foreign policy through working with Saudi Arabia not competing with it. This is an important consideration that makes the UAE's role stronger and more viable than the Qatari role.

Future of the UAE Role

There is no doubt that the UAE today is an active regional player, and its role goes beyond the traditional role it used to play in the past. Today, the UAE feels the danger facing the conservative nature of the political system that emerges from a number of parties seeking to break down this conservative structure in the region. Therefore, the UAE has started to take the lead in forming a regional system that pours in the interest of maintaining the existing conservative structure of the states of the Gulf. Facing the threat of armed religious groups and the penetration of Iranian influence in the region has become an essential pillar of the UAE's foreign policy today, and will so remain for the foreseeable future for the following reasons: 1- There seem to be no indications that these threats are waning or that religious groups and Iran tend to give up their off ensive strategies. 2- The absence of a clear

and effective international strategy to combat such threats. There is a clear perception that the US ability to develop an effective plan or to lead an international effort to defeat such threats is fading. 3- The new shift, particularly during the Obama administration, in the United States' strategy toward rapprochement with Iran; the UAE fears that Washington may replace its policy of containment of Iran with a policy of engagement, which will keep Tehran's offensive strategy unshakable in the region. 4- Ensure the survival of the new Arab spirit that has been created with the UAE-Saudia lliance and their move to form an Arab military coalition of effective Arab countries comprising of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Morocco. This coalition could work together to formulate an Arab security strategy capable of joint coordination to counter threats and achieve a balance in power and a balance in threat with the rival parties. 5- Ensure the survival of the UAE-Saudi alliance to enable the UAE to take the lead with a powerful regional state like Saudi Arabia. The UAE will not be able to play this role alone and without the Saudi support. With the new political leadership in Saudi Arabia, particularly the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, moving in parallel line with the UAE policy and strategy, the UAE's interest resides in maintaining this UAE-Saudi convergence in view of the dangers threatening the security of the region. And 6- the existing political leadership in the UAE believes that dealing with the threats coming from the religious groups and Iran must be dealt with firmly and as a zero-sum game. This trend is clearly led by Abu Dhabi today; a trend that managed to displace the soft orientation that was always adopted by the Emirate of Dubai in its dealings with Iran, because of the large scale of trade exchange between the Emirate and Iran. The UAE's tone today is leaning more toward a policy of containing Iran's efforts to meddle in the internal affairs of Arab countries than toward a policy of engaging with Iran.

All these considerations make the UAE's strategy move toward strengthening the leading role played by the UAE in the Gulf region in partnership with its ally Saudi Arabia in order to confront the perceived dangers posed to the security of the region. Hence, we do

not expect any change in this strategy in the coming years, as the change in the present time will give the other parties the indication that the Gulf states do not have the power to maintain their containment policy.

Challenges

The emergence of the UAE as an active player in an unstable environment presents some challenges. A continuation of such strategy will require the UAE to deal with these challenges in order to claim success. One of these challenges is the human cost and the ability of the state to bear the burden of such cost. The UAE had not seen human casualty during its previous foreign military participations in Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Somalia and Libya like the casualty suffered as a result of its military intervention in Yemen. The UAE's society did not witness such a big human loss like the one suffered during the war in Yemen, in which the UAE participated as part of the Arab coalition forces that undertook the mission of restoring the legitimate authority to Yemen against the Houthis and supporters of the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Most of the UAE's previous military involvements in coalition forces were limited to peacekeeping, while in the war on Yemen, it was directly and seriously involved in the conflict. The continuing support of the UAE community to the decision made by the political leadership concerning the intervention in Yemen is necessary to ensure the stability of the UAE's new assertive role in the region.

The other challenge is the ability to resist the animosities from those who are opposed to this active role played by the UAE. Iran, IS, Houthis, Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Qaeda will not be happy with the new assertiveness in UAE foreign policy. Thus, the scale of confrontation may be amplified by those parties aiming to cause harm to the national security and stability within the UAE or to attack its interests abroad. Iran, for example, does not wish success to UAE's new role so as not to give greater momentum to the status of the UAE. Iran considers itself as the main player in the Gulf region, and it does not welcome the rise of a small state like the UAE that would challenge it.

Therefore, the responsibility becomes heavier on the UAE's authorities in their efforts to face off the dangers resulting from the consequences of a military or any other confrontation with such parties.

There is also the challenge of the state ability to withstand the financial costs incurred by taking the initiative to play a leading role in the region. The roles of UAE in countries such as Egypt, Bahrain and Yemen require huge financial contributions. The success of the UAE's goals in such countries does not stop at the political support, but it also requires the economic and military supports. A successful policy in the region needs a significant economic support in accordance with the strategy to contribute to the rebuilding of such countries, especially in both the Egyptian and Yemeni cases. The UAE is one of the producers and exporters of oil, and it relies on its oil revenue to support its own national budget. Therefore, the ability to generate money to contribute to the success of the reconstruction processes in such countries largely depends on world oil prices. The rise in oil prices will help the state to provide economic support for such countries; while the decline in oil prices puts such support at risk of financial distress. Perhaps the UAE today is able to support some of the reconstruction projects in some Arab countries, but the question is about the extent of its ability to take responsibility almost entirely, and to continue to do so in light of the continuous oil price decline, which affects the ability to achieve balance in its budget and avoid deficit. Recently, the state lifted government subsidies on gasoline, which suggests that there is a need to provide additional resources to support the budget. The oil price decline may have a negative impact on UAE's spending to support some of its foreign policy initiatives.

An additional challenge may be related to the availability of qualified diplomats who are capable of helping the state in its active and influential role. The ability to play such a role in the region requires major diplomatic tools, represented primarily in the human efficiency that is capable of promoting and defending the State's policies. A state with an influential role has to be able to create alliances and partnerships to contest political animosities that may arise as a result of taking such role. Hence, the obvious question is:

does the UAE have this capacity in its diplomatic sector to support the state strategy of active role in the Middle East? Qatar found it difficult to sustain its active role partly because of its lack of sufficient number of qualified diplomats to carry its policy of leadership. The UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has recently started a new initiative of developing new skilled national diplomats by establishing a professional diplomatic academy within the ministry.

Conclusion

The UAE's shift to take the lead in the region is more of a strategic shift than a tactical one. It has felt that there is a vacuum in power in the Gulf region which resulted from the decline of US leadership role and the fall of a key ally in the regional system. The UAE's major concern is about the danger caused by the hostile parties to the regional conservative system. It is believed that religious groups and Iran are seeking to fill the vacuum created by the fall of the political regimes in some of the Arab states due to the so-called Arab Spring, and they are working to change the status quo to be in their favor. Thus, the UAE adopts a strategy of encountering such a threat by working to fill the void and contain the hostile powers. It is not expected for such a strategy to be halted anytime soon. Saving the conservative values in the Gulf region is essential to the UAE, but the most prominent challenge to this effort will remain its ability to maintain its strategic alliance with Saudi Arabia. This alliance helps in maintaining UAE's active and influential role in the region as it is a source of support and strength.

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