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Their Quest for Reputational Security“

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PLEDGE OF HONESTY

On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

ABSTRACT (EN) As globalization progresses, soft power becomes relatively more important to confronting a country's challenges than hard power. This thesis shows that few countries have risen to the challenge quite like the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE's security architecture not only depends on alliances and armament, but also on public diplomacy, which is the art of engaging foreign publics. The novel concept of reputational security illustrates the value of soft power and image (nation brand) further: It states that security may arise from the degree to which a country is known among foreign publics. This thesis assesses the Emirati soft power strategy according to its ability to generate such reputational security. Scholarship neither offers a theoretical model for public diplomacy nor for reputational security and primarily focuses on current or former superpowers in its research of public diplomacy. As the UAE neither possess a pre-determined level of recognition nor a distinct cultural heritage, the challenges to its soft power strategy are fundamentally different, however. The same is true for Kazakhstan and Qatar, which provide meaningful comparisons given their remarkable similarity in essential aspects. This thesis thus establishes its own framework of analysis upon which to investigate an actor's quest for reputational security. It states that there are three approaches to enhance reputational security: Participation to gain legitimacy; Exposure to acquire recognition; and Projection to enhance reputation. While all actors show remarkable similarities in all three areas, the UAE pursue the most evident such strategy: Participation in global governance has given the UAE legitimacy. Exposure through tourism, sport, or cultural festivals has increased its recognition. And the projection of the UAE's values and identity in religious affairs show its attempts to enhance its reputation. Although the UAE have achieved remarkable progress since its establishment, its goal of reputational security is confronted with a glass ceiling, especially through the projection of values, given the human rights situation in the country as well as Western biases.

Abstrakt (DE) Mit zunehmendem Fortschritt der Globalisierung nimmt auch die Wichtigkeit von soft power zu. Wenige Länder scheinen sich dieser Herausforderung mehr bewusst zu sein als die Vereinigten Arabischen Emirate. Deren Sicherheits-Architektur basiert zu einem beträchtlichen Teil auf „*public diplomacy*“, was die Auseinandersetzung eines Landes mit einer ausländischen Öffentlichkeit beschreibt. Das neue Konzept der „*reputational security*“ verdeutlicht diese zunehmende Bedeutung von soft power und internationaler

Reputation zusätzlich: Es besagt, dass Sicherheit auch vom Bekanntheitsgrad eines Landes in der Weltöffentlichkeit abhängt. Diese Arbeit wird die *reputational security* der Emirate basierend auf deren soft power Strategie untersuchen. Die Wissenschaft hat weder ein theoretisches Model für *public diplomacy* noch für *reputational security* und das meiste Wissen bezieht sich auf jetzige oder ehemalige Großmächte. Aber die Emirate genießen weder einen globalen vorbestimmten Wiedererkennungswert noch besitzen sie eine distinkte Kultur wodurch sie sich absetzen könnten. Dasselbe trifft auch auf Kasachstan und Katar zu, die aufgrund ihrer Vergleichbarkeit mit den Emiraten als wertvolle Fallbeispiele dienen werden. Diese Master-Arbeit erstellt daher einen eigenen Analyserahmen womit *reputational security* untersucht werden kann. Der Rahmen beschreibt drei Strategien, welche diese drei Länder vorantreiben um ihr Image in der Welt zu verbessern: „*Participation*“ (Partizipation) in internationaler Politik, „*Exposure*“ (Aussetzung) gegenüber der Weltöffentlichkeit, und „*Projection*“ (Projektion) von Werten und Ideale. Auch wenn die Emirate in allen drei Bereichen große Fortschritte erzielt haben, stoßen sie, speziell bei der *Projection*, an eine gläserne Decke, da die Menschenrechtssituation im Land keine größere Reputation zulässt und westliche Vorurteile eine Perzeptionsänderung schwierig machen.

Keywords: United Arab Emirates, Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, Reputational Security, Nation Brand

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1. Introduction

“The North Wind and the Sun had a quarrel about which of them was the stronger. While they were disputing with much heat and bluster, a Traveler passed along the road wrapped in a cloak.

‘Let us agree,’ said the Sun, ‘that he is the stronger who can strip that Traveler of his cloak.’ ‘Very well,’ growled the North Wind, and at once sent a cold, howling blast against the Traveler.

With the first gust of wind the ends of the cloak whipped about the Traveler’s body. But he immediately wrapped it closely around him, and the harder the Wind blew, the tighter he held it to him. The North Wind tore angrily at the cloak, but all his efforts were in vain. Then the Sun began to shine. At first his beams were gentle, and in the pleasant warmth after the bitter cold of the North Wind, the Traveler unfastened his cloak and let it hang loosely from his shoulders. The Sun’s rays grew warmer and warmer. The man took off his cap and mopped his brow. At last he became so heated that he pulled off his cloak, and, to escape the blazing sunshine, threw himself down in the welcome shade of a tree by the roadside.”

The moral of this fable from around 600 BC, credited to the famed Greek storyteller Aesop, is unambiguous: “Gentleness and kind persuasion win where force and bluster fail.”¹ Nicholas J. Cull, a leading scholar in the field of *soft power*, applied the moral of this ancient tale to explain its contemporary virtue: “[W]ise policies, attractive culture, and admirable character bring foreign policy benefits.”²

The term itself was coined by Joseph Nye in his eponymous article “Soft Power”³ from 1990. In 2004, he further elaborated on and expanded the understanding of this concept in his book “Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics.” In it he describes soft power as arising “from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideas, and policies”⁴ and thus quite literally places it vis-à-vis the concept of *hard power*, which refers to a state’s military and economic capabilities. Such hard power allows for the implementation of foreign

¹ Aesop.

² Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 3.

³ Joseph S. Nye Jr., 1990.

⁴ Joseph S. Nye Jr., 2004; p. x.

policy tactics like coercion or payments to achieve goals;⁵ soft power, on the other hand, “is the ability to get what you want through attraction.”⁶ However, soft power is more than the mere cultural carrot⁷ to seduce the metaphorical donkey to move; it means having a reputation for fantastic carrots so donkeys from all around come flocking to you on their own accord.

In the analysis of international politics, hard power is granted the lion’s share of attention. This was no different when, on August 13, 2020, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel announced that they had reached an agreement to normalize their relations called the Abraham Accords. In the tradition of Realist thinking, many observers invoked the mantra, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend,”⁸ and credited Iran with having caused this change in Middle East politics. The Abraham Accords are not the primary focus of this thesis, but the debate that followed the agreement was a reflection of this one-dimensional perspective on international relations in general and Emirati foreign policy in particular. This thesis aims to shift some attention away from this focus on hard power and to expand the debate to the role that soft power plays in modern (Emirati) security architecture. The first hypothesis of this research regards this relationship between hard and soft power in the 21st century:

I:

Soft power is rising in importance as a tool for improving security relative to hard power.

But what is soft power *exactly*? How can it be integrated into foreign policy? And most importantly: Which concrete benefits can it provide and how can it complement traditional hard power elements of national security? This relationship between soft power and security is understudied in academia and was also hardly mentioned in the discussion of the Abraham Accords. Nevertheless, the implications of national images in global politics have been given increasing attention recently, and some, including Cull, have argued that there is a connection between a country’s reputation and its security. He calls this “reputational security”, which he defines as “the degree of safety accruing to a nation state that proceeds from being known by citizens of other nations.”⁹

⁵ Joseph S. Nye Jr., 2009; p. 160.

⁶ Joseph S. Nye Jr., 2004; p. x.

⁷ Joseph S. Nye Jr., 2004; p. x.

⁸ For instance: Doron Itzchakov, 2020; p. 42.

⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

II:

Soft power can provide an actor with reputational security.

As the subtitle of Nye's book suggests, actors in international politics understand that soft power can be cultivated and utilized for various purposes, including to solidify hard power capacities or fill the gaps where it is missing.¹⁰ Nye described this conflation of soft and hard power as *smart power*,¹¹ and in its conclusion, this thesis will show that the UAE have struck a highly sophisticated balance between the two, thus making it an undeniably rising smart power.

III:

The UAE actively cultivate and project soft power as a way to complement its hard power capabilities and enhance its reputational security.

Naturally, there is neither one unequivocal guide to how security is best provided in the 21st century nor to understand why the UAE chose to normalize its relations with Israel; the answers are comprised of several factors and all the arguments brought forward in the literature have merit. But this thesis believes that by neither considering the UAE's soft power strategy nor the contemporary importance of reputational security, both debates lack an essential dimension. Hence, the ambitions of this thesis are twofold: *Substantially*, it aims to explore and weigh the various elements of the Emirati security-strategy; and *conceptually*, it seeks to place the debate on this issue into a more appropriate framework.

In order to do this, the thesis will be divided into two parts: In order to understand the Emirati quest for reputational security, the first deals with the identification of the UAE'S external and internal threats, whereas the second will be exploring the UAE's opportunities in overcoming or mitigating them. The thesis will distinguish between hard and soft power strategies, whereby the debate around the latter will be the main focus of this thesis, entailing several aspects: First, it will provide a general overview of public diplomacy, which in the context of this thesis refers to a government's engagement with foreign publics, while simultaneously giving examples of how the UAE have utilized its components. Next, it will elaborate on the concepts of nation brands and reputational security and how they are

¹⁰ Daniel Golebiowski, 2020; p. 151.

¹¹ Joseph R. Nye, 2004; p. 32.

interconnected. As the field of public diplomacy and especially reputational security are young and under-studied, this thesis will then present its own framework of analysis to understand the approach to reputational security. Case studies on Kazakhstan and Qatar will show its utility and provide meaningful comparisons before the thesis lays out in detail how the United Arab Emirates have pursued public diplomacy for the ultimate purpose of enhancing reputational security. Throughout the thesis, some attention will be given to the Abraham Accords and their relation to Emirati public diplomacy. Finally, it will provide a conclusion and will argue that the pursuit of reputational security is a promising yet precarious strategy, both in general as well as in particular for the UAE, that the understanding of international politics would be well served if further studies were done on the topic, and ultimately that the Abraham Accords entail a clear public diplomacy dimension, which so far has received hardly any attention.

The literature for this thesis is in large part owed to some few scholars who have contributed huge amounts to a field that remains relatively under-researched. Nicolas J. Cull's works, mostly his book *"Public Diplomacy: Foundations For Global Engagement In The Digital Age"* from 2019, provides the understanding of public diplomacy that guides this thesis as well as the inspiration for the concept of reputational security. The primary work of Joseph R. Nye and that of other authors, like Eytan Gilboa and Simon Anholt, have further supplied the basic knowledge which this thesis applies to its understanding of soft power and reputational security. Kristian C. Ulrichsen's *"United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics, And Policymaking"* from 2017 is one of the few comprehensive works on the modern UAE and it has been very helpful in understanding the state, its economy, and foreign policy. The works of J. E. Peterson, Peter van Ham, Samuel P. Huntington, and many more have also given valuable input.

2. Threats to the United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates are confronted with a set of different yet interconnected challenges: Political Islam, propagated and supported by two of the UAE's rivals, Iran and Qatar, is perceived as a threat to the socio-economic stability of the UAE. This fact is exacerbated by the diverging levels of wealth and development within the seven emirates constituting the UAE, which has given rise to varying degrees of susceptibility to such ideologies among its population. Iran and its nuclear weapons program as well as its proxies, especially in adjacent areas like Yemen, are moreover not only a threat to the physical security of the UAE but also to its internationally minded economy, for which any kind of security concern can be detrimental.

2.1.External Threats: The Cold War in the Middle East

1979 was a transformative year for the Middle East: Egypt became the first Arab state to sign a peace treaty with Israel, leading to its expulsion from the Arab League and making it a regional pariah;¹² Saddam Hussein became President of Iraq and would go on shaping the region for 24 years;¹³ fundamentalists seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca, laying bare the state's vulnerability to political Islam;¹⁴ the Soviet Union began a costly war by invading Afghanistan, which inspired many young Muslims from around the world to join the fight against the invaders, in consequence paving the way for 9/11 and its aftermath;¹⁵ and finally, 1979 saw the people of Iran oust its Shah and replace his secular, pro-Western regime with an Islamic Republic under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini.¹⁶ In many ways, the year 1979 made the modern Middle East as we know it.

Especially the events that took place in Iran would prove impactful for the region. An ally of the West up until then, even on friendly terms with Israel,¹⁷ the newly established Islamic Republic dramatically changed political course, thereby creating a rift between itself and the status-quo powers of the region, which first came to fore with the Gulf states' support

¹² Eugene Rogan, 2010; p. 496.

¹³ Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021.

¹⁴ Eugene Rogan, 2010; p. 498 f.

¹⁵ Eugene Rogan, 2010; p. 540 f.

¹⁶ William R. Keylor, 2011; p. 392 f.

¹⁷ Raphael Ofek, 2020; p. 34.

for Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war.¹⁸ Many commentators have begun dubbing the resulting conflict as ‘The Cold War in the Middle East’¹⁹ as it resembles the stand-off between the USA and the USSR in several ways: First, both have their roots not in territory but influence and ideology; second, as in the last century, each side supports various proxies that often engage with each other; and third, the Middle East’s cold war has a nuclear dimension looming over it as well, albeit not such an apocalyptic one, at least not yet.

As the monarchies of the Gulf all rest their legitimacy to govern “largely on family ascendancy”²⁰ and therefore have an interest in supporting the broader status-quo in the region, Iran, already by its mere existence as a revisionist theocratic Republic, poses a fundamental threat. This “collective fear of revolutionary Iran” was also a major reason for the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981, which aimed at “tightening [the Gulf countries’] security and economic ties.”²¹ The religious component of this conflict presents another fault line. The al-Saud’s custodianship over Islam’s two holiest mosques in Mecca and Medina naturally awards it huge soft power in the Islamic World; and although the UAE represent a more tolerant and pluralistic Sunni state,²² they also perceive the Iranian Shia religious agenda as a threat. These fears were not entirely exaggerated, as the case of Bahrain has proven. Though governed by a Sunni family, the population of the island-nation is 70% Shia, and already in the early 1980s, two attempts to overthrow the government were pushed back. In short, for the Gulf, “[t]he Iranian revolutionary model has been a threatening and destabilizing factor” for decades.²³

Today, this is best illustrated by the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, which all serve, to varying degrees, as proxy conflicts between the two camps. Similar to Bahrain, Iraq under Saddam Hussein was a majority-Shia country led by a Sunni elite. After having adopted a democratic constitution, the Shia population was able to translate their demographic majority into political control, in the process “economically and politically disenfranchising Sunni communities”²⁴ and allowing Iran to increase its influence over large segments of Iraqi society – from political institutions over parties down to local militias.²⁵ The

¹⁸ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 212 f.

¹⁹ See for instance: Jonathan Marcus, 2019.

²⁰ Clive Jones & Yoel Guzansky, p. 8.

²¹ Doron Itzhakov, 2020; p. 41.

²² James M. Dorsey, 2020; p. 55.

²³ Doron Itzhakov, 2020; p. 41.

²⁴ Dafna H. Randl & Nicholas A. Heras, 2015.

²⁵ Hamdi Malik, 2020.

Arab Spring with its revolutions and civil wars presented another opportunity for Iran to enhance its revolutionary agenda. When it became evident that the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad would escalate his suppression of the demonstrations in his country, many commentators expected his fate to be similar to that of Muammar al-Gaddafi. Yet, with Iranian (and Russian) support – including logistics, equipment, as well as ground and air forces – he managed to stay in power and regain control over most of Syria. This not only served the purpose of gaining an ally among the Arab nations, but it also allowed the Islamic Republic to set up bases and supply lines, thereby extending the reach of its *al-Quds* forces throughout the region.²⁶ With the establishment of Hezbollah, a militant Islamic group in Lebanon to which Iran supplies “funds and training” and which has “pledged allegiance to Iran’s supreme leader”, Iran already in the 1980s extended its reach all the way to the Mediterranean.²⁷ In 2004, King Abdullah II of Jordan warned that this Iranian influence constitutes a “Shiite crescent,”²⁸ spanning from Iran in the East to the Mediterranean in the West, and providing it with unhinged supply lines and thus the ability to project its power much more easily. Although not geographically part of this Shia crescent, Yemen provides the best example of a proxy war between Iran and the Gulf countries. There, the use of military force by the UAE and Saudi-Arabia has come to “unprecedented application”²⁹ in order to protect it from Iranian subversion. They view the Houthis, a Shia group that had taken over large parts of the country, including the capital, by 2014, as an Iranian proxy, although at the beginning of the war this seems to have been exaggerated.³⁰ The UAE consequently “assumed a leading role in the ground war,”³¹ trying to expel Iranian influence from the south of the Arabian Peninsula. This has given Iran “both the motivation and the opportunity to flex its muscles”; today, it is assumed that the Houthis wouldn’t have been able to carry out its missile and drone attacks on Saudi oil facilities over the last years without Iranian assistance.³²

The nuclear dimension of this cold war has arguably received the most international attention thus far. “[I]nitially intended to create a balance of terror vis-à-vis the Iraqi nuclear weapons project,”³³ today the Iranian nuclear program is the primary bone of contention

²⁶ Elizabeth Dent & Ariane M. Tabatabai, 2020.

²⁷ Kai Robinson, 2020.

²⁸ Robin Wright & Peter Baker, 2004.

²⁹ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 205.

³⁰ Mohsen Milani, 2015.

³¹ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 208.

³² Robert Malley & Stephen Pomper, 2021.

³³ Raphael Ofek, 2020.

between Iran and the rest of the world. While some commentators have argued that nuclear weapons might actually – just like during the Cold War between the US and the USSR – be a stabilizing factor in the Middle East,³⁴ most have disagreed and point at the Stability-Instability Paradox,³⁵ which would allow the Iranian government to escalate its subversive activities in the region as they would no longer have to fear large-scale retribution given its nuclear deterrent. This danger also entails the risk of further proliferation, for instance by Saudi-Arabia. In an interview from 2018, de-facto ruler of Saudi-Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), stated that “without a doubt, if Iran developed a nuclear bomb, we would follow suit as soon as possible.”³⁶ Such a new balance of terror would place the UAE in a precarious situation: The UAE are caught in the middle between Saudi-Arabia and Iran and only 40 miles across the Persian Gulf separate the Emirates from the Iranian mainland.³⁷ On the one hand, this has made the Emirates’, especially Dubai, an “indispensable connection” and strong trading partner in the past, as the UAE’s trade relations with the Islamic Republic by far exceeded that of its neighbours.³⁸ But on the other, it places the country in a vulnerable geostrategic position. The dispute between the UAE and Iran around some islands that were occupied by Iran in 1971³⁹ as well as the tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the global oil supply is shipped, are testament to this geographic vulnerability.⁴⁰ A hot conflict between the Iranians and the Gulf countries could have detrimental effects for the UAE, both for its physical security as well as its economy because political instability is bad for business and Abu-Dhabi and Dubai have highly internationalised economies. Already twelve years ago, Mohammed bin-Zayed (MBZ), today the UAE’s de facto ruler, is quoted in a cable published by Wikileaks as having said that he sees “Iran as the primary external threat to the UAE and his regime.”⁴¹ Nothing suggests that this is any different today.

Though maybe the primary external threat, Iran isn’t the only challenge to the UAE in the region. The Arab Spring was a decisive event for the UAE and led to a “hawkish”⁴² response: It financially supported the military-led government of Egypt, which had ousted the

³⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, 2012.

³⁵ Colin H. Kahl, 2012.

³⁶ BBC News, 2018.

³⁷ Mohamad Ali Harissi, 2020.

³⁸ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 215.

³⁹ Eugene Rogan, 2010; p. 457 f.

⁴⁰ BBC News, 2019.

⁴¹ WikiLeaks.

⁴² Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 184.

Muslim Brotherhood, gave strong security support to “secular” groups in Libya,⁴³ and contributed to the restoring of order in Bahrain,⁴⁴ where in 2011 the regime was yet again threatened to be ousted by its Shia-majority.

The UAE represent a comparatively liberal model of an Arab country, but its support for similarly non-Islamic factions in the Middle East is not solely owed to the UAE’s moderate outlook. Apart from the perceived Iranian influence on some of these groups, two of the 9/11 hijackers in 2001 held Emirati citizenships,⁴⁵ which came as a shock to the country’s leadership; the “perceived threat posed by international terrorism to the highly multicultural nature of the UAE” had taken hold, and several prevented terrorist plots in the country since then hardened the feeling that Islamist militancy posed a serious threat to the rise of the UAE.⁴⁶

The Emirates’ rivalry with Qatar is a reflection of such fears. Qatar supports “very different groups in the post-transitional political reordering” of the Middle East, most apparent in its funding of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt⁴⁷ and Islamist militias in Libya.⁴⁸ This intra-Gulf rivalry eventually culminated in the blockade of Qatar that started in 2017, when Saudi-Arabia and the UAE, together with a number of other Arab nations, demanded, among other things, that Qatar cut its financial support to such groups and its ties with Iran.⁴⁹

Qatar and the UAE share a lot of structural commonalities – small, rich, monarchical, oil-rich – and both are rising regional powers. Hence, Abu-Dhabi and Doha also compete for global reputation, the “hearts and minds in the Arab world,”⁵⁰ and ultimately reputational security. Each employs their own soft power strategy, which will be elaborated on in detail later as Qatar will be used as a comparative model to the UAE.

⁴³ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 184.

⁴⁴ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 196.

⁴⁵ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 143.

⁴⁶ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 185.

⁴⁷ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 194.

⁴⁸ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 197.

⁴⁹ Patrick Wintour, 2017.

⁵⁰ Samuel Ramani, 2021.

2.2. Internal Threats: The Socio-Economic Model

The announcement of British Prime Minister Harold Wilson in 1968 to “withdraw from Britain’s commitments East of Suez” came as a total surprise for the leaders in the Gulf, who until then lived under the protection of the British Empire.⁵¹ Only three years later Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE had appeared on the map as sovereign states. At the beginning, the success of the UAE nation building process was far from guaranteed as the country was confronted with a variety of challenges: The sizes of the seven emirates constituting the UAE and the distribution of resources within them varied by large margins. Abu-Dhabi was not only by far the biggest but also oil-richest emirate, holding 94% of total oil reserves. In connection with the rapid need for development, the federal system led to parallel-running structures and strategies, and ultimately to varying degrees of development.⁵²

But Abu-Dhabi’s huge oil and gas reserves have proofed an immeasurable blessing for all the Emirates’ development. To its luck, the UAE’s foundation as a state roughly coincided with the beginning of its commercial exploration of oil and with the oil boom following the war of Israel against Egypt and Syria 1973, when several Arab countries cut their oil exports to the West, which in turn led to a rise in global oil prices.⁵³

The history of the economic development of the UAE is impressive but unfortunately exceeds the scope of this thesis. One thing shall not go unmentioned, however: Although the term “Dubai model” has found its way into scholarship, it nevertheless hasn’t received “due-attention”, which some authors who have explored it suspect is due to the common misperception that Dubai’s economic success is based on oil, while in fact oil revenues contribute less than 1.5% of Dubai’s GDP as of 2017.⁵⁴ Due to its role as a “first-mover” of economic diversification in the Gulf region, its visionary strategy built on integration into the global economic and financial system, and its openness with “[f]ree movements of factors of production, including capital and labour, as well as of goods and services,”⁵⁵ Dubai constitutes a study by itself in the field of public diplomacy (or nation branding, as will be discussed later). Ashraf Mishrif and Harun Kapetanovic have provided an excellent overview in their paper “Dubai’s Model of Economic Diversification” from 2018.

⁵¹ Eugene Rogan, 2010; p. 457.

⁵² Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 87.

⁵³ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 88.

⁵⁴ Ashraf Mishrif & Harun Kapetanovic, 2018; p. 90.

⁵⁵ Ashraf Mishrif & Harun Kapetanovic, 2018; p. 92 f.

For any authoritarian regime, the wish for a successful economy is not owed to the wish for prosperity alone but reflects the needs for political stability and thus national security. The Arab Spring, which was born out of one man's economic desperation, did not have much impact on the UAE but it nevertheless revealed growing concerns over the rise of Islamist political organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.⁵⁶

The death of a highly respected patron of a domestic Emirati group inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood, who gave these factions "breathing space" in the UAE, coincided with the Arab Spring, and consequently Emirati security forces cracked down on the group and arrested many of its members.⁵⁷ Especially MBZ considered their increasingly open agitations as a threat to Emirati society⁵⁸ and has called them "an organization which encroaches upon the sovereignty and integrity of nations."⁵⁹ Ulrichsen pointed out that there was "virtually no prospect of any mass protest in the UAE," but located the Emirates' surprisingly strong reaction less in these groups political demands, but rather in their narratives' potential to draw upon "economic distress and lack of opportunity that had proven such a potent tool of mass mobilization" in other countries.⁶⁰ This fear mirrored the different levels of development in the UAE mentioned above. While the GDP per capita was estimated to be around US\$ 110.000 in Abu-Dhabi in 2011, it was less than 20% of that in some northern emirates. This difference in wealth was aggravated by crumbling infrastructure, higher rates of unemployment, sometimes even blackouts and petrol shortages in the north as well as a perceived discrimination in government jobs.⁶¹

These socio-economic differences therefore "contained the potential for grievances that might quickly acquire a political dimension" particularly should they occur in regions far from the glitz and glamour of Dubai or Abu-Dhabi.⁶² One newspaper even referred to the northern part of the country as a "ticking time bomb"⁶³.

⁵⁶ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 184.

⁵⁷ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 189.

⁵⁸ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 190 f.

⁵⁹ Ian Black, 2012.

⁶⁰ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 192.

⁶¹ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 192.

⁶² Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 193.

⁶³ Gulf States Newsletter, 2011.

3. Opportunities for the UAE to Improve Their Security

In light of these external and internal threats, the UAE have a variety of options to pursue mitigating them in order to increase their security. For one, they can strengthen their hard power by increasing military capabilities such as armament or the forming/strengthening of alliances. The diversification of the UAE's economy falls into this category, too, because it enhances the ability to provide for this security and fosters political stability. For the other, the UAE can embrace strategies to enhance its soft power, which in turn not only supports its economy but can also provide the UAE with a worldwide image that in consequence would grant some degree of reputational security.

3.1. Hard Power

As stated, the focus on hard power capabilities is grounded in a Realist understanding of international politics that suggests a security-focused approach to politics. Rational, unitary states as the primary actors on the global stage are driven in their actions by an existential fear for survival. These fears are provoked by the Hobbesian nature of the international system of all-against-all, which drives these states to accumulate power in order to be able to defend themselves. The accumulation of that power, however, provokes the adversary to follow suit and equally enhance their own capabilities, therefore often rendering the quest for security to become a "self-defeating"⁶⁴ exercise. This situation leads to the often-quoted security dilemma. Regardless of the fact whether or not these states actually harbour any offensive intentions, the sheer fear stemming from this anarchic organization of the state-system exacerbates these mechanisms and leads to its re-production.⁶⁵

According to Glenn H. Snyder, a leading theorist of International Relations, the accumulation of power intended to increase security most prominently happens in three ways: "[A]rmament, territorial aggrandizement, and alliance formation."⁶⁶ Territorial aggrandizement is not a serious option for the United Arab Emirates: For one, there is no territory it could conquer without provoking a regional war and completely destroying its reputation; for the other, strategic depth is of limited use in the 21st century and may only

⁶⁴ Glenn H. Snyder, 1984; p. 461.

⁶⁵ Frank Schimmelfennig, 2013; p. 66.

⁶⁶ Glenn H. Snyder, 1984; p. 461.

provide additional benefits if it contains, for example, resources. Hence, the UAE are left with either increasing their military capabilities or allying with an actor which shares the UAE's security concerns and is able to support the UAE in deterring its enemies or share in the costs of doing so.

3.1.1. Alliance Formation

The UAE have a long history of formal and informal networks of security cooperation with powers outside the Middle East, most importantly with the US, which has been a partner latest since the Gulf War in 1990 with formalized security relations since 1994.⁶⁷ Today, about 3,500 US troops are permanently stationed at al-Dhafra airbase in Abu-Dhabi.⁶⁸ Ulrichsen provides an excellent overview of the UAE's security ties. They practice a strong exchange with Australia and France, which in 2009 opened a military base in the UAE; with India the UAE have an institutionalized network of naval exchanges and cooperates to combat piracy in the horn of Africa; and the UAE are also the first Arab state to have established a formal relationship with NATO. Going beyond mere institutional exchanges, the UAE were among the first non-NATO states to aid its air campaign in Kosovo and subsequently also sent troops to support the security efforts on the ground, marking the first UAE peacekeeping mission. The UAE also cooperated with NATO in Afghanistan, which proved to be a strong source of alliance goodwill with the USA.⁶⁹

The UAE's efforts in rallying the international community to engage in Libya during the uprising in 2011 both reflected its interest in providing stability but also in presenting itself as a reliable partner, which became even more pressing as Qatar was pursuing the same strategy.⁷⁰ Although the benefit of hindsight has given much rise to criticism against the intervention in Libya, for the UAE it was a successful endeavor. Not only did it cement their role as a credible ally to the US, it also provided the Emirates' security forces with experience and the government with leverage over their Western partners' policies vis-à-vis the Middle East.⁷¹ All this, including the fact that the UAE have participated in every war in the Middle East in support of the US except for the second Iraq war starting in 2003,⁷² suggests that for

⁶⁷ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 142.

⁶⁸ John Gambrell, 2017.

⁶⁹ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 186 ff.

⁷⁰ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 195 f.

⁷¹ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 196 f.

⁷² Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 185.

the UAE, the United States is the central pillar of their security architecture. However, Obama's "pivot to Asia"⁷³ and Bush's earlier invasion and occupation of Iraq "injected elements of doubt into the strategic relationship"⁷⁴ with the USA. This doubt further increased due to the speed in which the USA dropped Hosni Mubarak in Egypt during the Arab Spring.⁷⁵

This might reasonably have led to the thinking in the UAE that they are in need of diversifying their security arrangements. It is within this framework that many observers understood the Abraham Accords, as it serves the UAE's security in two ways: First, normalization can directly become the basis for classic alliance formation through cooperation with the Jewish State. But second, it is an indirect way of enhancing their role as a partner to the United States.

Because Israel has wanted recognition from Arab countries for many years, the decision to normalize was not the outcome of long and hard negotiations, but rather a unilateral Emirati decision. Intuitively, this Emirati decision makes sense from a security perspective. Iran's vile and often-times anti-Semitic rhetoric vis-à-vis Israel, including the threat to annihilate the Zionist regime,⁷⁶ leave no room for rapprochement between Israel and Iran. Beyond that, Iran's support for groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, which are both engaged in constant conflict with Israel, expands the fear of Iran beyond the developing nuclear threat. The bases and supply lines, which Iran was able to build in Syria throughout the civil war, in part serve the purpose of erecting a deterrent force at Israel's borders. For this reason, Israel's air force has been actively engaged in Syria, locating and destroying Iranian supply lines and positions of the Revolutionary Guard.⁷⁷ The Iranian name of these elite forces – *al-Quds* – means Jerusalem in Arabic and Persian, which embodies its ideological opposition to the very existence of Israel.

With regard to Iran, Israel's and the UAE's interests are therefore obviously aligned, and Realist logic would dictate an alliance between them to counter-balance Iran. But from an Emirati perspective, it is not just the common interest that is attractive about Israel. The Jewish State undeniably fields the strongest military in the region, and the Israeli Defense Forces have in their long history gathered more experience than any other regional army due to their seemingly perpetual conflict with its neighbours. This experience has also translated

⁷³ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 205.

⁷⁴ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 185.

⁷⁵ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 195 f.

⁷⁶ Tehran Times, 2021.

⁷⁷ Sina Azodi, 2021.

into proven effectiveness, with examples being the destruction of the Iraqi⁷⁸ and Syrian⁷⁹ nuclear programs in the years 1981 and 2007 respectively. These well-respected and feared capabilities of the Israeli Air Force could very well prove crucial in regard to Iranian nuclear facilities. Beyond the scope of conventional military capabilities, Israel is also one of the most advanced nations in the realm of cybersecurity as well as cyber offense, because Stuxnet and other malware has regularly set back the Iranian nuclear program.⁸⁰ Israel has also proven the value of its intelligence agencies by sabotaging Iranian facilities, assassinating leading figures of the program⁸¹ or gathering valuable information on its progress⁸² – and all of that deep inside Iran itself. The latest sabotage of the Natanz nuclear facility was in all likelihood caused by Israel.⁸³ But most importantly, Israel has for many years proven its commitment to fighting the threat it perceives from Iran, not only militarily, but diplomatically as well. Israel opposed – and at the time of writing still does, though a new Israeli government seems to be on the way – the nuclear agreement negotiated with Iran in 2015. Although the UAE have spoken out in favour of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action,⁸⁴ the nuclear threat naturally remains a sensitive issue.

Taking these factors together, Israeli prowess in the realms of military, cyber, intelligence, and diplomacy are all good reasons for the UAE to look at Israel supportively. However, the question remains: Which actual benefits arise from official recognition and the normalization of relations. For one, Israel is at least equally committed to pushing back Iranian influence its nuclear program. Normalization wasn't necessary to re-direct the Israeli security outlook. The UAE and Israel have been on the same strategic side already before the Abrahams Accords. It is further unclear how much the UAE can contribute to the clandestine activities against Iran or would be ready to engage in open hostilities (similar to Israeli air strikes in Syria) given its geographical vulnerability. In 2019 alone, several tankers from the UAE and other nations were damaged in this region by what is perceived as Iranian aggressions.⁸⁵ By allying with Iran's enemy, the UAE have given Iran reasons to step up their activities in the Strait of Hormuz, of which the Emirates' are likely to suffer the most damage. Lastly, although

⁷⁸ Journal of Palestine Studies, 1981.

⁷⁹ Amos Harel & Aluf Benn, 2018.

⁸⁰ Gill Baram & Kevjn Lim, 2020.

⁸¹ David E. Sanger, 2021.

⁸² David E. Sanger & Ronen Bergman, 2018.

⁸³ Ronen Bergman, Rick Gladstone, and Farnaz Fassihi, 2021.

⁸⁴ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 216.

⁸⁵ Jonathan Marcus, 2019.

cooperation in intelligence will stand on a “more solid footing,”⁸⁶ it does not actually require the official recognition gained through the Abraham Accords. It is in the nature of intelligence that it happens away from the public eye, hence intelligence sharing is possible regardless of official recognition, as is proven by the fact that Israeli and Emirati intelligence services started having “more effective ties” during the Iranian nuclear negotiations.⁸⁷ The same goes for more general cooperation: Visits, meetings of defence ministers, and joint trainings certainly become easier and also more frequent as they don’t have to be kept secret any longer. But as Realists would argue, that whatever is necessary in questions of security, will be done, regardless of official recognition. In this context, the Abraham Accords’ biggest security benefit seems to be the chance to increase exchange and the build-up of trust. In other words, the real benefits, apart from the economic ones, might only materialize in the medium to long-term future.

As all these factors are *strengthened* only to an unknown extent, and none of them are *enabled* by normalization, alliance formation especially given the ally in question, Israel. Thus, alliance formation seems to be an insufficient explanation for why the UAE extend recognition to the Jewish State. But while normalization with Israel might not itself bring that many direct alliance benefits, it can be understood as hedging towards the US, as the US and Israel have a close relationship, especially on but not limited to security. A large part of the political establishment in the US considers Israel a most essential ally. In this regard, the question of the role of domestic politics in the US – referring to the talk about normalization having been timed to please Trump and support his election campaign – are interesting, but extend the scope of this thesis. However, it suggests that normalization was also an attempt to foster a closer relationship with the US and make the UAE – next to Saudi-Arabia – the truly indispensable Arab nation for the United States, not just in a military sense, but in the eyes of the public as well.

3.1.2. Armament

Another way, in which states can increase their security in the anarchic state system is by increasing their own military capabilities. In this regard, the UAE has one disadvantage and one advantage: On the down side, the UAE has a population of fewer than 10 Million people,

⁸⁶ Yoel Guzansky & Ari Heistein, 2020.

⁸⁷ Hagar Shezaf & Rori Donaghy, 2016.

only 10% of which are Emirati citizens,⁸⁸ hence the quantitative potential of its military is limited. In contrast, Iran has a population over 80 Million,⁸⁹ an overwhelming force as an adversary. On the plus side, the UAE are among the richest countries in the world and can therefore afford all the military equipment it can get its hands on in order to do what it can to increase the quality of its military as much as possible.

The UAE already have a strong military, as is illustrated by various people and outlets dubbing it “little Sparta.”⁹⁰ Though the war in Yemen has been widely criticized especially in the West, the performance of the Emirati military has earned much praise and respect.⁹¹ In its support of NATO troops in Afghanistan, the UAE military was also considered sophisticated enough to be allowed – as only one of two non-NATO nations alongside Australia – to fly close air-support missions to protect troops on the ground.⁹²

Within the context of armament and increasing the quality of the military, normalization with Israel offers several benefits to the UAE. First and foremost, much has been talked about the prowess of the United States’ fifth generation of fighter-jets, the F-35. Some have pointed out that the UAE have “no real military need” for the F-35 and that the sale might actually embolden the UAE to strike Iran.⁹³ Yet, the UAE have always had great interest in acquiring the best weaponry⁹⁴ but so far, Israel has vetoed the sale of the F-35 in fear of a relative loss in its Qualitative Military Edge,⁹⁵ which measures “technological, tactical, and other advantages that allow it to deter numerically superior adversaries.”⁹⁶ It appears that at least a part of the price Israel was willing to pay to attain the diplomatic success of recognition was to halt its resistance to such a sale. Should these jets actually go into service in the Emirati Air Force anytime soon, it would likely be the largest security benefit so far. But how much of a difference these jets truly make is difficult to assess. Realism as a theory of International Relations became most prominent right after World War II,⁹⁷ a time in which conventional military capabilities were much more essential than they are today. For a small state like the UAE, such advanced weaponry constitutes a more valuable asset as they can

⁸⁸ World Population Review, 2021.

⁸⁹ Worldometer, 2021.

⁹⁰ See for instance: Eva Thiébaud, 2021.

⁹¹ The Economist, 2020.

⁹² Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 188 f.

⁹³ Shimon Arad, 2020.

⁹⁴ Robert Worth, 2020.

⁹⁵ Yoel Guzansky & Ari Heistin, 2020.

⁹⁶ William Wunderle & Andre Briere, 2008.

⁹⁷ Frank Schimmelfennig, 2013, p. 66.

close the numerical gap by increasing the quality of their military. Nevertheless, whether the purchase of equipment alone is reason enough to break half a century of Arab political dogma – no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel⁹⁸ as long as there is no comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue⁹⁹ – is questionable.

By including software in the armament discussion, the potential benefits for the UAE grow bigger. But private Israeli companies – or companies with obvious relations to Israel – have in the past already cooperated with the Emirati state and supplied it with surveillance programs.¹⁰⁰ Other planned deals, however, for example in 2011, when the UAE wanted to purchase aerial vehicles from an Israeli company, were not approved by the Israeli government.¹⁰¹ Hence, the acquisition of Israeli hardware and software was not impossible before recognition, however has certainly become much easier and more likely after. Israel is undoubtedly more inclined to allow such exports having received the prize of normalization. But then again, it cannot be assumed that Israel will unreservedly export hard and software to the UAE only because of normalization. The survival of the current regime is not guaranteed, and neither can a change in Emirati sentiments vis-à-vis Israel be ruled out. Due to the clandestine nature of intelligence and military cooperation, it is hard to judge how far Israel is willing to go and whether these benefits make normalization alone worth it, or if other benefits outside the hard power framework trump or decisively complement these considerations.

⁹⁸ The Khartoum Resolutions, 1967.

⁹⁹ Arab peace initiative: full text, 2002.

¹⁰⁰ Chaim Levinson, 2020.

¹⁰¹ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 219.

4. The Opportunities of Public Diplomacy

As touched upon in the introduction, soft power can be cultivated and utilized by actors for different reasons: It can boost their economy by attracting investments or increasing tourism but also strengthen their safety by enhancing reputational security. The practice of cultivating soft power by engaging with foreign publics is mostly referred to as public diplomacy. Both concepts, soft power and public diplomacy, are therefore inseparably connected as soft power forms the theoretical and intellectual foundation of public diplomacy. The former produces the asset and the latter wields it.¹⁰²

4.1. History of Public Diplomacy

Although the term *public diplomacy* is fairly new, the practice itself is not. The benefits of ruling through attraction rather than submission have left a long trace throughout history. In this context, Cull's background as a Historian becomes obvious; he delivers numerous precedents of states and leaders who saw their rule strengthened by their "reputation for wisdom."¹⁰³ But the common definition of power, which is described as "the ability to *control* [emphasis added] people or events,"¹⁰⁴ is testament to the fact that for most time in history, hard power capabilities have been deemed more important.

Most recently during the Cold War, it became apparent, however, that cooperation had to be achieved not merely through force but attraction as well. The conflict's global reach and the apocalyptic threat of nuclear weapons¹⁰⁵ meant that East and West had to 'fight' in other ways than all-out war; consequently, public diplomacy – which could also be described as the competition for hearts and minds¹⁰⁶ – gained in importance relative to the competition for military supremacy. Global supply-chains and increased economic interdependence further suggested that the applicability of hard power was in decline, and as globalization progressed, so did the connections both between governments as well as peoples and societies. In our modern age, the revolution in communication technologies allows people to watch "almost every significant development in world events [in] almost every place on the

¹⁰² Eytan Gilboa, 2015; p. 3.

¹⁰³ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Cambridge Dictionary.

¹⁰⁵ Eytan Gilboa, 2008; p. 59.

¹⁰⁶ Eytan Gilboa, 2015; p. 1.

globe.”¹⁰⁷ Eytan Gilboa, one of the leading scholars in the field of public diplomacy, argues that “[f]avourable image and reputation” have become more important than traditional elements of hard power such as “territory, access, and raw materials.”¹⁰⁸ Hence, as politics becomes increasingly international, borders blur, and similar products from different suppliers compete for demand, the value of soft power for international actors has never been more important. For some of them, like the Vatican or non-governmental organizations, it is even the only source of international influence.¹⁰⁹ The motivations of actors to commit to meaningful Public Diplomacy and strive towards recognition and reputation might differ, and some might embrace more the word than the spirit, but even the most hermit nations in the world have an image that affects the way it conducts – and determines how it *can* conduct – foreign policy and trade.

4.2.No Theory of Public Diplomacy

As Gilboa points out, public diplomacy is still on the search for a theory, however. This circumstance is due to several factors: For one, it is “probably one of the most multidisciplinary areas in modern scholarship”¹¹⁰ as its understanding is compiled by a variety of disciplines from History, Political Science, Sociology, Cultural Studies, and Psychology to Computer Science, Technology, and Business Administration Marketing.¹¹¹ Much of that knowledge, as Gilboa notes, has come from History and has made only limited contributions to theory. The focus on the United States and other large powers has further pushed the value of public diplomacy for smaller nations like the United Arab Emirates in the offside of attention. Beyond that, the use of misleading terms like propaganda, (international) public relations, psychological warfare, and public affairs by scholars has blurred the understanding of public diplomacy.¹¹² This problem of terminology is additionally highlighted as different countries have adopted different names for their public diplomacy, thereby implying diverging insinuations: “Strategic communication,” as used by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, implies a security perspective; the term used by the French – “influence diplomacy” –

¹⁰⁷ Eytan Gilboa, 2008; p. 56.

¹⁰⁸ Eytan Gilboa, 2008; p. 56.

¹⁰⁹ Eytan Gilboa, 2008; p. 61.

¹¹⁰ Eytan Gilboa, 2008; p. 56.

¹¹¹ Eytan Gilboa, 2008; p. 74.

¹¹² Eytan Gilboa, 2008; p. 56.

on the other hand “suggests an ability to manipulate an audience”. “Public diplomacy” is the term used by the United States, and the one which Cull calls “the least-worst term in common use.”¹¹³

Though it has become commonly used in academia, it also lacks an agreed upon definition. Many have been proposed but they all differ in details such as the identification of the actor, the content, and/or the audience. As Cull’s book provides the foundational framework for this thesis, his understanding of public diplomacy shall guide it: “[T]he business of conducting foreign policy by engaging global publics.”¹¹⁴ On the one hand, this is a narrower understanding than that of others, as it places the agency in public diplomacy in the hands of an official source (though it can act in partnership with non-state actors in achieving its goals). Other definitions empower such actors to engage in public diplomacy by themselves; for the purpose of analyzing Emirati public diplomacy, however, this distinction is not important. On the other, it is very broad, as it doesn’t differentiate between goals (influence on or investigation of a foreign public’s opinion), means (media or other channels of communication), contents (cultural or educational) or audiences (publics and governments).¹¹⁵

4.3.Components of Public Diplomacy

Cull’s book is very useful insofar as it provides a general overview of the ends and means of public diplomacy, thereby identifying “five ways in which international actors have engaged foreign publics.”¹¹⁶ In the following sections, these components will be introduced while simultaneously illustrating their practicability on the basis of contemporary Emirati examples. This refers only to singular tactics rather than the Emirati public diplomacy strategy as a whole, which will be elaborated on in detail in the last part of this thesis. Complementing Cull’s framework with examples from Emirati practice also serves to elucidate the differences between large and small state public diplomacy.

¹¹³ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 2.

¹¹⁵ Eytan Gilboa, 2008; p. 57 f.

¹¹⁶ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 4.

4.3.1. Listening

Cull calls listening the “foundational skill”¹¹⁷ of Public Diplomacy. It should be understood as “engaging a foreign public by gathering and analyzing information from that public and feeding what is learned into the policymaking process.”¹¹⁸ In personal life, good listening is not just waiting one’s turn to respond and then pushing one’s own perspective; similarly, in foreign public engagement good listening is not just “collecting data”¹¹⁹ but credibly and continuously considering and catering to what has been said. Citing the renowned theoretician Sun Tzu, Cull invokes the parable of know your enemy¹²⁰ – as in the enemy in the way he exists rather than the “mental projection [...] drawn from one’s imagining.” As long as what is heard is also taken into account, Cull states plainly and simply, “[a] reputation for listening is a soft power asset.”¹²¹

Historically, listening has taken many forms, including espionage, personal inquiries of official dignitaries who reported their findings back home, and analyses of open-source media such as newspapers or radio broadcasting.¹²² In modern times, listening has become a much more diversified process: The availability of vast streams of data from all kinds of additional sources – from social media over opinion polls to the utilization of academic findings¹²³ – have “opened up undreamed-of possibilities in listening”¹²⁴ and significantly improved the ways how states can understand foreign publics and their interests.

As easy as the simple recommendation of listening might sound, it actually entails several difficulties: Again, public diplomacy is the art of engaging with a foreign public; considering that each nation or culture shows, to varying degrees, different mentalities, value systems, and interpretations of history, even the best listeners can fall prey to cognitive or social biases,¹²⁵ for example to prejudice,¹²⁶ groupthink,¹²⁷ or by inadvertently dismissing information because they intuitively don’t deem the source credible.¹²⁸

¹¹⁷ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 20.

¹¹⁸ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 21 f.

¹¹⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 22.

¹²⁰ Sun Tzu; p. 12.

¹²¹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 22.

¹²² Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 22.

¹²³ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 22.

¹²⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 37.

¹²⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 29.

¹²⁶ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 29.

¹²⁷ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 33.

¹²⁸ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 29.

There is one form of listening, namely to foreign experts, not described by Cull, but is employed by the UAE as well as other smaller nations. The UAE have a long record of hiring foreign experts, not only to advise public officials and decision makers but assume such positions themselves. Given the reliance of the UAE on the United States, it shouldn't surprise that many of the advisors employed by the Emirati state are Americans from the security sector. Two of the most prominent examples are former Secretary of Defense James Mattis¹²⁹ or the former White House's counterterrorism czar Richard Clark.¹³⁰ Moreover, the former head of Australia's Special Operations Command, Major-General Michael Hindmarsh, assumed a vital position in the UAE Presidential Guard in 2010, as well as other soldiers from Australia who hold important positions in "leadership, training and mentoring."¹³¹ This enables the relatively young Emirati state to learn from the long experience of Western decision makers, understand their interests, and more successfully integrate into the international community.

4.3.2. Advocacy

Advocacy can be considered the counter-practice to listening as an actor attempts to "promote a particular policy, idea, or that actor's general interests in the minds of a foreign public."¹³² Given that advocacy generally strives to serve short-term interests, many actors place it in the centre of Public Diplomacy.¹³³ One common mistake in relation to advocacy is to use it as a euphemism for propaganda, which, given its negative historic connotation, blurs the understanding of what public diplomacy is and what it is not. In the words of Cull, "Propaganda is about dictating your message to an audience and persuading them you are right. Public diplomacy is about listening to the other side and working to develop a relationship of mutual understanding."¹³⁴ Public diplomacy and propaganda clearly differ in intent and effect. A decisive factor in the success of advocacy is, of course, the actor's credibility. As will be described in more detail later, the UAE are not regarded as credible when, for instance, advocating certain values like climate change or women's rights.

¹²⁹ Jeremy Herb, 2017.

¹³⁰ Robert F. Worth, 2020.

¹³¹ Ian McPhedran, 2009.

¹³² Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 39.

¹³³ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 39.

¹³⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 1.

This is because similar to listening, advocacy is impacted by prejudices and biases. But “while the biases are the enemies of listening, they are the mechanisms by which effective advocacy works.”¹³⁵ This becomes evident when considering the hiring practices of the Emirati state that were already discussed: The affinity bias¹³⁶ in theory makes it harder for non-Western countries to advocate their positions vis-à-vis Western publics, which is why employing foreigners suggests improved Emirati advocacy capabilities especially towards the US.

Within this framework, there exist four approaches to advocacy. The first is the “direct appeal”, which “visualizes the immediate reader or listener as the object of influence.”¹³⁷ Yousef al-Otaiba, UAE ambassador in Washington D.C., has provided several precedents for this by regularly contributing articles to newspapers and journals like *Foreign Policy*.¹³⁸ The most fitting example was his Op-Ed in the Israeli daily *Yedioth Ahrono*, when he appealed to the Israeli public not to move forward with annexation as it would undermine the improved relations with the Arab world.¹³⁹ The fact that the letter was written in Hebrew made it even more remarkable.

The second approach is the “indirect appeal,” which “targets opinion makers and imagines a two-step process whereby the opinion maker will pass on the message to a wider audience.”¹⁴⁰ One example of this is what John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt have described in their book, “*The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*”, from 2007.¹⁴¹ By being able to rely on a strong network to lobby decision-makers in the US to pursue Israel friendly policies, the positions of the Jewish State have arguably more impact on US decision making than those of any other nation. This also suggests that when viewing the Abraham Accords as a way of hedging to the USA, the UAE have been able to increase their influence and standing by extension.

The UAE employed indirect appeals in regard to international criticism surrounding the controversy around Princess Latifa. The daughter of Dubai’s ruler has several times tried to escape her home but was always brought back and has since been kept under house arrest.

¹³⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 42.

¹³⁶ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 30.

¹³⁷ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 47.

¹³⁸ See for instance: Yousef al Otaiba, 2015.

¹³⁹ Haaretz, 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 47.

¹⁴¹ John J. Mearsheimer & Stephen M. Walt, 2007.

This hurts the UAE image in general but particularly the narrative of it being a more tolerant and modern country – especially in regard to women’s rights, which is of central importance for the West. After calls for a sign of life increased, former Irish President as well as former UN Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, was asked by the family to help and provide such a proof-of-life. In retrospect, she has called this her “biggest mistake” and indirectly stated that she had been misled by the family.¹⁴²

The third approach is “crowding the message space;” though it contains elements of the above-mentioned strategies, it “distinguishes itself by an emphasis on the volume of material released.”¹⁴³ The fourth and final approach is “partnership.” Resembling the indirect appeal, the actor empowers others to speak for the cause, only that these partners carry greater autonomy “and the message becomes a co-creation.”¹⁴⁴ As “[o]ne of the best recent examples of the power of collaboration” Cull refers to the global struggle to counter violent extremism. The United Arab Emirates played a vital part in this effort: They founded the Hedayah International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism in Abu-Dhabi in 2012, which helped generate and exchange shareable media.¹⁴⁵ Another precedent is the UAE’s cooperation with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which helped to fund immunization programs that “virtually”¹⁴⁶ eradicated Polio in Nigeria.¹⁴⁷

4.3.3. Cultural Diplomacy

Although the term itself seems intuitive at first, much time and space could be devoted to discussing what culture means precisely and what it includes. The realm of cultural diplomacy, for example, could be further subdivided into arts, sport or even gastro diplomacy.¹⁴⁸ Cull defines cultural diplomacy as the presentation of “that actor’s life, belief or art”¹⁴⁹ as a means of increasing its soft power and enhance its recognition and reputation. In general, a government’s role in this form of public diplomacy is more “facilitative” and its outcomes

¹⁴² Mark Hillard, 2021.

¹⁴³ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 47.

¹⁴⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 47.

¹⁴⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 158 f.

¹⁴⁶ Kristian C. Urlichsen, 2017; p. 163.

¹⁴⁷ Frank Kane, 2015.

¹⁴⁸ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 77 f.

¹⁴⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 5.

“may be loosely beneficial rather than specifically goal oriented,”¹⁵⁰ which is understandable given the complexity, potential divisiveness, and difficulties of managing culture.¹⁵¹

Cull describes the benefits arising from cultural soft power as the halo effect, “whereby a perceived excellence in one area encountered first brings benefit to an unrelated area.”¹⁵² Important during the Cold War – a “struggle not just for territory but for imagination”¹⁵³ – the USSR, for example, tied the dominance of Russian chess players in the sport to its argument of intellectual superiority over the US.¹⁵⁴ But using culture in such ways can also invoke hostility and trigger competition¹⁵⁵ and, as the chess example shows, might even backfire. Once the American chess-protégé Bobby Fisher had defeated the Russian World Champion Boris Spassky in “The Match Of The Century”¹⁵⁶ in 1972, the (chess) tables had turned.

The Cold War especially reveals the link between soft power and security. In times of peace, cultural diplomacy is a friendly reminder of a country’s existence and its contributions to the ‘good’ in the world, which can result in increased tourism or investments. In times of conflict, however, it can be weaponized to decrease foreign public’s support for the opponent and attract sympathy. Cull notes that a singular cultural diplomacy event cannot, of course, have the same concrete effect as “a beach assault or the capture of a strategic bridge.”¹⁵⁷ Cultural diplomacy therefore clearly has a “medium-term horizon”¹⁵⁸ as it is a collective endeavour that depends on various elements and frequent repetition. Reputational security, as will be argued later, is the ultimate security benefit that might arise from this practice.

Another major part of ‘culture’ in the context of public diplomacy as Cull defines it is religion. Saudi-Arabia’s unique religious soft power is testament to this. On the flipside of this coin, it also places Saudi policy within a corset that is difficult and dangerous to break out from. Language is another area of influence, especially valuable to French cultural diplomacy.¹⁵⁹ In any case, the creation of a common ‘cultural’ sphere has historically been crucial in achieving territorial coherence and political control.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁰ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 62.

¹⁵¹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 77.

¹⁵² Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 62.

¹⁵³ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 67.

¹⁵⁴ James Rodgers, 2018.

¹⁵⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 64 f.

¹⁵⁶ Madsen Pirie, 2019.

¹⁵⁷ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 67.

¹⁵⁸ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 6.

¹⁵⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 71.

¹⁶⁰ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 64 f.

Cull goes on to list four core approaches to cultural diplomacy: The most straightforward of them is the *cultural gift*, whereby an “actor selects an element of its culture to present to a foreign audience in the hope of exciting admiration or appreciation.”¹⁶¹ Although of course different in nature than the export of music or movies, monumental architecture as constructed in the UAE but also Qatar and Kazakhstan are also examples of this. The potential dangers of cultural gifts include the consolidation of stereotypes, a lack of understanding by the recipient audiences¹⁶² as well as alienation through overemphasising (cultural imperialism).¹⁶³ With regard to the megalomaniac construction projects in the UAE such repercussions potentially include criticism of the carbon footprint or of the extravagance itself. Countering such negative reactions by attempting to inform foreign audiences about various aspects of one’s culture is done by the second approach, *cultural information*,¹⁶⁴ though this is hard to apply to the UAE with regard to moving billions of tons of sand or steel for artificial islands and skyscrapers. But in the attempt to showing the world that the UAE are a more tolerant and open Arab country, cultural information constitutes a centrepiece of the UAE’s approach to reputational security. The third, cultural *capacity building*, is prominent especially among larger nations. Institutions like the Goethe Institute or the British Council promote understanding, sometimes even development and build links through offering language courses.¹⁶⁵ However, as seen with the Chinese Confucius Centres, such institutes can also cause resentment, as it has been described as being an instrument for propaganda.¹⁶⁶ Lastly, *cultural dialogue*, which is “explicitly two-way”, can foster exchange, for instance through festivals.¹⁶⁷ Especially film festivals and events like the World Expo are a very prominent way for countries like the UAE, Kazakhstan, and Qatar to engage in cultural dialogue.

4.3.4. Exchange Diplomacy

According to Cull, exchange and education are the “soul”¹⁶⁸ of Public Diplomacy. The idea is long-term oriented and aims at forming lasting relationships between countries and

¹⁶¹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 73.

¹⁶² Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 73.

¹⁶³ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 78.

¹⁶⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 73.

¹⁶⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 75.

¹⁶⁶ Pratik Jakhar, 2019.

¹⁶⁷ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 75f.

¹⁶⁸ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 80.

individuals as they are based on mutual acceptance and inherent educational benefits.¹⁶⁹ A variety of existing scholarships (Fulbright) or exchange programs (Erasmus)¹⁷⁰ generate a better understanding of another country than any other form of public diplomacy ever could as individuals literally *live*¹⁷¹ the experience. Similar to cultural diplomacy, many aspects of exchange diplomacy exist outside official control but in return nevertheless yield great political benefits. The list of current and former decision makers all over the world who have lived, studied or worked in the United States is endless; it is unequivocally considered a great asset for the US to be able to engage with such foreign officials or businesspeople. The lack of relations – and hence also the lack of exchange – between Israel and much of the Arab and Muslim world undoubtedly makes mutual understanding more difficult. Although Egypt and Jordan have concluded peace treaties with Israel, neither was embraced by its publics as a “warm peace,”¹⁷² unlike in the United Arab Emirates,¹⁷³ which thus stands to gain much from this exchange. Exchange diplomacy in general is arguably of heightened importance for countries like the UAE, who much depend on being able to attract foreigners.

Cull lists eight types of exchanges: *higher educational exchange* refers to academic programs like Erasmus but also includes universities setting up international campuses abroad, as is being heavily promoted in Qatar and the UAE.¹⁷⁴ Closely connected to the first form is the second, *leader exchanges*, a “programmed experience for a person identified as having present or future influence in a target society.”¹⁷⁵ The beforementioned Jordanian King Abdullah II¹⁷⁶ as well as MBZ¹⁷⁷ have both studied at the British Military Academy in Sandhurst, and both have proven to be among the most moderate and reliable partners for the West in the Middle East. *Professional exchanges*, especially between militaries, are a more distinct form of such programs.¹⁷⁸ This very prevalent practice in the UAE has already been described above, although the UAE do not exchange professionals as much as they employ them directly, which in effect is a hybrid between listening, advocacy, and exchange diplomacy. *Third-party facilitated exchange* as the fourth form seeks to reconcile communities and *Youth exchange*

¹⁶⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 81.

¹⁷⁰ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 92.

¹⁷¹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 81.

¹⁷² Hillel Frisch, 2020; p. 6.

¹⁷³ Rauf Baker, 2020; p. 17.

¹⁷⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 91 f.

¹⁷⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 92.

¹⁷⁶ King Abdullah II, 2011; p. 43.

¹⁷⁷ Robert Worth, 2020.

¹⁷⁸ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 94.

and mentorship is similar to academic exchange programs but targets younger audiences as it is believed that “political ideas can form early in a student’s career and a quicker intervention can head off later negative ideas”¹⁷⁹, as done, for instance with “Birthright Israel.”¹⁸⁰ Institutions like the US Peace Corps or Israeli kibbutzim allow for *development/work experiences*, a hybrid form of exchange and travel.¹⁸¹ Lastly, *Tourism* accounts for the largest share of international ‘exchange’. Tourism not only supports the economy but also increases a country’s recognition and reputation around the world.¹⁸² As such, it is an essential aspect of reputational security and thus to the Emirati soft power strategy.

4.3.5. International Broadcasting

Broadcasting blurs into all areas of Public Diplomacy. It can be a source for listening when institutions like the BBC, CNN or Russia Today collect data and information;¹⁸³ it can be used to advocate interests, although the success of this depends on the credibility and objectivity of the reporting;¹⁸⁴ it can allow people to ‘eavesdrop’ on news not directly aimed at them;¹⁸⁵ it can employ surrogates to substitute the lack of local media, as was done by many radio stations on both sides during the Cold War; it can spread culture; and finally, it can also serve commercial interests.¹⁸⁶

Of course, broadcasting has evolved rapidly since the Cold War. New technologies have given rise to a whole new world of possibilities to spread news and messages. Also new players have emerged that try to counter the hegemony of older players like the BBC or CNN. Qatar’s al-Jazeera is a prime example for this.¹⁸⁷ Although the UAE have no comparable broadcaster, they have certainly come to realize its importance for soft power politics. One of the demands to Qatar before the blockade in 2017 was that Doha would close down al-Jazeera; as with the twelve other demands, Qatar never fulfilled them.¹⁸⁸

¹⁷⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 95.

¹⁸⁰ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 96.

¹⁸¹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 97.

¹⁸² Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 97 f.

¹⁸³ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 102.

¹⁸⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 107 f.

¹⁸⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 102.

¹⁸⁶ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 109f.

¹⁸⁷ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 113.

¹⁸⁸ Patrick Wintour, 2017.

5. Nation Brands

The five components of public diplomacy as just described above are ways in which states can conduct public diplomacy. Ideally, an actor combines all elements, but depending on the country, its will and resources, that is more or less possible. The reasons behind the motivations for conducting public diplomacy may also vary. During the Cold War, the US did so in the context of its ideological conflict with the Soviet Union; Great Britain and France today do so to strengthen their diplomatic and commercial positions; smaller nations, like the Faroes, employ public diplomacy to increase tourism and attract investments;¹⁸⁹ and others, like Kazakhstan, Qatar, and the UAE do it for all these reasons combined and for the ultimate goal of enhancing reputational security. But what all actors have in common is that each of them has an image in the eyes of the world, or in other words, each of them represents a nation brand. But what distinguishes some actors from others is that not all have a pre-determined level of recognition. Everyone knows the USA, Great Britain, and France, but not everyone knows the Faroes, Kazakhstan, Qatar or the UAE. What these small states' public diplomacy differentiates from others is that they strive to appear on what Cull calls "the mental map"¹⁹⁰ of the global audience. Recognition is the prerequisite for attracting tourism, increasing investment, and attaining reputational security.

In 2004, the Brand Israel Group lead by Public Diplomacy expert Ido Aharoni tasked Boaz Mourad, researcher and branding expert at New York University, to convene a study on Israel's image in the world. He gathered a cross-section of people and posed one question: If a country were a single house, what would it be like to attend a party there? "The answers were initially as [...] expected. The house of Germany was neat and tidy. The house of Italy was full of conversation, wine, and warmth. The focus group enjoyed imagining being there. The facilitator asked about the house of Israel. The answers were stark. The house was dangerous. They imagined concrete walls and security fences. They imagined tension and people worried for their future. They imagined being uncomfortable." Even after running the exercise over and over in different cities, the focus groups "associated Israel primarily with conflict and crisis". Aharoni was "shocked", as he felt that Israel's image did not align with its domestic impression: "[T]he energy of the Israeli tech sector; the fun of the Tel-Aviv night scene; the pluralism of so much Israeli life."¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Simon Anholt, 2020; p. 85 ff.

¹⁹⁰ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

¹⁹¹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 120.

This story, for which this thesis was unfortunately unable to attain primary sources, was told by Cull as a way of illustrating the importance of images in international politics, which in part are the result of an actor's public diplomacy. This concept of image is best captured by the widely used term "nation brand", coined by Simon Anholt, one of the leading thinkers in regard to international reputation and soft power, in an article published in 1998.¹⁹² In his newest book he argues plainly and simply that "countries in good standing trade at a premium; countries in poor standing trade at a discount."¹⁹³

The word 'brand' is widely understood but simultaneously hard to conceptualize. As Cull observes, it is a "complex cluster of elements"; in the commercial world it includes a design in form of a logo or a slogan, primary elements like the product's ingredients and features themselves, but also aspects like the behavior of the corporation behind it.¹⁹⁴ His prime example is Coca-Cola, but Apple, as a representative from the digital age, might be more appropriate: Its smooth and simple design invokes a feeling of modernity, which is complemented by its black-white-grey coloring. Its primary product element is its easy usability and, well, its sexiness. The fact that Apple has been tied to the use of child-labor¹⁹⁵ is trumped by its "infinite mindset"¹⁹⁶ that constantly allows it to re-define and re-produce the kind of technological future for which people are willing to wait in line overnight. The glamour of Apple's brand outshines its competitors like Microsoft similarly to how Coca-Cola beats Pepsi.

In short, a brand is "a consumer's idea about a product", but it can also refer to "what people around the world think and feel about a state" as humans bestow other countries with "certain salient characteristics:"¹⁹⁷ Italy is fashionable, Germany is reliable,¹⁹⁸ and back in 2004, Israel was dangerous. Naturally, having a globally recognized 'brand' is much easier for a large country, but even among the smallest there are many that occupy a special place in our mind.

Consider Jamaica:¹⁹⁹ Almost everyone in the world knows the three-million people Caribbean island-state with its Gold-medal winning sprinters, Rastafari culture, and Reggae

¹⁹² Simon Anholt, 1998.

¹⁹³ Simon Anholt, 2020; p. 8.

¹⁹⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 121 f.

¹⁹⁵ Tyler Sonnemaker, 2021.

¹⁹⁶ Simon Sinek, 2019; p. 8.

¹⁹⁷ Eytan Gilboa, 2008; p. 67.

¹⁹⁸ Simon Anholt, 2020; p. 9.

¹⁹⁹ Simon Anholt, 2020; p. 19.

music. Its black, green, and yellow coloring also gives its 'brand' a unique visual appearance; so distinct, in fact, that the prospects of a Conservative-Liberal-Green coalition in Germany is dubbed Jamaica-coalition due to the respective party colors.²⁰⁰ Undoubtedly, Jamaica has a friendly image around the world, and many people would enjoy attending a party at house Jamaica, that is unless you are gay; Jamaica is considered one of the most homophobic countries in the world.²⁰¹

But a nation's brand has different effects for each country. The kind of soft power of Jamaica may give it a higher profile than similarly small nations around the world, and thus makes people 'care' more about it whenever a political development unfolds. But apart from tourism it generates little revenue from this image: Corporations that sell, for instance, fashion with the Jamaican national colors don't have to pass any of their profits on to the Jamaican government.²⁰² Such a commercial dimension is one of the most direct effects of the nation's brand. Depending on the country's image, people are willing to pay more or less for its products. This "Country of Origin" effect has already been studied in the 1970s and is still common today. The value of Germany's image – high quality and reliable engineering – to its economy "is almost beyond calculation."²⁰³

However, as described by Cull, the term 'nation brand' is a "metaphor run amok"²⁰⁴ and Anholt has many times expressed his regret of how the term has morphed into *nation branding*.²⁰⁵ His original vision was for states to build better national images by creating better national realities;²⁰⁶ but the idea of competitive identities is here to stay and it unleashed a multi-billion-dollar industry with "corporate slogans, logos, mission statements, and mega events". Cities, regions, and whole states began incorporating nation branding into their public diplomacy and have launched campaigns in order to cultivate their image and market their location.²⁰⁷ This again lays bare the difficulty in terminology and also raises question about the distinction between what is public diplomacy and what is simple marketing. This question will in part be discussed later, however an in-depth investigation exceeds the scope of this thesis.

²⁰⁰ Kira Welling, 2018.

²⁰¹ Tom Faber, 2018.

²⁰² Simon Anholt, 2020; p. 19.

²⁰³ Simon Anholt, 2020; p. 9.

²⁰⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 120.

²⁰⁵ Simon Anholt, 2020; p. 11.

²⁰⁶ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 121.

²⁰⁷ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 120 f.

As a country like the United States already has an established 'brand' and re-branding it would be arguably impossible, nation branding is an approach used by small states as they are often less known or not known at all. Though it is certainly true that many dollars around the world are wasted for useless PR-campaigns, Anholt also agrees that nation branding can help put a state or a city onto the global audience's mental map;²⁰⁸ as evidenced by Dubai. Whether it can raise the country's reputation is a different question.

"Of all the ideas," according to Cull "to animate the practice of public diplomacy in the last twenty years, only [the nation brand] approaches soft power in its international traction."²⁰⁹ And one central "need" that has emerged from this conceptualization of public diplomacy and nation brands is "to build reputational security."²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Simon Anholt, 2020; p. 11f.

²⁰⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 120.

²¹⁰ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 166.

6. Reputational Security

The value of soft power (euphemistically: a good *brand*) and hence the reasons for a country to embrace public diplomacy and nation branding are manifold. “A country with a powerful and positive image [...] finds it pretty easy to attract tourists, foreign investments, students and researchers, international events, consumers for its products and services, and the attention and respect of other governments and the media.”²¹¹ The more immediate effect of these benefits is commercial. But soft power doesn’t only serve the economy; in further consequence it increases social stability, buttresses the position of the ruling establishment, and ultimately enhances reputational security. It is within this context that the difference between more and less established, small and large states, present their biggest impact. Although of course it differs case by case, the United States, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom have to worry much, much less about their brand-recognition. Most people in the world know these countries, and when a challenge arises, for instance a terrorist attack or a natural disaster, the world will hear about it and it will care.²¹² As Cull notes, “newer or weaker countries (or those actively engaged in disputes) are not simply seeking to build their soft power as a luxury add-on too boost exports, tourism or foreign direct investment. They need soft power for the same reason they need the hard power assets of a standing military: core security.”²¹³

Cull defines reputational security as “the degree of safety accruing to a nation state that proceeds from being known by citizens of other nations.”²¹⁴ The word ‘degree’ is highly important as it illuminates the fact that reputational security is not a binary concept but a *spectrum*. It is also not a single acquisition, cannot be guaranteed through a treaty or ever be fully achieved. It is rather an expectation that is presented vis-à-vis another country and its public, and the enhancement of this expectation has no endpoint but is a perpetual struggle for recognition and reputation.

He goes on by stating that “[a] country with reputational security is accepted as legitimately sovereign over its territory, not just in law but also in international public perception. It is appreciated as a member of the international community and seen as an

²¹¹ Simon Anholt, 2020; p. 8.

²¹² Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 167.

²¹³ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²¹⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

integral part of the fabric of that community. People are interested in news from the place and should it be threatened, they see its preservation as a foreign policy priority.”²¹⁵

Before and during World War II, the American perception of Great Britain made its preservation “a greater priority than remaining strictly neutral.” Contemporary Ukraine is a contrary example: Cull notes that Ukraine was best known for “having been part of the Soviet Union and maintaining a complex set of interconnections to Russia.”²¹⁶ Hence, because the international community did not view Ukraine as “sufficiently distinct from Russia,”²¹⁷ its conflict in 2014 provoked only limited support for Ukraine. Not enough at least, that the preservation of Ukraine as a “singular and unified entity”²¹⁸ was considered enough of a priority to warrant a stronger reaction vis-à-vis the Russian Federation.

The same is arguably true for Georgia in 2008, which explains the efforts it puts behind the goal of joining the European Union and NATO. He also frames the award-winning national branding efforts of Kosovo in the same light. Any future attempt of Serbia to regain that territory would be met with stronger or weaker international resistance depending on how successfully Kosovo had been able to place itself “on the mental map of Europe.”²¹⁹

Another example is South Korea: Any nuclear attack in the 21st century would provoke unprecedented global outrage, regardless of the actors involved. But it has been argued that North Korea does not need nuclear weapons to deter South Korea (and in consequence the United States); nearly 6.000 artillery systems within range of major South Korean population centers²²⁰ are deterrence enough. It is questionable to what degree North Korea would care about *its* international image, but an artillery barrage into the center of Seoul, the capital of South Korea, would undoubtedly provoke the harshest international condemnation, which again potentially deters North Korea from taking such action. The list goes on: Taiwan’s survival “hinges on the polity’s ability to maintain an international perception of its identity as something distinct from mainland China, whose survival in some unique form is of value to the wider world.”²²¹ This also explains why China de-facto punishes countries and corporations who refer to Taiwan as a country²²² and only 14 of the 193 UN member states

²¹⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²¹⁶ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²¹⁷ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 167.

²¹⁸ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²¹⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²²⁰ D. Sean Barnett et al, 2020; Preface.

²²¹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²²² Brenda Goh & John Ruwitch, 2018.

officially recognize Taiwan.²²³ On the flipside, for the potential aggressors – Russia, Serbia, North Korea, China – this means that any kind of aggressive action is met with more or less international resistance depending on the victim’s level of reputational security. This doesn’t exclude the possibility of conflict, of course, but it increases the price the aggressor would have to pay. Arguably, Taiwan represents the most acute such case in international politics.

The current “shift in political paradigms [...] from the modern world of geopolitics and power to the postmodern world of images and influence,”²²⁴ as Peter van Ham, another leading scholar of public diplomacy, writes, hence has advantages and disadvantages for smaller nations: On the one hand, many are far behind bigger nations in terms of soft power and will be unlikely to ever be able to compete with the global attraction of more established nations with world renowned cultural heritages. On the other hand, their smaller hard power capabilities can be mitigated through the development of reputational security as the use of military force has lost, and will likely continue to lose, some of its application capabilities in international politics.

The kind of narrative at the foundation of such a brand-recognition naturally impacts reputational security. Cull refers to the victim narrative as a prime strategy employed in modern times to attract global awareness and refers to the Israeli-Palestine conflict as the prime example.²²⁵ The latter have managed to consolidate the narrative of being a people without land, and so every time violence breaks out, people around the world care. Palestine has nothing to offer the world economically, and also culturally they are hardly distinct from other Arab peoples, and apart from the conflict in Palestine, there are many struggles around the world that would deserve attention. But the Palestinian narrative as a suppressed people provides it with soft power that manages to rally huge sympathy around the Palestinian flag, which in turn constrains Israel, as was seen in the most recent escalations in May 2021.

The Kurds occupy a similar position in the world’s mind. Their indiscriminate gassing by Saddam Hussein in the 1980s as well as their role in defeating ISIS in the last decade has put the Kurds on the mental map of the global public, and their narrative as a victim as well as a more moderate force in the Middle East has arguably allowed countries like Germany to supply it with much needed weaponry (which it rarely does to warring parties).²²⁶

²²³ World Population Review, 2021.

²²⁴ Peter van Ham, 2001; p. 4.

²²⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 168 f.

²²⁶ BBC News, 2014.

Cull writes that reputational security, like any form of security or the entire category of soft power, is hard to measure.²²⁷ This is undeniably true. Fighter jets and tanks can be counted, and the commercial value of soft power may be somehow quantifiable, its emotional dimension, however, is arguably immeasurable. The esteem of culture and the importance of values differs from individual to individual, from public to public, and from country to country. But herein also lies the beauty, if one might call it that, of the concept of reputational security: It is *intuitive*. Reputational security cannot be institutionalized or agreed upon between two governments, but every individual, regardless of political knowledge, can take stock of the own mind, explore its perceptions, and ask: What is my image of this country? What does it give to me, to humanity? How much would I *care* if something were to happen? The accumulation of such individual perceptions in one society determines how much the state and consequently how much the world cares. This level of caring defines how much the community of nations is willing to help, to provide humanitarian assistance, extend financial aid, lend diplomatic cover or even give military support to bring security. As such, the idea behind reputational security is the epitome of globalization and a clear reflection of humanity in the 21st century. The test of reality is the only measure able to falsify the implied assumptions of reputational security, and then only case by case. There is no universal law that can be induced or verification reached as the hypothesis of reputational security holds true until it doesn't.

²²⁷ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

7. Framework of Analysis

In his studies on Qatar, J. E. Peterson's refers to its public diplomacy as "a strategy of branding the state for *survival* [emphasis added]." ²²⁸ Though he actually neither uses the term public diplomacy nor reputational security, he applies the same logic a decade before Cull, who in 2018 argued that perhaps the most obvious case of a country pursuing a strategy aimed at attaining reputational security is Kazakhstan. ²²⁹ This thesis argues that the United Arab Emirates constitute another such case, in scope and effect probably even larger than either Qatar or Kazakhstan. Due to the lack of a model for small state public diplomacy in general and reputational security in particular upon which to investigate the Kazakh, Qatari, and Emirati cases, this thesis will suggest its own framework of analysis. Its utility will be shown by the cases studies provided further below. But first, this thesis will outline the basis for this framework by describing the variables and challenges common to all actors.

7.1. Common Variables and Challenges

As Peterson has asserted, it is generally difficult to compare small states because the adjective 'small' can refer to different variables. ²³⁰ Kazakhstan is about 235 times, and the UAE seven times larger in territorial terms than Qatar, and in regard to population, Kazakhstan is six times, and the UAE three times bigger than Qatar. ²³¹ However, if the goal of reputational security is the focus of analysis, other factors like their history, political system, level of wealth, and the context in which they pursue it matter much more. These three cases provide an excellent framework for comparison as they show remarkable similarities in these areas: They each became members of the international community quite recently, are authoritarian systems, base their considerable wealth on fossil fuels, and inhabit comparable regions.

The further share a number of challenges, the first of which arises from their point of departure. Qatar and the UAE gained their independence in 1971 and Kazakhstan in 1991. ²³² As they had not existed as sovereign entities up until then, their membership in the

²²⁸ J. E. Peterson, 2006; p. 732.

²²⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²³⁰ J. E. Peterson, 2006; p. 733 f.

²³¹ Birgit Albrecht et al, 2019.

²³² William R. Keylor, 2011; p. 461.

international community was not consolidated and the global awareness of these states' existence was correspondingly low.

The second is the fact that they are superficially virtually indistinguishable from other actors in their region. Central Asia consists of five nations, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan; arguably, few people from outside the region would be able to distinguish between them, not least because of their similarly sounding names. This is also true for Qatar and the UAE as they are buttressed on the same peninsula with each other and two more structurally similar, small, rich, monarchical petrol-states (Bahrain and Kuwait), with which they have to compete for attention.

The third common challenge is closely related to the second and reflects their lack of a distinct culture. Kazakhstan has no world-renowned heritage that would give it a pre-determined level of global recognition. Qatar and the UAE, on the other hand, share in the same Islamic heritage, which is world-renowned, but equally deprives them of a pre-determined individual 'brand-recognition'.

The fourth is that all of these actors further compete with larger, more distinct actors in their immediate neighborhood. Similar to Ukraine, which in the West was not seen as sufficiently distinct²³³ from Russia, Kazakhstan equally lives in the shadow of its larger neighbor as well as in the shadow of their common history. Qatar and the UAE have Saudi-Arabia to the West and Iran to the East: Saudi-Arabia stands out through its religious soft power and Iran through a combination of religious and cultural soft power, as the theocratic state-structure awards it influence over Shia Islam and the Persian civilization is among the oldest in the world.

The fifth challenge is not common to Kazakhstan, Qatar, and the UAE alone but to virtually all actors in the international community – although to varying degree – that consider reputational security a strategic goal. As the idea behind reputational security, according to Cull, is the expectation of "safety [...] from being known by citizens of other nations,"²³⁴ the actor in question has to ask itself whose citizens matter most. Usually, the answer is citizens of Western nations. All the beforementioned examples – Ukraine, Georgia, Kosovo, South Korea, and Taiwan – project their expectation of reputational security primarily at the United States and Europe, as they have the resources and in the past already shown the will to

²³³ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 167.

²³⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

provide appropriate support. Cull complemented his definition by stating that “[w]hile it often helps most to be known for something positive, simply being known is of some benefit.”²³⁵ As reputational security is a spectrum and not a binary concept, “being known for something positive” therefore enhances the degree of reputational security, and in regard to what an actor can expect from the West, this degree is in part a reflection of that actor’s values and identity. Forty years ago, when South Korea was an economically weak, military dictatorship, its security was a strategic imperative for the United States; today, it is arguably a cultural one as South Korea has become a liberal democracy similar to that of the US.

The arising problem is that not every country is able or willing to enact policies that reflect or even mirror the Western system. This is a common challenge of relatively high degree for Kazakhstan, Qatar, and the UAE compared to the other beforementioned examples. Nevertheless, actors like Kazakhstan, Qatar, and the UAE, who more fundamentally lack a predefined level of global awareness, have already a lot to gain by mere recognition, however will reach a glass ceiling of reputational security as long as they are not able to also increase their reputation. But breaking through that ceiling is very difficult. None of the three culturally or politically belongs to the West, which makes hedging towards it much more difficult and limits, for the time being, the can-be-expected degree of reputational security. In 1996, Samuel P. Huntington published “The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order”, in which he makes the case that the world is divided into several “civilizations,” the highest level of a cultural entity, such as the Western, Islamic or Orthodox civilizations, and that it is along these lines that societies define their common identity and most readily express solidarity. Huntington described Ukraine as a “cleft” country, torn between its Western and its Orthodox identities, each part of a larger civilization, thus making the country heterogenous and governance difficult.²³⁶ Cull employed the same logic when he described Ukraine as not sufficiently distinct²³⁷ from Russia to explain why Russia was able to take Crimea and support Eastern Ukrainian rebels without more resistance from the West. This civilizational challenge is, according to Huntington, difficult to overcome, as every country who has tried to belong to two civilizations has failed in uniting the best of two worlds and also in exploiting the best of both.²³⁸

²³⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²³⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, 1996; p. 165 ff.

²³⁷ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 167.

²³⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, 1996; p. 139.

7.2. Participation, Exposure, and Projection

In light of these commonalities and the lack of a theoretical foundation in scholarship, this thesis suggests the following framework of analysis to investigate the approaches Kazakhstan, Qatar, and the UAE have taken in enhancing their reputational security. It is based on three intersecting approaches: Participation to gain legitimacy; Exposure to acquire recognition; and Projection to enhance reputation. Individually, each supplies some level of reputational security, but only collectively are they capable of providing an actor with a maximum degree:

- a. Participation: As an actor seeks to consolidate its independence and membership in the international community, it actively participates within it and presents itself as a reliable partner to it. This aims directly at foreign governments and indirectly at their respective domestic audiences. It also aids in gaining a (better) seat at the table, which is essential if the actor wants to take part in shaping global governance.
- b. Exposure: As an actor seeks recognition from the international community, it advocates its existence by exposing itself to a broad foreign audience, thereby introducing its 'brand'. The degree to which brand-recognition is sufficient and brand-reputation is necessary for a certain level of reputational security is debatable and varies, but as recognition is a prerequisite for reputation and also much easier to acquire, it suggests that, at least at first, recognition is prioritized.
- c. Projection: As an actor seeks reputation within the international community, it moves its brand from the game of recognition into the game of reputation where it projects its values and identity to the foreign audience. Enhancing one's reputation rests much more on political will than on availability of resources as it aims not only to impress but to be applauded.

7.3. Case Study One: Kazakhstan

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a fundamental change on the Eurasian map: 15 new states could now be found within the space that before constituted one, huge political entity.²³⁹ Russia, as the dominant force among them, clearly does not lack name-recognition. All others arguably do: Ukraine and Georgia have already been mentioned; the most interesting case-study, however, is provided by the Central Asian republics.

Based on the elaborations by Simon Anholt, who has advised the Latvian and Kazakh governments on increasing their name-recognition in the world, the Baltic countries “simply didn’t exist”²⁴⁰ in the minds of most just a few years ago; the same is arguably true for all five of the Central Asian. But while the situation has changed for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania thirty years later given their membership of the European Union and NATO (aided by the fact that, as Huntington states, they historically belong to the western civilization)²⁴¹, the Central Asian countries are faced with a different situation. According to Cull, none of them has put more effort into building its “relevance and reputation among global audiences”²⁴² than Kazakhstan. This strategy has been pursued in various areas that follow the pattern of Participation, Exposure, and Projection:

The most central element of Kazakhstan’s Participation efforts to brand itself as a reliable partner – seen by the fact that “Kazakhstan’s government doesn’t waste a single opportunity to mention”²⁴³ it – came when it signed START I and then the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and transferred all its nuclear weapons,²⁴⁴ which it had inherited from the Soviet Union, to Russia. In an Op-Ed in the New York Times, former President Nursultan Nazarbayev argued that “I have no doubt that we are a more prosperous, stable country, with more influence and friends in the world because of our decision;”²⁴⁵ Kazakhstan has built on these beginnings and made non-proliferation a centerpiece of its diplomatic engagement, for instance by hosting nuclear talks with Iran in Almaty in 2013.²⁴⁶ Similar to the Baltic States, Kazakhstan further tried to establish its position by becoming “a great joiner” and hosting diplomatic summits: It was a founding member of the Shanghai Five and a driving force of its

²³⁹ William R. Keylor, 2011; p. 460.

²⁴⁰ Simon Anholt, 2020; p. 84.

²⁴¹ Samuel P. Huntington, 1996; p. 162.

²⁴² Nicholas Cull, 2018.

²⁴³ Joshua Kucera, 2013.

²⁴⁴ William R. Keylor, 2011; p. 573.

²⁴⁵ Nursultan Nazarbayev, 2012.

²⁴⁶ BBC News, 2013.

successor, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It is also an active member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union and was the proponent of the organization Conference on Interaction and Conference-building Measures in Asia.²⁴⁷ Moreover, after 2011, when the US had relinquished its space shuttle program, Baikonur Cosmodrome, though leased to Russia but located in Kazakhstan, was the only place from which flights to the International Space Station could be launched,²⁴⁸ arguably giving Kazakhstan an additional importance on the mental map of the western world (by 2020 the US had developed its own capacities again).²⁴⁹

As part of its Exposure strategy, Kazakhstan has pursued “a symbolic diplomacy of place and space,”²⁵⁰ as Cull describes it. The government moved its capital from Almaty to Astana and designed as a concept capital with the help of star-architects and beset with buildings of monumental design. Kazakhstan has further engaged in event-diplomacy, shown by its strong desire to host Expos as it successfully did in Astana in 2017. But apart from hosting it, Kazakhstan has also put great effort into delivering “spectacular contributions”, like at the Yeosu Expo in South Korea in 2012.²⁵¹ Other attempts of Kazakhstan to expose itself to western – in this case European audiences – is their membership in UEFA (the Union of European Football Associations) as the only country from Central Asia²⁵² and its efforts to be able to participate in the Eurovision Song Contest.²⁵³ Films arguably constitute the cultural center of these efforts, as is seen by the hosting of a row of film-festivals.²⁵⁴ A very interesting debate centers around the film *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America For Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*. According to Peter van Ham, who has written extensively on nation-branding and has analyzed the case of *Borat*, Kazakh officials took great offense as Kazakhstan was “basically unknown to most people in the West, and their first ‘information’ about the country came from watching *Borat*.”²⁵⁵ This relates to the confirmation bias as described by Cull, whereby a “listener’s response to a piece of information can be greatly shaped by as simple a cause as having heard a different piece of information first.”²⁵⁶ In this sense, Borat

²⁴⁷ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²⁴⁸ Jeffrey Kluger, 2014.

²⁴⁹ Radio Free Europe, 2020.

²⁵⁰ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²⁵¹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²⁵² UEFA.

²⁵³ Anthony Granger, 2021.

²⁵⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²⁵⁵ Peter van Ham, 2008; p. 142.

²⁵⁶ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 31.

certainly didn't serve Kazakhstan well as it was clearly a "slander"²⁵⁷ towards the Central Asian republic. However, some Kazakh officials even consider the film as a PR-gift since it "gives it a place on the mental map of Western audiences which Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan lack."²⁵⁸ After having banned the first movie, Kazakhstan has started to embrace its "unwanted son"²⁵⁹ and launched a campaign to attract tourists with Borat's catchphrase, "Very Nice."²⁶⁰ This debate is testament to the recognition/reputation dichotomy.

The Projection elements of Kazakhstan's nation-branding efforts remain relatively weak, however, as Cull's and Anholt's criticisms show. The country prioritizes the pursuit of international relevance (Participation and Exposure) over improvements in the field of human rights in its own country (Projection).²⁶¹ Cull embraces Anholt's approach to building a better national image by building better national realities²⁶² when he states that "[t]rue reputational security [...] will require attention to its reputation for corruption, which although the best in the Central Asian region [...] still requires work"²⁶³. But as governments also "require a degree of reputational security among their own citizens,"²⁶⁴ Kazakhstan's lacking efforts in improving its 'national reality' might be explained by the lack of political will, as it would "require a trade off in the ability of the government to manage and direct its own population."²⁶⁵ In other words, with too much focus on societal progress – and hence Projection thereof – it might destabilize its own regime, which reflects the sort of 'glass ceiling' mentioned above. Problematic for western countries is also the democratic practices in Kazakhstan: Elections of its long-time President Nazarbayev were described as "coronations" and in the 2019, after Nazarbayev had surprisingly made room for a hand-picked successor,²⁶⁶ the OSCE described the elections as "tarnished by clear violations of fundamental freedoms."²⁶⁷ However, Kazakhstan did try to strengthen its reputation by advocating religious tolerance – for instance by launching the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in 2003 – while

²⁵⁷ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²⁵⁸ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²⁵⁹ Robert A. Saunders, 2008; 63.

²⁶⁰ Joel Stein, 2020.

²⁶¹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²⁶² Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 121.

²⁶³ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²⁶⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²⁶⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²⁶⁶ Andrew Roth, 2019.

²⁶⁷ OSCE, 2019; p. 1.

simultaneously combatting radicalism, a topic that has been high on the world's agenda at the time.²⁶⁸

In order to enforce Participation, Exposure, and Projection, Kazakhstan has also pursued an inward-looking, educational strategy. In the tradition of exchange diplomacy, it has “an extensive system of sending students overseas for higher degrees” and founded new Universities, like the Nazarbayev University in 2010. However, there is “no thought of bringing internationally operated campuses to Kazakhstan,” as is done by Qatar and the UAE. It nevertheless embraces internationalism and modernity by requiring post-elementary education in STEM-disciplines to be delivered in English, and it plans to introduce Roman letters instead of Cyrillic by 2025. It further places great emphasis on the themes of innovation and sustainable energy.²⁶⁹ The importance of innovation and technology for contemporary soft power are undeniable and will be illustrated in the context of the UAE.

²⁶⁸ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

²⁶⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

7.4. Case Study Two: Qatar

Deliberately designed “to put Qatar on the map,”²⁷⁰ as Peterson describes it, Qatar has pursued a long-standing public diplomacy strategy since its foundation in 1971. As a founding member of the GCC²⁷¹ as well as an early member of OPEC,²⁷² it has striven to gain institutional legitimacy, which it further tried to strengthen by hosting several high-profile summits, for instance the WTO ministerial meeting in 2001.²⁷³ At the time of writing in 2006, Peterson of course couldn’t foresee the events leading up to Qatar’s exclusion from OPEC in 2019²⁷⁴ and its escalation of conflict with the UAE and Saudi-Arabia within the GCC that led to the blockade in 2017. Qatar and the UAE follow the same strategy in regard to Participation when it comes to managing their security: By Qatar hosting the largest US military base in the Middle East,²⁷⁵ the country assumes an essential role for the US in international affairs. This not only ties it to the United States, but as the regional headquarter for the US in the Middle East, it has also turned out to be an easy way for Exposure, as Qatar has “received prominent mention in worldwide reporting” in the advent of the 2003 Iraq War.²⁷⁶

Qatar’s Exposure policies have placed a special emphasis on sport: Already in the 1990s, it put a lot of effort into being able to host sport events that attract a global audience, like the Qatar Rallye and high-profile tennis and golf tournaments.²⁷⁷ The most prominent case of Qatar’s sport/event diplomacy is undoubtedly the FIFA World Cup 2022. The World Cup, however, again highlights the distinction between reputation and recognition. So far, “there has been little positive to say about Qatar hosting”²⁷⁸ it: First, much was reported about Qatar having bribed FIFA officials to win the hosting rights;²⁷⁹ then, the debate around the heat during Qatar in the summer, when World Cups are usually held, forced Qatar to re-schedule the event to be held in the winter;²⁸⁰ and finally, the headlines about exploitation, forced labour, and the death of approximately 6,500 migrant workers building these stadiums has resulted in even worse press.²⁸¹ However, regardless of the negative reporting, with being

²⁷⁰ J. E. Peterson, 2006; p. 732.

²⁷¹ GCC, 2021.

²⁷² OPEC, 2021.

²⁷³ J. E. Peterson, 2006; p. 746.

²⁷⁴ OPEC, 2021.

²⁷⁵ Matthew Wallin, 2018; p. 7.

²⁷⁶ J. E. Peterson, 2006; p. 732.

²⁷⁷ J. E. Peterson, 2006; p. 747.

²⁷⁸ Simon Chadwick, 2015.

²⁷⁹ Tariq Panja & Kevin Draper, 2020.

²⁸⁰ Simon Chadwick, 2015.

²⁸¹ The Guardian, 2021.

awarded the right to host the World Cup, Qatar has managed an unprecedented coup, and once the World Cup has been held, the Qatar's brand-recognition around the globe will have certainly risen given that about 3.5 billion people – half the world's population – watched the last World Cup in Russia in 2018.²⁸² What it does to its reputation, however, is a different question. Similar to the *Borat* debate, this one is another testament to the recognition/reputation dichotomy and highlights the importance of distinguishing between these two approaches.

Qatar Airways, the national airline, and the construction of a major airport, outline Doha's strategy to increase tourism and its importance as a regional hub. In this context, Qatar's and the Emirate's Exposure diplomacy are in heavy competition, which will be elaborated on below. What makes Qatar unique as a small state, both in comparison to Kazakhstan and the UAE as well as in a global sense, is the huge influence it has been able to build up through its global broadcaster al-Jazeera. Al-Jazeera's value lies primarily in Qatar being able to influence the public opinion in the Middle East, and to a lesser degree, outside it. As an instrument for listening and advocacy, as defined by Cull, it therefore molds into all four approaches to generating reputational security. Al-Jazeera's was grudgingly acknowledged by the UAE and Saudi-Arabia when they made the closure of al-Jazeera one of the 13 demands before their blockade in 2017.²⁸³

With its reforms of democratization and women's empowerment, Qatar has also “won plaudits for its steps toward democratization and ensuring the equality of women.”²⁸⁴ However, such Projection efforts are undermined as Qatar is widely regarded as a heavy funder of Islamist movements and even terrorist organizations,²⁸⁵ which has arguably trumped the progress it made in these areas and hurts its credibility vis-à-vis the West. This is different in regard to the Middle East, however. Qatar's cultural diplomacy combines a focus on its Islamic heritage and architecturally impressive designs, for example for the Museum of Islamic Art, which was designed by star-architect I. M. Pei.²⁸⁶ The case of Qatar raises another important issue: The expectation of reputational security directed at the West, especially in the field of Projection, comes into conflict with its soft power in the Middle East. Qatar seems to strike a more balanced approach than the UAE in this regard.

²⁸² Matt Clinch, 2018.

²⁸³ Patrick Wintour, 2017.

²⁸⁴ J. E. Peterson, 2006; p. 733.

²⁸⁵ David B. Roberts, 2019; p. 1.

²⁸⁶ J. E. Peterson, 2006; p. 747.

As opposed to Kazakhstan but similar to the UAE, the educational aspects to Qatar's public diplomacy put a strong emphasis on attracting foreign universities to open branches in Doha, most notably the Ivy League, Cornell University, or the elite Georgetown University.²⁸⁷ These campuses offer a variety of studies, from engineering and computer science to medical studies and foreign affairs. Similar to Kazakhstan, a focus on STEM-disciplines is obvious.

²⁸⁷ J. E. Peterson, 2006; p. 747.

8. The Emirati Soft Power Strategy

In order to mitigate the external and internal threats to their country and complement the hard power elements of its security architecture, the UAE have been undeniably pushing a public diplomacy strategy aimed at placing the country on the mental map of the world's population. Several economic benefits arise out of this, like increased tourism and investments, which in turn again allow the country to support its hard power and consolidate its socio-economic state structure. This dimension of public diplomacy is reflected in the first three points of the UAE's Soft Power Strategy, which was officially launched in 2017: First, they want to unify the directions of various sectors like the economy, humanities, tourism, media, and science; second, they aim to promote the UAE's position as a gateway to the region; and third, they want to establish the UAE as a regional capital for culture, art, and tourism.²⁸⁸ These broad goals for the most part aim to increase the UAE's Participation in global governance and expand its Exposure to the world. Given its huge resources, engaging globally and raising attention is comparatively easy for the UAE. The fourth point in their strategy, however, entirely reflects Projection: They want "to establish [the UAE's] reputation as a modern and tolerant country that welcomes all people from across the world."²⁸⁹ The focus on a 'modern and tolerant' reputation implies the UAE's willingness to move their brand from the game of recognition into the game of reputation. This is much more difficult and unachievable with mere wealth alone. As the following chapter will show, the UAE have indeed gone beyond what Qatari and Kazakh public diplomacy has both attempted and yet achieved.

8.1.Participation

Just like Kazakhstan and Qatar, the UAE have tried to consolidate their state as a member in the international community by emphasizing their reliability as partner through constructive participation in global governance. Like Qatar, the UAE already joined OPEC before its independence – Qatar in 1961 and the UAE in 1967²⁹⁰ – and was a founding member of the GCC.²⁹¹ The readiness to host a number of military bases from different countries emphasis

²⁸⁸ The UAE Soft Power Strategy, 2021.

²⁸⁹ The UAE Soft Power Strategy, 2021.

²⁹⁰ OPEC, 2021.

²⁹¹ GCC, 2021.

the willingness to play a reliable role as an integral part of the international/regional community. But different to Qatar, which also hosts a Turkish base,²⁹² the UAE place themselves in a different regional camp as the UAE and therefore somewhat project a different identity and set of values as evidenced by the fact that they have called the base a “source of instability.”²⁹³ The UAE’s internationally applauded partnership with NATO is another successful example of its (security) Participation. The benefit for the UAE’s reputational security in this context is especially pronounced given the centrality of the USA to the Emirates’ security architecture. These benefits go beyond strategic importance, however. As the relationship between the UAE and the USA grows in the security field, they spill over into other areas (related to the halo effect described by Cull), which is further supported by the Emirati hiring practices. It is also in this context where the Abraham Accords reveal one of their public diplomacy elements: First, as relations between Emiratis and Israelis grow and ideally improve, the nation’s official relations will also reap such spill over benefits. As the UAE is the first Gulf Arab nation to normalize relations and generally the first Arab nation to embrace a warm peace with Israel, especially in contrast to Qatar, which seems unlikely to follow suit anytime soon, they are moreover the first to feel those benefits. Second, recognition of Israel is a strong show of Participation for the international community; its Projection elements will be discussed later.

But in the case of the United Arab Emirates, what this thesis understands as Participation is best illustrated by the UAE’s civil nuclear energy program. Due to the dual-use nature of nuclear technology and exacerbated by the danger of proliferation of nuclear weapons, especially in the Middle East,²⁹⁴ the topic of nuclear energy is understandably among the most sensitive in international politics. For that reason, “policymakers in Abu Dhabi cooperated intensively with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and international partners such as the United States to ensure that its nuclear plans met the highest standards of transparency, safeguarding, and monitoring [...], even going beyond the requirements of global best practice [...]”²⁹⁵ Given the context of the Cold War with Iran, the expectations vis-à-vis Arab countries in regard to nuclear security are arguably higher; but they are nevertheless an indicator of Emirati intentions.

²⁹² The Arab Weekly, 2020.

²⁹³ The Arab Weekly, 2020.

²⁹⁴ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 216.

²⁹⁵ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 118.

As climate change seems to have arrived on the top of the international political agenda, the UAE's ambitions in this area are another example of its Participation efforts.²⁹⁶ For instance, the UAE landed a major coup when it won the right to host the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), which is the first intergovernmental organization headquartered in the Middle East.²⁹⁷ As opposed to hosting military bases, however, engagement in the global fight against climate change perfectly captures the *Zeitgeist* as it has become a centerpiece of many nations' values and even identity around the world. This emotional component awards climate change heavy Projection elements as well, being different from religion or women's rights, which are sensitive issues in Muslim societies, climate change meets no such cultural constraints. For the UAE, the consequences of climate change, including rising temperatures but also the end of the fossil fuel era, warrant economic action but also offer reputational opportunities. The advertisement of the then world's largest solar panel field is just one symbolic example of how the UAE have embraced both.²⁹⁸ How this engagement impacts the degree of reputational security depends both on how effectively they manage the transition, but also to what degree the foreign public can be convinced that an Arab petrol state actually contributes to improving climate security (relating back to Cull's confirmation bias).

8.2.Exposure

If the goal is attracting attention, huge amounts of oil and some of the largest sovereign wealth funds in the world²⁹⁹ provide for a variety of possibilities. Arguably, one of the more subtle ones is, similar to Kazakhstan, hosting Expos, which Dubai will do in 2021 (originally planned for 2020). Cull describes this as "a logic for cultural outreach"³⁰⁰ for such states. Generally, the UAE have put "immense energy"³⁰¹ into hosting events, for example the Formula 1 race which has taken place in Abu-Dhabi since 2009.³⁰² With an average of 430 Million people watching Formula 1 in 2020,³⁰³ it might not come close to the audience Qatar can expect while hosting

²⁹⁶ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 114.

²⁹⁷ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 114.

²⁹⁸ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 116.

²⁹⁹ Babu Das Augustine, 2021.

³⁰⁰ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 69.

³⁰¹ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 69.

³⁰² Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 167.

³⁰³ Statista: Number of TV viewers of Formula One (F1) racing worldwide from 2008 to 2020; 2021.

the World Cup, but it manages to attract attention without many of the negative connotations that Qatar has to accept and it also provides repetition. While Qatar will host the next World Cup, *Emirates*, and by extension the UAE, have been sponsoring it. For example, the company had their flight attendants hand out the Medals to the winning German team after the Final in 2014.³⁰⁴ Though probably impossible to quantify, it would be interesting to know whether such initiatives are worth their money.³⁰⁵

The two Emirati airlines, *Emirates* and *Etihad*, have generally tapped into not only Football but also into other sports. As Ulrichsen points out, the visible support and sponsoring of sport not only attracts watchers, but it also taps into the considerable passion that sports fans bring to their favorite teams and events.³⁰⁶ Emirati individuals bought several teams as well as pinned their names on the stadiums of Arsenal London (Emirates Stadium)³⁰⁷ and Manchester City (Etihad Stadium),³⁰⁸ and in the Champions League Final of 2021, millions of viewers around the world watched Manchester City play in a jersey that advertised *Etihad*.

At this point it is important to mention the distinction between marketing and public diplomacy and also refer to the fact that the relationship between the state and private individuals and enterprises differs from country to country. Such sponsoring mustn't always be state-directed. For the purpose of Exposure, it doesn't matter how awareness is raised as long as it consolidates the actor on peoples' mental map, and in the case of the UAE, the line between public and private as well as state and ruling family wealth are opaque at best.³⁰⁹ This means that there is clearly a benefit for the Emirati state in such practices and it suggests that it is part of a broader strategy.

However, *Emirates* and *Etihad* are not mere sponsors to bestow sport with an Emirati label. They represent a tightly and well-coordinated strategy of metaphorically making the UAE, especially Dubai, one of the centres of the world. "Nearly 2 billion people live within four hours' flying time [...] and twice as many within seven hours" from the UAE; beyond that, "any two big cities on Earth can be linked via Dubai with no other stop."³¹⁰ This blessing of the geographic location of the UAE in the middle between Europe, Asia, and Africa culminated in

³⁰⁴ Rafat Ali, 2014.

³⁰⁵ The author of this thesis doubts it.

³⁰⁶ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 167.

³⁰⁷ *Emirates*, 2021.

³⁰⁸ Daniel Taylor, 2011.

³⁰⁹ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 122 f.

³¹⁰ *The Economist*, 2010.

2015 when Dubai became the world's busiest airport for international passengers.³¹¹ The value of this cannot be overstated: Having millions of international passengers, 86,4 million in 2019,³¹² even if only connecting to other flights, very much puts the UAE on those people's mental maps. One stop-over in Dubai on the way from New York to Mumbai is certainly not enough for a person to develop an image of the UAE, which is essential to enhancing reputational security. But for the UAE it serves as an integral part of raising recognition. The willingness to please international customers is a reflection of not only wanting to raise recognition but step up the game and link that awareness with "something positive."³¹³ In 1987, *Emirates*, for instance, became the first Gulf airline to offer alcoholic beverages³¹⁴ and in 2014, Dubai launched the first US customs and border pre-clearance facility to open outside the country since the 1980s,³¹⁵ which is again testament to the centrality of the US in the Emirati perspective. On top of tourism and transportation, the *Emirates* also reinforce the UAE's role as "the preeminent logistical and infrastructural hub in the region."³¹⁶

There are also more extravagant ways of Exposure. Impressive architectural designs are one such tactic, and it has been employed by Kazakhstan, Qatar but arguably most energetically and extravagantly by the UAE. The construction of the artificial islands of Palm Jumeirah was clearly a public diplomacy stunt to gain attention and attract tourism, and has since indeed become a sight known all around the world; the same is true for Burj-Khalifa, the world's tallest building.

This kind of Exposure attracts global recognition as the media will naturally report on the world's tallest building. By repetition and accumulation of such reports, eventually tourism will increase as well, which also relates to the importance of air travel in the UAE. Tourism in general has been a central pillar of the Emirati public diplomacy strategy. According to Ulrichsen, Dubai "led the way" in nation branding, especially by "aggressively" marketing itself as an "international shopping and mass tourism destination" with initiatives like the Dubai Shopping Festival, the construction of the largest mall in the World (Dubai Mall), and artificial ski slopes.³¹⁷ Financial inducements to bring Hollywood producers to the Emirates further

³¹¹ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 119.

³¹² Deena Kamel, 2020.

³¹³ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

³¹⁴ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 120.

³¹⁵ Ted Reed, 2014.

³¹⁶ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 124.

³¹⁷ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 162.

exposes and quite literally *projects* the UAE to the outside world.³¹⁸ This has been successfully achieved with the Mission Impossible franchises, for instance.³¹⁹ In sum, Dubai's tourism strategy seems very successful: While in 1985 fewer than half a million people visited the city, the number in 2019 was just shy of 17 Million.³²⁰

Anholt would argue that this is mere marketing and does not relate to his vision of the nation brand, but as reputational security, to some degree, depends on the actor's branding, the line between the two blurs, at least in effect. The more international visitors are exposed to the UAE, *live* the country, and fill their mental map with an actual experience, the more reputational security the country can expect through mere recognition. In reference to the recognition/reputation debate, tourism is arguably the most effective way of increasing the degree of reputational security without having to rely on the outward Projection of being a "good country."³²¹ Though the country's reputation largely depends on other factors, these elements of Exposure nevertheless also project some sense of national values and identity, especially given that they are artificially constructed rather than taken from or basing on a cultural heritage. It is interesting to note that many of these grand projects, like the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the planned Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, are very relatable to Western audiences, which is in line with the Projection dimension of the Emirati soft power strategy.

8.3.Projection

With the "vision of transforming [themselves] into a global player acting through tolerance and understanding"³²² expressed in the UAE Soft Power Strategy the United Arab Emirates have in many ways moved beyond the game of recognition and into the game of reputation. But while Exposure is comparatively easy for a rich petrol state like the UAE, Projection is significantly more intricate and encounters many more obstacles. In order to increase its reputation and thereby to enhance the degree of reputational security, the UAE need to represent something with which the world – mostly the West – can relate and admire.

³¹⁸ Charles Riley, 2015.

³¹⁹ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 166.

³²⁰ Dubai Online, 2021.

³²¹ Simon Anholt, 2020.

³²² Daniel Golebiowski, 2020; p. 164.

One example of the difficulties of Projection is humanitarian aid. Few countries in the world give as much money or put such an emphasis on humanitarian cooperation in their foreign policy as the UAE. It is reflected in its top standing in Anholt's Good Country Index (rank six of 149 in the category of global contributions to prosperity and equality).³²³ But such work gains less attention than building skyscrapers. Similar to the issue of climate change, the confirmation bias potentially plays against the UAE as foreign audiences might show cynical reactions to rich Arab states advertising their humanitarian engagement.

Projection also carries domestic political risks, which mark the limits of possibilities for countries like the UAE. Similar to why Kazakhstan is stepping on the breaks on issues like human rights, the UAE considers western-style democratization and liberties as dangerous to its socio-economic model.³²⁴ The UAE rank 124th of 162 nations on The Human Freedom Index (Kazakhstan 75th and Qatar 129th);³²⁵ in terms of freedom of press, Reporters Without Borders ranks the UAE 131st of 180 (Kazakhstan 155th and Qatar 128th);³²⁶ and the crackdown that followed the Arab Spring led to closures of some international organizations by the UAE, for instance the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Gallup polling center, the RAND Corporation,³²⁷ as well as arrests of 94 individuals in 2012.³²⁸ The consequential treatment and trial of these "UAE94" was heavily criticized by the International Commission of Jurists.³²⁹

Anholt founded not only the Good Country Index, which is a measure of state behavior, but also the Nation Brands Index, which is a measure of brand perceptions, and he argues that there is an overwhelming correlation of over 80% between the two, indicating that if a country wants to improve its brand it needs to be good.³³⁰ In relation to the degree of reputational security, this is the glass ceiling at which the UAE seem to be stuck for as long as they don't improve their national reality, aka their human rights record, for instance.

But regardless of the fact that the UAE can't and won't democratize and liberalize their society based on a Western model in the short and medium-term future, it can nevertheless tackle certain areas in which it is possible to hedge closer to the West. Although there is no doubt that the Western value system has rifts and is not perfectly homogenous, there are

³²³ The Good Country Index.

³²⁴ Robert Worth, 2020.

³²⁵ The Human Freedom Index, 2020.

³²⁶ World Press Freedom Index, 2021.

³²⁷ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 193.

³²⁸ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 191.

³²⁹ International Commission of Jurists, 2013.

³³⁰ Simon Anholt, 2021; 18:00.

nevertheless some consensuses that have become defining element of Western 'civilization'. Climate change is one and has already been discussed, but the UAE have also tried to appeal to the West by projecting its moderate values on religion and women's rights.

8.3.1. Religion

As Samuel Huntington has foreseen, one of the main clashes of civilizations in contemporary politics is between the Western and the Islamic civilizations. Since the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, a prevalent perception among Western publics is that of an intolerant, even radical and militant Islam. The episodes surrounding the Mohammed caricatures in France and Denmark as well as debates in multiple European countries about laws prohibiting the Niqab are testament to the importance as well as the sensitivity of the issue. "Denmark dropped from sixteenth to fiftieth – below Israel, in fact – among the nations most admired by Muslims worldwide, and its reputation has still not recovered today, fifteen years later." Even Denmark's trade suffered as Scandinavian goods were boycotted in the Muslim World,³³¹ which is further testament to the relation between soft power and the economy.

The perceived lack of religious tolerance in many parts of the Middle East constitutes a liability for the soft power of individual Arab countries vis-à-vis the West. Saudi-Arabia's religious soft power is thus a double-edged sword: It undoubtedly provides it with unique influence among Muslims, its fundamentalist social contract, for example in terms of women's rights and intolerance of religious minorities, however, is undeniably a source of criticism in the West.

Due to its geographical location next to historic trade routes, the UAE have always practiced a more open and tolerant Islam.³³² As described, they also consider Islamic groups like the Muslim Brotherhood as threats to its stability and have substantially supported the fight against ISIS.³³³ In order to underline this sentiment, the UAE have made religious tolerance the centerpiece of its value Projection.

In a pope's first ever trip to the Gulf, Pope Francis visited the UAE in 2019. By itself, such a high-ranking visit already raises a country's profile, at least short-term, but the visit initiated continuing policies that aim at cementing the tolerant perspective of the UAE in the

³³¹ Simon Anholt, 2020; p. 145 f.

³³² Robert Worth, 2020.

³³³ Ian Black, 2014.

world's mind. On February 4th, the Pope and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, one of the most important mosques in Islam, signed the "Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together."³³⁴ It stresses the close historic relations between the three book religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and can be read as a joint vision for religious tolerance and cooperation. The document also inspired the current construction of the Abrahamic Family House in Abu-Dhabi. The huge complex, which is designed by star-architect Sir David Adjaye, unites a church, a synagogue, and a mosque in one square.³³⁵ This is not to deny the authenticity of these tolerant sentiments, but given the non-existence of a Jewish minority (76% Muslims, 9% Christians),³³⁶ these plans clearly enhance the goal of public diplomacy.

This attention devoted to Judaism also connects the UAE's public diplomacy to the Abraham Accords, which suggests that the UAE have been preparing their population for normalization and thus been considering the step as an element of its soft power strategy for some time. The soft power benefit of the Abraham Accords doesn't only stem from spill-over effects, but from the implications that come from its Projection vis-à-vis the West. As the first Arab nation to break 'The Three No's of Khartoum' in the context of a warm peace, the UAE appear less ideological and closer to the Western consensus in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is globally known and hotly debated. Though it is in essence no conflict between religions, the very fact that each side practices its own religion and some central elements of their dispute revolve around the religious importance of the territory at dispute, it is unsurprising that the conflict has assumed religious connotations. Anti-Semitic rhetoric in Arab societies or even from Middle Eastern leaders (like that of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad)³³⁷ illustrates another sensitive rift between the values of the Western and Islamic civilization. By recognizing Israel, the UAE have somewhat shown that they have bridged this rift. Among Arab nations, this may constitute a soft power deficit, but it enhances it vis-à-vis the West. This public diplomacy dimension of the Abraham Accords suggests that Saudi-Arabia and Qatar, given that their regional influence builds much more strongly on religious soft power than that of the UAE, would find fewer benefits in normalization as, in terms of soft power, it might be closer to a zero-sum game. Those observers that predict Saudi-Arabia to normalize its relations with Israel soon either underestimate the weight of soft power or the centrality

³³⁴ Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, 2019.

³³⁵ Elisabeth Schneyder, no date.

³³⁶ U.S. Department of State.

³³⁷ Meir Javedanfar, 2012.

of the Israeli-Palestinian issue in Arab politics. The “weak” reactions to the announcement last year indicate that in this question, at least some change is happening within the Middle East. Further studies on the sentiment on the ‘Arab street’, for example by analyzing Twitter reactions to normalization last year, would be very illuminating.

8.3.2. Women’s Empowerment

By expressing support on the issue of women empowerment, the UAE address another gap between western expectation and perceived Islamic reality. Women’s rights have been consolidated as a fundamental pillar of the western value system as is seen by emphasizing the need for more women in leadership positions, the introduction of quotas in many institutions, and the equal cast of governments in various places (to name just a few, symbolic examples). The evaluation matrix of the public diplomacy of the United Kingdom, for instance, dictates that all activities have to be assessed in its contribution to women’s empowerment.³³⁸

To counter these Western impressions, the UAE are visibly promoting gender equality, for instance by highlighting various statistics like the proportion of seats held in the UAE’s consultative parliamentary body (50%),³³⁹ the number of female ministers in the cabinet (9 out of 33)³⁴⁰ or the rate of women in the diplomatic corps (20%).³⁴¹ Such numbers and other facts, like the fighter jet pilot who led the first air strikes against ISIS³⁴² or the Emirati ambassador to the UN both being women, reappear in the literature and suggest that the narrative has been picked up, at least by close observers. Studies have reflected the Emirati efforts: The Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum, for instance, identifies the UAE as one of the “five most-improved countries” in 2021 versus the last year³⁴³ and now ranks 72nd (Qatar 142nd and Kazakhstan 80th).³⁴⁴ Regardless of the true progress, however, with women empowerment the UAE are not only tackling a societal challenge but also a very prevalent prejudice in Western audiences, and affairs like that around Princess Latifa, who attract a lot of attention, actively undermine these efforts. Moreover, many people who don’t deal with the Middle East in detail might stereotype the UAE as being one and the same with

³³⁸ Nicholas J. Cull, 2019; p. 92.

³³⁹ The World Bank, 2021.

³⁴⁰ The United Arab Emirates Cabinet, 2021.

³⁴¹ Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2021.

³⁴² See for instance: Dana Ford, 2014.

³⁴³ Global Gender Gap Report, 2021; p. 9.

³⁴⁴ Global Gender Gap Report, 2021; p. 10.

the whole Middle East. In order for Western prejudice to change, the region as a whole would need to embrace such policies. The confirmation bias, however, though making the consolidation of a new idea more difficult, also implies that the Emirati advocacy of such policies might unfold a larger initial reaction as they are unexpected and thus also has more potential for progress.

8.3.3. Education

As an actor seeks to constructively manage global politics and economics, effectively accumulate recognition, and credibly increase reputation, it needs to acquire knowledge and training for its population. Education is primarily inward-looking and, in many ways, resembles the listening component of public diplomacy, and hence represents the foundation for all the challenges of enhancing reputational security. The essential necessity of education for actors like Kazakhstan, Qatar, and the UAE to play a decisive role in the modern world becomes evident when considering all these countries' heavy focus on the STEM-disciplines, for instance. But beyond the necessity of education for the actors themselves, it also has heavy Projection elements. Although not quite as emotionally burdened as other topics in this category, an actor's scientific contribution provides it with respect and prestige.

Similar to Qatar but unlike Kazakhstan, the UAE brought many foreign universities to the country. "[B]y far the highest profile educational institution" to have taken root in the UAE is New York University; it opened a "full-fledged portal campus"³⁴⁵ in Abu-Dhabi in 2008, and former US President Bill Clinton then gave the first commencement speech.³⁴⁶ Especially the Graduate Programs it offers (again, many in the STEM-disciplines)³⁴⁷ are a testament to the educational priorities in the UAE. However, doubts have been raised about the benefit for the UAE apart from prestige, as few Emirati nationals have been enrolled and many students leave the UAE upon graduation. Furthermore, also the question of the sustainability of such efforts remains. In the 1980s, over forty US-universities rushed to open branch campuses in Japan but by 2010 only one had survived.³⁴⁸ Regardless, as of 2019, only China hosted more such International Branch Campuses than the UAE (31 in total versus 11 in Qatar),³⁴⁹ and as of 2014,

³⁴⁵ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 165.

³⁴⁶ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 165 f.

³⁴⁷ NYU Abu Dhabi, 2021.

³⁴⁸ Kristian C. Ulrichsen, 2017; p. 128 f.

³⁴⁹ Chris Mackie, 2019.

the UAE hosted the greatest number of international schools (428 versus 131 in Qatar),³⁵⁰ which reflects the international population of the Emirates but also its global outlook.

The Projection elements of what can broadly be considered education were already evident during the Cold War, when the Space Race became an extension of the Cold War;³⁵¹ the term “Sputnik moment” is a linguistic remnant of this technological competition. Though the importance of space exploration for the reputation of a country faded after the Apollo Program had ended, it is again picking up today.³⁵² Several countries as well as private individuals are currently doubling down on their efforts to establish space programs, including the UAE, which in February became the first Arab country to successfully launch an interplanetary mission by sending a space probe to Mars’ orbit.³⁵³ Once there, it will “produce the first global map of the Martian atmosphere” and unusually for a space mission, the UAE will release the data to the international scientific community “without an embargo”.³⁵⁴ The Emirati Mars Mission is a clear signal of technological prowess and has been widely applauded by the scientific community, especially given that the mission consisted entirely of Emirati scientist with an average age of below 35³⁵⁵ and was built from scratch in only six years.³⁵⁶ The UAE’s space program is also tightly connected to its women empowerment strategy. 80% of the science team is female,³⁵⁷ and in April, the UAE also nominated the first female Arab astronaut to go to space.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁰ Nick Clark, 2014.

³⁵¹ Burton „Ernie“ Catledge & Jeremy Powerll, 2009; p. 14.

³⁵² Steven J. Markovich, Andrew Chatzky, and Anshu Shiripurapu, 2021.

³⁵³ Deutsche Welle, 2021.

³⁵⁴ Elizabeth Gibney, 2020.

³⁵⁵ Ine Steenmans & Neil Morisetti, 2020.

³⁵⁶ Elizabeth Gibney, 2020.

³⁵⁷ Elizabeth Gibney, 2020.

³⁵⁸ Deutsche Welle, 2021.

9. Conclusion

Reputational security is a concept that businesses have been very much aware of for some time.³⁵⁹ Within the field of nation state security, however, the concept is fundamentally new. This thesis tried to take this novel concept, explore it, and provide its first in-depth analysis. By identifying the UAE's challenges, it was established that the Emirates face both external as well as internal threats, and that with hard and soft power they have two broader strategies with which to mitigate them. Based on Cull's comprehensive studies on public diplomacy, the thesis laid out the framework in which soft power can be cultivated before introducing the concept of the nation brand and consequently the thinking behind reputational security itself. As scholarship does not provide a theoretical framework for the study of reputational security, it became necessary to develop a framework of analysis upon which to investigate the three case studies. This thesis considers the Participation-Exposure-Projection framework as well as the analysis of the Kazakh, Qatari, and Emirati cases its most significant contribution to scholarship. The framework has not only outlined and defined which approaches exist in order to enhance reputational security, but the case studies have also shown its utility. If embraced individually, some reputational security can be achieved, but only if followed collectively, an actor can expect a maximum amount. Of the three cases that this thesis investigated, none has shown a more collective approach, most importantly in the field of Projection, than the UAE. However, more case studies would be needed in order to evaluate the broader applicability of the Participation-Exposure-Projection framework and its potential usability to establish a model with which to explain in further detail the relationship between its variables.

It should be beyond doubt that the importance of soft power has dramatically risen relative to hard power and will likely continue to do so as globalization progresses. It is therefore only natural to conclude that national security too is increasingly tied to a nation's availability of such power. The immeasurability of reputational security and its dependence on intuition make it hard, however, to provide a conclusive answer to the second hypothesis, which suggested that soft power can provide an actor with reputational security. In that sense, reputational security follows the same logic as nuclear deterrence: One might reasonably argue that mutually assured destruction so far prevented the world from fighting a third, final world war similarly to how one might reasonably argue that Taiwan's westward orientation has prevented China from invading it. It is impossible to verify either of the statements as they

³⁵⁹ Ra Tiedemann-Nkabinde & Daniil Davydoff, 2019.

can only be assumed to be true as long as the status-quo doesn't change. But similar to considering nuclear deterrence to be valid at least to some degree given that no nuclear Armageddon has occurred yet, the premise of reputational security can equally be considered valid given the precedents listed above. Though it is equally impossible to definitively state that Russia would not have dared take Crimea if Ukraine had been "sufficiently distinct", Cull is correct when he writes that "[i]t is sometimes easiest to identify a dimension of international society by its absence."³⁶⁰

The third hypothesis stated that "[t]he UAE actively cultivate and project soft power as a way to complement its hard power capabilities and enhance its reputational security by hedging to the West." This is undeniably true. Upon close inspection of the UAE's behavior and policies as laid out in the chapters on Participation, Exposure, and Projection it should be evident that the UAE are pursuing a clear and distinct soft power strategy aimed at supporting its economy, consolidating its stability, and enhancing its reputational security. While all the arguments brought forth in this thesis clearly suggest the UAE's intent, the success of this approach is much harder to assess. The answer rests entirely on two factors, the first of which is context. The degree of reputational security that would be necessary to counter a certain challenge depends on the nature of that challenge. The second factor is the recognition-reputation dichotomy. Again, given the difficulties of quantification, it remains unclear how much recognition is sufficient or how much reputation is necessary to provide a certain degree of reputational security. However, the data and insights provided by researchers and scholars like Simon Anholt or Nicholas Cull suggest that recognition is good but reputation is best.³⁶¹ In any case, though widely disregarded by the Realist school of international relations theory, global brand-recognition and thus reputational security is an additional line of defense.

This thesis concludes that among comparable countries in the Middle East and beyond, few, if any, have shown more effort than the UAE in trying to appear modern, tolerant, and 'Western'. But based on the foundational work of Samuel P. Huntington as well as intuition, this thesis finds it hard to view the Emirati Projection efforts as either sufficient or likely to be sufficient in the short to medium-term future to steer the sentiments of Western publics towards accepting the UAE as similar in values or identity. However, if the UAE continues on its path and with the passing of time and the accumulation of perceptions, it is not impossible

³⁶⁰ Nicholas J. Cull, 2018.

³⁶¹ Nicholas J. Cull.

that the United Arab Emirates will not only take shape on peoples' mental maps, but also appear in a similar shade than that of the West. Nevertheless, the ultimate glass ceiling is the fact that as a culturally indistinct nation that shares one heritage with a whole region, the ultimate success of the Emirati soft power strategy is tied to the Western perception of the whole Middle East.

But all this focus on soft power and international reputation of course cannot distract from the fact that hard power – payments and coercion – has been the decisive factor for states' survival in the past and remains a fundamental necessity today. The UAE, not least due to their conflict with Iran and the volatility of the Middle East, seem to be acutely aware of the needed balance between hard and soft power capabilities. It is within this conflation, described as *smart power* by Joseph Nye,³⁶² where the real success of the UAE seems to lie. They have a sophisticated military, a strong alliance system, a successful economy, as well as an improving image and increasing influence in the world. The Abraham Accords are a reflection of all these elements and thus a perfect example of the UAE's smart strategy. Arguably, this is what Nye meant when he wrote about "the means to success in world politics."³⁶³

³⁶² Joseph R. Nye, 2004; p. 32.

³⁶³ Joseph R. Nye, 2004.

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