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The Emirati recipe for an
effective foreign policy

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Abstract:

Beginning in the early XXI century, the importance of territorial size has gradually diminished, thanks to the new opportunities in the fields of information and communication technologies. Despite its minute size, the tremendously active foreign policy of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has catalysed the rise of this country to the podium of regional powers, and its impact is now perceived not only in the Gulf, but also in remote locations like Madrid, Tripoli, Rabat or Addis Ababa.

This foreign policy is not only carried out in the diplomatic sphere, but it also presents a more aggressive facet in the military domain, as well as in the economic realm, which tends to go unnoticed. Thus, unconventional tools like sports diplomacy, the attraction of foreign military trainers and the use of investment packages with strings attached have aligned to serve the governing elite's foreign policy objectives. In this paper, the different methods used by the UAE in its current foreign policy will be analysed, together with a case study of the Emirati presence in the Horn of Africa, which will shed light on how these instruments are used in a specific setting.

Keywords:

United Arab Emirates (UAE), foreign policy, investments, diplomacy, Horn of Africa.

***NOTE:** The ideas contained in the Opinion Papers shall be responsibility of their authors, without necessarily reflecting the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defense.

La receta emiratí para una política exterior efectiva

Resumen:

Desde los inicios del siglo XXI la importancia de la extensión territorial ha disminuido gradualmente, gracias a las nuevas oportunidades en los campos de las tecnologías de la información y comunicación. A pesar de su reducido tamaño, la política exterior tremendamente activa de Emiratos Árabes Unidos (EAU) ha catalizado el ascenso de ese país al podio de potencias regionales, y su impacto es ahora percibido no solo en el Golfo, sino en lugares tan remotos como Madrid, Trípoli, Rabat o Addis Abeba.

Esta política exterior no se desarrolla solamente en el ámbito diplomático, sino que también presenta una faceta más agresiva en el ámbito militar, y una tercera vertiente económica que suele pasar desapercibida. Así, herramientas poco convencionales como la diplomacia deportiva, la atracción de entrenadores militares extranjeros y el uso de paquetes de inversión con condicionantes se alinean para servir los objetivos en materia de política exterior de la élite gobernante. En este trabajo, se analizarán los instrumentos utilizados por EAU en su política exterior actual, junto con un análisis de la presencia emiratí en el Cuerno de África, para ver esas herramientas en acción.

Palabras clave:

Emiratos Árabes Unidos (EAU), política exterior, inversiones, diplomacia, Cuerno de África.

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Introduction

With less than 1.5 million native citizens¹ and a smaller size than Andalusia, the UAE plays in the premier league of international relations. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahayan officially presides over this small cornucopia, which houses the sixth largest oil reserve and the seventh largest gas reserve², although the real leader is Mohamed bin Zayed, the crown prince. It also has the most diversified economy in the Gulf Cooperation Council, and has become a global hub for finance, transportation and trade. While it is true that the ownership of natural resources can bring prosperity, the success of the Emirati project relies on many other factors. For this reason, it is not uncommon to ask the following question: how can such a small country have a disproportionate influence and become a full-fledged regional power?

This document does not intend to carry out an exhaustive analysis of the reasons behind the main goals of the Emirati foreign policy, since that perspective usually receives sufficient attention. Therefore, the paper will focus on understanding the instruments used by the UAE in its current foreign policy. Furthermore, it will always be useful to be acquainted with the foreign policy toolkit of other countries – even more so when they have acquired a high degree of influence – because that knowledge can benefit and strengthen Spanish foreign policy itself in those areas where it falters most.

The paper begins by introducing the objectives of current Emirati foreign policy, and then devotes a long section to the instruments used to strengthen its foreign policy. It then presents a case study on the Horn of Africa, to see how these instruments are used in a specific setting, and it finally sheds light on the UAE's presence in Spain.

¹ The population of the UAE reaches 10 million, but most of them are expatriates.

² BRIDGE, Sam, *UAE moves up to 6th in global list of oil, gas reserves after new discoveries*, Arabian Business, November 4-2019. Available at: <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/energy/432402-uae-moves-up-to-6th-in-global-list-of-oil-gas-reserves> Accessed on September 30-2020

Emirati foreign policy goals

Before examining those instruments, it is convenient to get acquainted with the main objectives of current Emirati foreign policy, which may or may not coincide with the objectives set out in the UAE Constitution. These can be understood from two perspectives.

On the one hand, the UAE is confronting Iran and political Islamism. The regime in Tehran is perceived as a serious threat in Abu Dhabi which, in turn, is the emirate which holds the reins of Emirati foreign policy. There are several reasons that explain that enmity, the most important of which include an old territorial dispute, the normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE, and the sectarian confrontation that has led the UAE to position itself alongside Saudi Arabia and against Iran in their fight for hegemony in the region and the Muslim world. The other great enemy is political Islam, embodied in the Muslim Brotherhood and, by extension, in two of its great defenders: Qatar and Turkey. This confrontation intensified in 2017 with the diplomatic crisis in Qatar and the subsequent blockade. As for Turkey, relations have gradually worsened, especially after having conflicting interests in Mohammed Morsi's Egypt, the attempted coup in Turkey and the various proxy wars in Libya and Syria.

On the other hand, the UAE seeks to maintain stability in the region while increasing its influence to protect its treasured prosperity. Therefore, it aims to present itself as a tolerant and innovative country; a vital requirement to attract foreign direct investment and strengthen ties with other countries.

Analysis of the UAE's foreign policy instruments

To deliver an organized presentation of such a multifaceted foreign policy, the tools under discussion have been divided into three areas: diplomatic, military and economic instruments.

Diplomatic instruments

To understand the reach of Emirati foreign policy, it may be useful to consider the number of foreign representations that the UAE maintains abroad, as well as those foreign representations it hosts within the country itself. The most up-to-date data³ shows that the UAE maintains 98 embassies abroad and 20 consulates. The other side of the coin is even more interesting: the UAE is home to 121 foreign embassies in Abu Dhabi and 74 consulates, most of them in Dubai. This is, in effect, a disproportionate number of representations if we consider the relatively small size of the country, both in geographic and demographic terms. The strategic, energetic and economic importance of the country may explain the disparity.

To better understand such overrepresentation, Figure 1 shows the amount of foreign representations in the rest of Gulf Cooperation Council countries. It is clear that the number of embassies and consulates in the UAE far exceeds that of its neighbouring countries, and in some cases, such as Bahrain, it even quadruples that number. The only country with which it maintains parity is Saudi Arabia, a country with three times more inhabitants and an area 25 times larger. On the other hand, the UAE also far exceeds the number of representations in other countries with roughly the same population size, such as Hungary, Jordan and Azerbaijan. While a high figure in foreign representations alone is not a decisive advantage, in conjunction with a smart strategy and an active diplomacy, it can help project Emirati interests abroad very effectively.

³ Data extracted from: *Embassy Pages*, EmbassyPages.com. Available at: <https://www.embassypages.com/> Accessed on October 1-2020

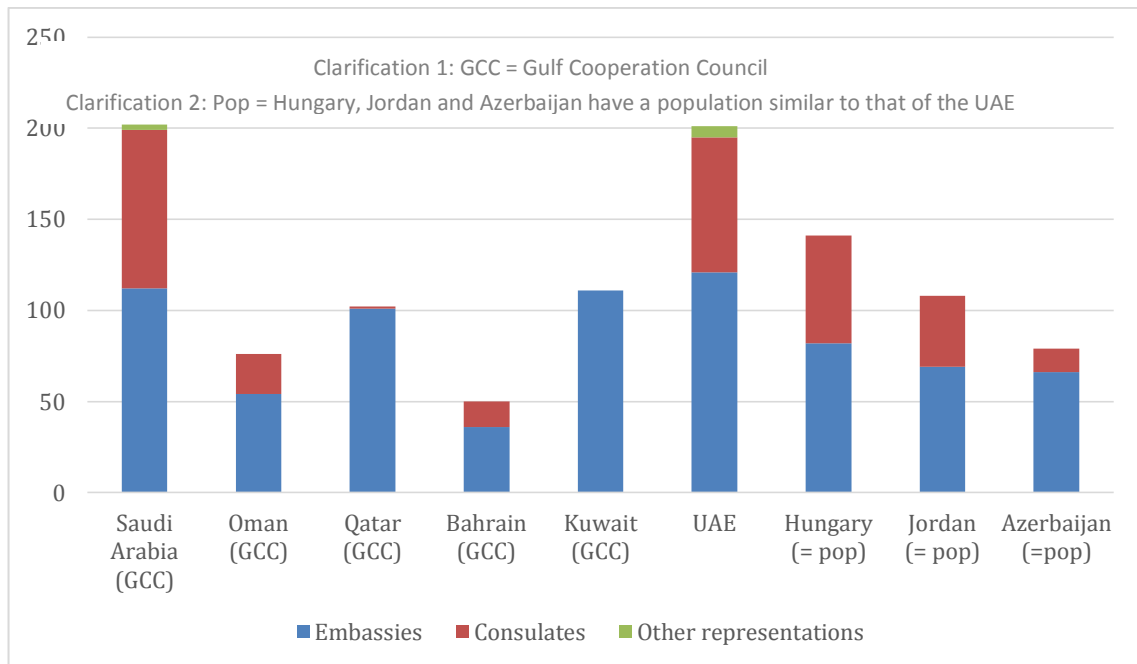


Figure 1. Foreign representations in the UAE and in other countries. Source. Embassy Pages.

The UAE has been able to effectively use the aforementioned diplomatic overrepresentation, maintaining a very intense pace of official visits and meetings with foreign dignitaries. While Emirati governing elites are constantly receiving presidents, prime ministers and ministers of foreign affairs, various senior officials are working tirelessly abroad. A clear example is the number of encounters that senior Emirati officials had with their counterparts during November and December 2019⁴. In just two randomly selected months⁵, 26 encounters have been recorded, and it is likely that other meetings have gone unnoticed. In comparison, a bigger country like Spain, being six times larger and with five times the population of the UAE, had less than a dozen encounters in Spanish territory or abroad, according to news released by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on those same dates⁶.

⁴ Data extracted from: Emirates News Agency. Available at: <https://www.wam.ae/en> Accessed on October 3-2020

⁵ Although these two months have been randomly selected, the frequency of official visits and meetings may vary depending on the time of the year and on unforeseeable events. Therefore, this number does not represent an average.

⁶ Data extracted from: *Sala de Prensa*, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación. Available at: <http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/es/SalaDePrensa/Paginas/inicio.aspx> Accessed on October 3-2020

November and December, 2019				
Date	Country	Country representative	UAE representative	Issue
December 28	Pakistan	President	Minister of Tolerance	Bilateral relations
December 25	Saudi Arabia	Minister of Foreign Affairs	UAE ambassador to Saudi Arabia	Bilateral relations and cooperation
December 25	Kazakhstan	President	UAE ambassador to Kazakhstan	Bilateral relations
December 23	Eritrea	President	Crown Prince	Bilateral relations
December 23	Sierra Leone	President	Minister of State	Bilateral relations
December 18	China	Other officials	Minister of Climate Change and Environment	Environmental cooperation
December 16	Cyprus	President of the Parliament	Crown Prince	Bilateral relations
December 15	Colombia	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Bilateral relations
December 12	Kyrgyzstan	President	Prime Minister	Bilateral relations
December 3	Egypt	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Libya, Syria, Turkey and terrorism
November 30	Guinea	President	Crown Prince	Bilateral relations
November 28	New Zealand	Deputy Prime Minister	Minister of State	Bilateral relations
November 27	Zambia	President	Prime Minister	Bilateral relations
November 24	Montenegro	President	Crown Prince	Bilateral relations
November 19	Zimbabwe	President	Crown Prince	Bilateral relations
November 19	Guatemala	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Minister of State for Foreign Affairs	Bilateral relations
November 18	Ghana	President	Crown Prince	Bilateral relations
November 18	Liberia	President	Crown Prince	Bilateral relations
November 17	Mauritania	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Bilateral relations
November 17	Bangladesh	Prime Minister	Prime Minister	Bilateral relations
November 16	Bahrain	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Crown Prince	Bilateral relations
November 13	Egypt	President	Crown Prince	Bilateral relations
November 7	Maldives	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Bilateral relations
November 6	Kuwait	Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs	Deputy Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs	Consular affairs
November 5	Senegal	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Minister of State	Bilateral relations
November 2	Bulgaria	Deputy Prime Minister	Minister of State	Bilateral relations

Table 1. Meetings between Emirati dignitaries and its counterparts. Source. Emirates News Agency.

The key is that the UAE does not rely solely on its foreign minister, but many other figures also ‘do diplomacy’, meeting often with heads of state, prime ministers and other dignitaries. Specifically, apart from President Khalifa bin Zayed, who de facto does not lead the country, and Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed, other notable personalities include Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed, Prime Minister Mohamed bin Rashid al Maktoum, the first Deputy Minister Mansur bin Zayed and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash. And, of course, for the rest of the cabinet it is not strange to travel often to meet with their counterparts.

This dynamic has not stopped with the arrival of COVID-19, and the visits have been transformed into telephone calls to expand bilateral relations, discuss regional crises, and to congratulate each other during certain celebrations. Only between mid-August to

mid-September 2020, there have been about 18 calls⁷ with presidents and ministers from all over the world, although most of them were concentrated around the Mediterranean and the European Union, given the existing tensions with Turkey and the normalization of relations with Israel. This frequency is not something exceptional; it actually represents the Emirati ordinary diplomatic dynamics.

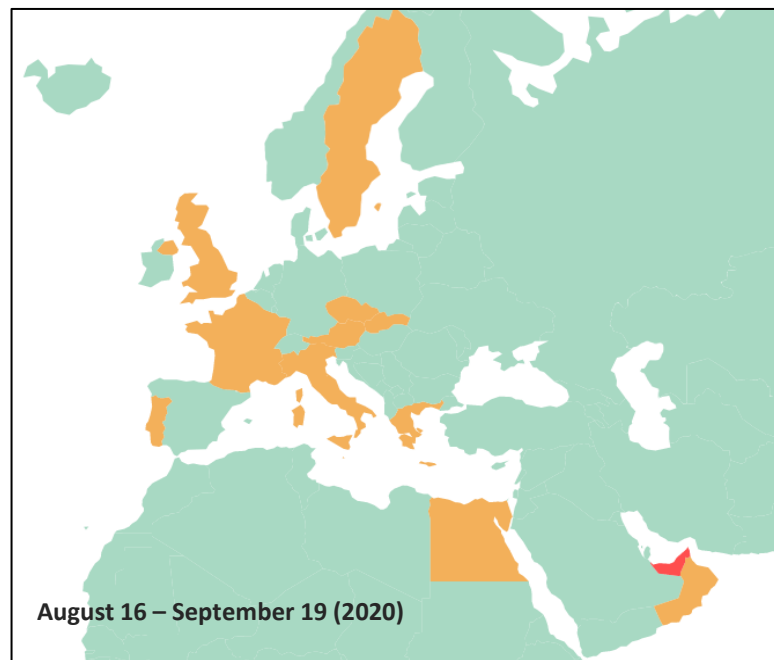


Figure 2. Some countries with which the UAE had telephone conversations. Source: Emirates News Agency.

Complementing the frequent calls, the UAE has embarked on a ‘COVID diplomacy’ strategy, sending around 1,500 metric tons of medical supplies – tests, masks, gloves, and the like – to 118 countries, thereby supporting the work of some 1.4 million doctors and health personnel⁸. Even to a rival like Iran, the UAE has sent up to 60 tons of aid⁹. Thus, the UAE has managed to improve its reputation enormously, by offering generous help at a time when, for many, sending precious medical supplies abroad would seem unthinkable.

⁷ Data extracted from: Emirates News Agency. Available at: <https://www.wam.ae/en> Accessed on October 3-2020

⁸ UAE sends fifth medical aid shipment to Colombia, Relief Web, September 18-2020. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/uae-sends-fifth-medical-aid-shipment-colombia> Accessed on October 3-2020

⁹ VIDAL, Albert, *Irán y Emiratos: análisis del nuevo escenario regional*, Artículo 30, August 3-2020. Available at: <https://articulo30.org/politica-defensa/iran-emiratos-analisis-nuevo-escenario-regional-albert-vidal/> Accessed on October 2-2020

Abu Dhabi has taken advantage of the circumstances to exercise soft power through numerous initiatives, so only the most prominent will be listed. In 2017, the ‘Soft Power Council’ was created with the intention of developing strategies to improve the country’s reputation¹⁰, such as, for example, the sports sponsorships of the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix and the Emirati logos present in the football matches of Real Madrid and Paris Saint Germain, or with the expansion of the Etihad and Emirates airlines. The ‘Public and Cultural Diplomacy Office’ was also recently inaugurated within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which aims to reinforce cultural exchange through initiatives like the Louvre Abu Dhabi or the Expo2020¹¹. In the educational field, the UAE enjoys the presence of world-renowned institutions such as The Sorbonne, New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology¹². In the religious realm, the country has become a champion of religious tolerance, especially after the historic visit of Pope Francis in 2019 and the construction of numerous churches and temples of worship.

An equally important factor is the UAE’s strong presence in Washington DC, through numerous lobbies and public relations campaigns. In 2013, it ranked as the government that spent the most on these activities¹³, and in 2018 an estimated 20 different entities accepted more than USD 20 million¹⁴ from the UAE, while numerous think tanks and

¹⁰ *The UAE soft power strategy*, The United Arab Emirates’ Government portal. Available at: <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/federal-governments-strategies-and-plans/the-uae-soft-power-strategy> Accessed on October 5-2020

¹¹ NUSSEIBEH, Zaki, *The values of Cultural Diplomacy*, Office of Public & Cultural Diplomacy. Available at: <https://opcd.ae/about-opcd/cultural-diplomacy/> Accessed on October 5-2020

¹² *Heritage*, Office of Public & Cultural Diplomacy. Available at: <https://opcd.ae/about-the-uae/heritage/> Accessed on October 5-2020

¹³ ITKOWITZ, Colby, *Which foreign countries spent the most to influence US politics?*, The Washington Post, May 14-2014. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/in-the-loop/wp/2014/05/14/which-foreign-countries-spent-the-most-to-influence-u-s-politics/> Accessed on October 5-2020

¹⁴ *The Emirati lobby – How the UAE wins in Washington: report*, Middle East Observer, October 16-2019. Available at: https://www.middleeastobserver.org/2019/10/16/the-emirati-lobby-how-the-uae-wins-in-washington-report/?_cf_chl_jschl_tk_=5beba8a30f0f5d87a7be994668c2663c359b1a91-1600886201-0-AT_uS0vsbRnqc-MRFCFqPG1qIXVnFShx0kP-jeGtK5mdd8Oq2aCP6tIVvmAbaMqFXc1tlcp1xJAY5RjqvTNREi4XuovEBz6IKEE0buxR8X0ITGUUIT-1uKrdM1CtLn7U_BqDSmmnnlGZ4cv9AtkqnLYtAep5FZJ-yf-To8nOV-uLBWVZ-ik9_HKLdmgBBySZrilq6u3IP7eksi_kf9MeKFju1PcURINWum53YuvzBdPtw4wB1RMknUb3H7hxE_O3etbFgaRv0MFHTBx3Ry0K6Znk3tV-A65a8WOhlSkug73EAKIJ2bwEsYDeY58PtOqPOAn2QJJS_SA-efqfc8bxD-UJ90Zi_JjYqKS4CklyrzvY Accessed on October 5-2020

research centres receive funding from the UAE regularly and, consequently, promote policies that are beneficial to this Gulf power.

Military instruments

A network of military bases is necessary to maintain a presence in different theatres that are a source of concern for Abu Dhabi. For that reason, the UAE keeps a naval and air base in Assab, Eritrea; vital to the conflict in Yemen¹⁵. Abu Dhabi also considered building another base in the port of Berbera, Somaliland, which has eventually not succeeded¹⁶. In contrast, the nearby island of Socotra has hosted Emirati military installations for a few years. Other projects that have not been officially confirmed include a small airbase on the Perim Island¹⁷ (in the Bab el Mandeb Strait) and further afield in north-eastern Libya, where some sources indicate that the UAE deployed Wing Loong drones and AT-802 strike aircraft at the Al-Khadim air base¹⁸.

In addition, the UAE Armed Forces takes full advantage of its good relations with NATO countries and its allies in the region to carry out military exercises very frequently, developing interoperability with some of the world's best performing militaries (Table 2). By doing this, the UAE minimizes the lack of preparation, which has been one of the greatest shortcomings of the Arab armies in recent decades. This collaboration is particularly close with the US, with which it has conducted more than 17 joint exercises since January 2017. Washington has also allowed Emirati pilots to train alongside its best pilots in numerous editions of the prestigious Red Flag exercise. Iniohos (Table 2)

¹⁵ MELVIN, Neil, *The Foreign Military Presence in the Horn of Africa Region*, SIPRI, April 2019. Available at: <https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/sipribp1904.pdf> Accessed on October 8-2020

¹⁶ *Somaliland UAE military base to be turned into civilian airport*, Reuters, September 15-2019. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-emirates-idUSKBN1W00FI> Accessed on October 8-2020

¹⁷ NUMAN TELCI, Ismail; ÖZTÜRK HOROZ, Tuba, *Military bases in the foreign policy of the United Arab Emirates*, Insight Turkey, Spring 2018, Vol 20, No. 2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26390312>, Accessed on October 8-2020

¹⁸ ROJKES DOMBE, Ami, *Report: The UAE is expanding the Al-Khadim air base in Libya*, Israel Defense, December 17-2017. Available at: <https://www.israeldefense.co.il/en/node/32228> Accessed on October 8-2020

Also: *UAE operating an airbase near Marj: report*, Libya Herald, October 28-2016. Available at: <https://www.libyaherald.com/2016/10/28/uae-operating-an-airbase-near-marj-report/> Accessed on October 8-2020

provides another extremely interesting insight: the UAE has been training with the Israeli Armed Forces since 2016, despite not formalizing their relations until 2020.

Date	Place	Name of the exercise	Participants
August 2020	Greece	Joint Air Force training	UAE, Greece
March 2020	UAE	Operation Thundercloud	UAE, US
March 2020	UAE	Native Fury 20	UAE, US
December 2019	UAE	Iron Union 12	UAE, US
June 2019	Red Sea	Eagle Salute – Eagle Response 2019	UAE, US, Egypt
June 2019	UAE	Bonds of Strength 1	UAE, Jordan
April 2019	Greece	Iniohos 2019	UAE, Greece, US, Israel, Italy, Cyprus
March 2019	UAE	Hamimat 10	UAE, France
March 2019	Saudi Arabia	Peninsula Shield 10	UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain
February 2019	UAE	Cooperation 2	UAE, Oman
December 2018	UAE	Iron Union 9	UAE, US
November 2018	Egypt	Arab Shield 1	UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain Kuwait, Jordan
October 2018	UAE	Iron Magic 19	UAE, US
April 2018	UAE	Desert Tiger 5	UAE, Malaysia
March 2018	Greece	Iniohos 2018	UAE, Greece, US, Israel, Italy, UK, Cyprus
March 2018	UAE	Gulf Star 1	UAE, India
March 2018	India	Multilateral exercise	UAE, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka
February 2018	Bahrain	Power of Determination	UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia
February 2018	UAE	Native Fury 2018	UAE, US
January 2018	UAE	Iron Union 6	UAE, US
December 2017	UAE	Flag 4	UAE, US, France, UK
December 2017	Sudan	Coast Heroes 1	UAE, Sudan
October 2017	UAE	Iron Magic 18	UAE, US
September 2017	UAE	Iron Union 5	UAE, US
April 2017	UAE	Iron Claw 3	UAE, US
April 2017	UAE	Desert Tiger 4	UAE, Malaysia
March 2017	Greece	Iniohos 2017	UAE, Greece, US, Israel, Italy
March 2017	UAE	Zayed 2	UAE, Egypt
January 2017	Gulf	Sea Dagger 17	UAE, UK
Almost every year since 2009	US	Red Flag	UAE and many other US allies

Table 2. Joint military exercises of the UAE in the past years. Source: Emirates News Agency.

To avoid overloading its Armed Forces beyond its possibilities, the UAE has tended to train local actors in the various settings where it has interests at stake. In the Horn of Africa, the UAE trained the Somali army between 2014 and 2018 and has been training the Puntland Maritime Police Force (PMPF) since 2010¹⁹, to confront the piracy that threatens the Bab el Mandeb Strait. In Yemen, the UAE has trained and equipped the Elite Hadrami Forces²⁰, and in 2015 it launched a program to train Yemeni pilots at the Al-Anad base²¹. In Libya, the UAE is rumoured to have relied on Sudanese mercenaries

¹⁹ KHAN, Taimur, *Shifting regional dynamics challenge UAE's balancing act in Somalia*, The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, April 26-2018. Available at: <https://agsiw.org/shifting-regional-dynamics-challenge-uaes-balancing-act-in-somalia/> Accessed on October 8-2020

²⁰ ARDEMAGNI, Eleonora, *The UAE's security-economic nexus in Yemen*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 19-2018. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/76876> Accessed on October 7-2020

²¹ ARDEMAGNI, Eleonora, *UAE's military priorities in Yemen: counterterrorism and the South*, Istituto per

and invested in training militias loyal to Khalifa Haftar²². Abu Dhabi has often used private military companies such as Reflex Responses and Knowledge International to carry out the training activities²³.

Another crucial factor is the multi-million-dollar investments in arms purchases, thanks to a defence budget of more than USD 20 billion per year between 2011 and 2014²⁴. In addition, the UAE is incubating a native defence industry under the umbrella of the EDGE Group, which in 2019 absorbed 25 native defence companies to increase their efficiency²⁵. Its goal is not to achieve self-sufficiency, but rather the development of systems in niche markets, such as the manufacture of ships, drones, and armoured vehicles. Despite being in its infancy, the Emirati defence industry has already produced systems such as the Caracal machine gun, the Yabhon United 40 and Garmousha drones, or the NIMR armoured personal carrier, already used by several armies²⁶. These companies count on the help of technological leaders, such as BAE Systems, Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, with whom they have signed memoranda of understanding and initiated several joint projects²⁷.

gli studi di politica internazionale, July 28-2016. Available at:

<https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/uaes-military-priorities-yemen-counterterrorism-and-south-15573>

Accessed on October 7-2020

²² Video shows UAE officers guiding Haftar's militia, Anadolu Agency, July 9-2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/video-shows-uae-officers-guiding-haftars-militia/1870353> Accessed

on October 7-2020

²³ IBISH, Hussein, *The UAE's evolving National Security Strategy*, The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, April 6-2017. Available at: <https://agsiw.org/uaes-evolving-national-security-strategy/> Accessed on October 7-2020

²⁴ UAE military spending/defense budget 1997-2020, Macro Trends. Available at: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/ARE/uae/military-spending-defense-budget#:~:text=UAE%20military%20spending%2Fdefense%20budget%20for%202014%20was%20%242.76B,a%2023.85%25%20increase%20from%202012.&text=UAE%20military%20spending%2Fdefense%20budget%20for%202011%20was%20%2419.18B,a%209.58%25%20increase%20from%202010>

Accessed on October 6-2020

²⁵ Mohamed bin Zayed inaugurates EDGE, an advanced technology conglomerate, poised to transform defence industrial capabilities, EDGE Group, November 5-2019, <https://edgegroup.ae/news/33>, Accessed on October 6-2020

²⁶ BARANY, Zoltan, *Indigenous Defense Industries in the Gulf*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 24-2020. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/indigenous-defense-industries-gulf>, Accessed on October 6-2020

²⁷ SAMAAN, Jean-Loup, *The rise of the Emirati defense industry*, The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 14-2019. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/79121> Accessed on October 9-2020

Lastly, Abu Dhabi has tackled the problem of manpower shortages by introducing compulsory military service for all Emirati male citizens in 2014, the duration of which depends on the educational level achieved²⁸. Apart from having more potential soldiers, the service actively promotes a healthy lifestyle, civic values and has reduced crime figures. Abu Dhabi has bet heavily on imbuing its army with a Western military culture, sending almost all of its officers to military schools in the UK, US or France²⁹, and simultaneously attracting foreign contractors and specialists to train the UAE Armed Forces, as happened with the former head of the Special Operations Group in Australia³⁰. In this way, a series of common behaviours in many Arab armies – which are often caused by fear of failure and the importance of ‘face-saving’ – that reduce their military effectiveness are minimized. At the same time, more advantageous behaviours are promoted on the battlefield, such as initiative, creativity, flexibility and sincerity³¹.

Economic instruments

The UAE has not hesitated to use its economic might to direct huge amounts of humanitarian and development aid to numerous countries, although these funds are usually concentrated in a few countries that are of great interest to Abu Dhabi, such as Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Jordan or Yemen. Aid is often instrumentalized to reduce the influence of actors with competing interests, or to gain international legitimacy and local allies, while justifying certain interventions. It is hard to determine the exact amount of aid, since there are different metrics to measure it, but according to official sources the

²⁸ UAE extends compulsory military service to 16 months, Reuters, July 8-2018. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-emirates-military/uae-extends-compulsory-military-service-to-16-months-idUSKBN1JY093> Accessed on October 9-2020

²⁹ BARANY, Zoltan, *Military officers in the Gulf: career trajectories and determinants*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 5-2019. Available at: https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/191105_Gulf_Officers_Final.pdf Accessed on October 9-2020

³⁰ WELCH, Dylan; TAYLOR, Kyle; OAKES, Dan; *Australian army veterans advising foreign army accused of war crimes*, ABC, December 13-2018. Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-12-14/australian-army-veterans-advising-foreign-army-accused-war-crime/10611142> Accessed on October 9-2020

³¹ POLLACK, Kenneth, *Armies of Sand: the past, present, and future of Arab military effectiveness*, March 14-2019, Oxford University Press. Accessed on October 3-2020

UAE was the world's first donor between 2013 and 2017 according to the ratio of Official Development Assistance/Gross National Income, far exceeding the 0.7% target suggested by the UN³².

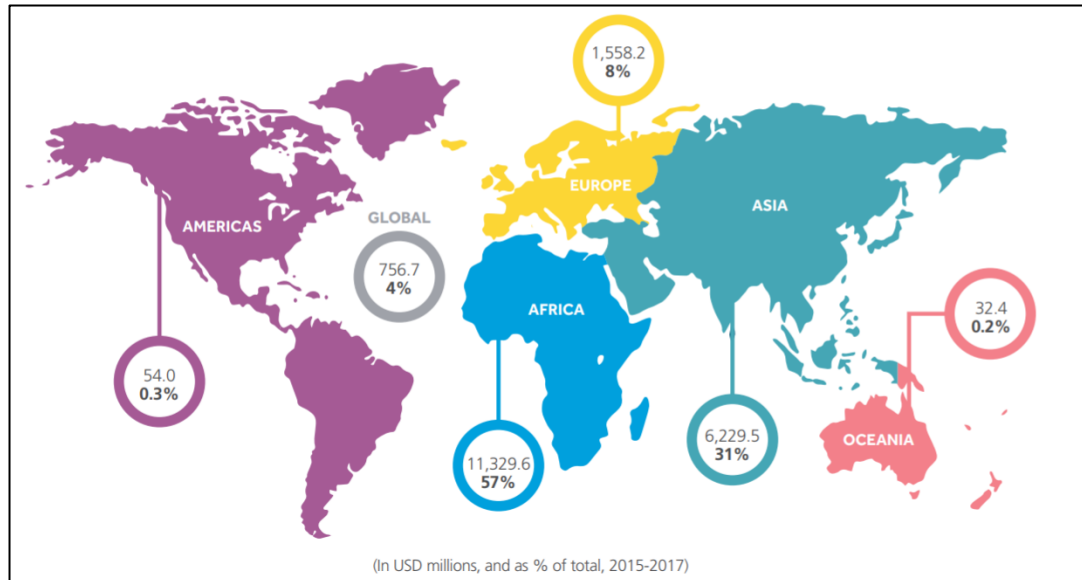


Figure 3. UAE aid between 2015-2017, by continent.

Source. UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation, 2017.

International summits hosted in the UAE to attract investment toward third countries are a very useful tool, as they allow the UAE to become the intermediary in those transactions, giving it more influence when it comes to deciding the final destination of such investments. Some examples that position the UAE as a leader before many African countries include the Africa Investment Summit³³, organized by the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA, the UAE's largest sovereign wealth fund), and the Africa Global Business Forum³⁴, organized by the Dubai Chamber of Commerce. The UAE also uses loans, and large investment packages to attract undecided governments and position itself as a priority partner in the face of potential competitors, as happened in Sudan after the fall of Omar al-Bashir. Alternatively, these tools are used to fortify allied

³² UAE named world's largest humanitarian donor for fifth straight year, Relief Web, April 9-2018. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/united-arab-emirates/uae-named-world-s-largest-humanitarian-donor-fifth-straight-year> Accessed on October 2-2020

³³ Media & Resources, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, November 18-2019. Available at: https://www.adia.ae/en/News/media_news_1.aspx Accessed on October 9-2020

³⁴ Scale-Up Africa, Global Business Forum 2019 Africa, 2019. Available at: <https://globalbusinessforum.com/africa> Accessed on October 9-2020

governments, as happened in Egypt after Abdelfatah El-Sisi's takeover, with colossal loans and investments.

Emirati companies wholly or partly owned by the state through family networks have also served as a spearhead to promote certain government foreign policy objectives.

1. Sports sponsorships from airlines such as Etihad and Emirates have contributed to enhancing the country's image, building trust with millions of fans of great teams, such as Real Madrid and Arsenal. The goal of those sponsorships is to turn the UAE into a global transport hub, a transit point between Europe, Africa and Asia³⁵.
2. Dubai Ports World, on the other hand, has been acquiring ports in strategic locations to increase its presence on the main sea routes. It is rumoured that some of its facilities could have a dual use, which could host naval forces if the need arose³⁶. In addition to that, the company plays an important role in containing piracy, especially around the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa, by organizing conferences to fight against this threat and by collaborating with the US in anti-terrorism initiatives³⁷. In any case, the control of these key infrastructure facilities gives an inordinate degree of influence to this company.
3. In the telecommunications domain, Etisalat is one of the world's largest service providers, and with more than 146 million users in 16 countries, it is the main operator in places like Morocco, Mauritania and other countries in West Africa³⁸. Aside from operating a content filtering system on the Internet, the company was embroiled in scandals when it introduced spyware on BlackBerry devices in 2009, as well as when it censored criticism against the UAE government, among others³⁹.

³⁵ HENDERSON, Christian, *The UAE as a Nexus State*, Journal of Arabian Studies, DOI: 10.1080/21534764.2017.1310534, January 2017. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317798345_The_UAE_as_a_Nexus_State Accessed on October 9-2020

³⁶ KOCAK, Ayse, *Dubai Ports World as the UAE foreign policy tool*, Clingendael, February 18-2020. Available at: <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/dubai-ports-world-uae-foreign-policy-tool> Accessed on October 9-2020

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *About Us*, Etisalat. Available at: <https://www.etisalat.com/en/whoweare/about-us.jsp> Accessed on October 3-2020

³⁹ Thompson, Ben, *UAE Blackberry update was spyware*, BBC News, July 21-2009. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8161190.stm> Accessed on October 6-2020

4. Besides the mentioned companies, Emirati sovereign wealth funds (SWFs) like ADIA and Mubadala, which are also controlled by key members of the royal family, are considered informal instruments of the Emirati foreign policy toolkit.

Case study: the UAE in the Horn of Africa

The multiple tools mentioned in the previous section have been widely deployed in the Horn of Africa, where the UAE pursues the following objectives: maritime security, especially in the Bab el Mandeb Strait, to secure trade routes from piracy and possible attacks by the Houthis; the containment of Tehran and its influence in Yemen; the containment of the Turkish and Qatari expansion in the Horn of Africa; the search for strategic depth, which might allow the UAE to respond in case its mainland is attacked or blocked⁴⁰; access to huge markets with great potential, especially with the privatization plans announced by the Ethiopian government, which are very attractive to SWFs like ADIA and Mubadala; and access to farming lands to improve the UAE's food security.

Although the triple categorization may complicate a chronological narrative, it will be useful to assess how the instruments are being used. Starting with the diplomatic tools, Abu Dhabi took advantage of the Ethiopia-Eritrea peace process to score a diplomatic goal by awarding the Order of Zayed⁴¹ —the UAE's highest civilian award— to their respective leaders, and by meeting with the Prime Minister of Ethiopia six times between March 2018 and February 2020, and at least eight times with the Eritrean President between December 2017 and December 2019⁴². By doing so, the UAE claimed its constructive role in the region. Despite not being officially recognised as states, the UAE has also hosted the President of Somaliland a couple of times in recent years, and Emirati officials have met with Puntland's President as well. On the other hand, during the first months of 2020, the Horn benefitted from the Emirati covid

⁴⁰ IBISH, Hussein, *The UAE's evolving National Security Strategy*, The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, April 6-2017. Available at: <https://agsiw.org/uaes-evolving-national-security-strategy/> Accessed on October 6-2020

⁴¹ *UAE President awards Order of Zayed to Eritrean President, Ethiopian Prime Minister*, Emirates News Agency, July 24-2018. Available at: <https://www.wam.ae/en/details/1395302700507> Accessed on October 9-2020

⁴² Data extracted from Emirates News Agency. Available at: <https://www.wam.ae/en>

diplomacy⁴³, which sent 48 tons of medical supplies to Ethiopia, 34 to Somalia and several other shipments to the regions of Puntland and Somaliland⁴⁴.

Regarding military instruments, the UAE has a network of bases mentioned in the previous section, which includes Assab in Eritrea, the island of Socotra, and the recently cancelled base in Berbera, Somaliland. Some rumours point to the development of a base in Bosaso (Puntland), and the island of Perim, in addition to the numerous existing Emirati military facilities along the Yemeni coast.

Reference has been made to the nearly 2,000 members of the PMPF trained since 2010 by the private military company Saracen International⁴⁵, as well as the Somali army and its counter-terrorism unit, also trained by the UAE until 2018. On top of that, around 4,000 Yemenis have received training at the Assab base⁴⁶, and a small group of Eritrean cadets studied at Emirati military colleges between 2012 and 2015⁴⁷. There are also rumours that the Emiratis trained and funded the Puntland Intelligence Agency, in addition to donating three aircraft to the PMPF and 15 armoured vehicles to Somalia in 2015⁴⁸.

Economic tools are often intermingled, especially when it comes to development aid, investment packages and monetary support. Thus, in times of need, the Central Bank of the UAE has directly supported the central banks of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan⁴⁹. In parallel, private foundations and organizations such as the Abu Dhabi Fund for

⁴³ Except for Eritrea, which rejected the aid because General Teklai Kifle and other leaders of the Eritrean Army are uncomfortable with the Emirati presence in the country. General Karikare, who is now ill, did have good relations with Abu Dhabi.

⁴⁴ Data extracted from Emirates News Agency. Available at: <https://www.wam.ae/en>

⁴⁵ SLIJPER, Frank, *Under the radar. The United Arab Emirates, arms transfer and regional conflict*, Pax for Peace, September 2017. Available at: <https://www.paxforpeace.nl/media/files/pax-report-under-the-radar--arms-trade.pdf>, Accessed on October 5-2020

⁴⁶ MELLO, Alex; Knights, Michael, *How Eritrea became a major UAE military base*, Tesfa News, September 2-2016. Available at: <https://www.tesfanews.net/west-of-suez-for-the-united-arab-emirates/> Accessed on October 3-2020

⁴⁷ NIZAR, Manek, *Eritrea's military got help from UAE, foreign firms, UN says*, Bloomberg, November 12-2017. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-11-12/eritrea-s-military-got-help-from-u-a-e-foreign-firms-un-says> Accessed on October 3-2020

⁴⁸ Frank, *Under the radar*.

⁴⁹ MEESTER, Jos; VERHOEVEN, Harry; VAN DEN BERG, Willem, *Riyal Politik. The political economy of Gulf investments in the Horn of Africa*, Clingendael, April 2018. Available at: <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-04/riyal-politik.pdf> Accessed on October 4-2020

Development (ADFD), the Emirates Red Crescent or the Khalifa Foundation are actively involved in charitable projects, which contributes to winning hearts and minds of the local population. As an example, Khalifa Foundation signed in February 2020 an agreement with the Ethiopian Ministry of Finance worth USD 100 million to support SMEs and start-ups⁵⁰.

In terms of investment, the UAE ranked as the fourth largest investor in Africa between 2014-2018⁵¹, and the second largest Gulf investor in the Horn of Africa, after pledging USD 3 billion in investments to Ethiopia in 2018⁵², together with an additional USD 3 billion promised to the transitional military council in Sudan in 2019, in a joint operation with Saudi Arabia⁵³. Abu Dhabi also included a generous program of infrastructure construction and assistance in its agreement with Eritrea on the lease of Assab's base.

When looking closely into some investments, the prominence of DP World in the region is striking. This state-owned company was awarded in 2016 a 30-year contract to increase the capacity of the port of Berbera (in Somaliland) by USD 442 million; a year later, its subsidiary P&O Ports acquired the rights to develop the port of Bosaso in Puntland, for USD 336 million⁵⁴. These acquisitions are intended to use the coastal ports in Eritrea, Somaliland and Puntland to increase UAE connectivity links with the Somali hinterland and Ethiopia. This has become even more explicit after the Emirati announcement of an oil pipeline project between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the construction of a corridor between Berbera and Ethiopia that will be financed by the ADFD at a value of USD 400 million⁵⁵. In addition, there are plans to establish a Special

⁵⁰ *Khalifa Fund signs US\$100 million agreement supporting SMEs in Ethiopia*, Emirates News Agency, February 27-2020. Available at: <https://www.wam.ae/en/details/1395302827231> Accessed on October 3-2020

⁵¹ MADDEN, Payce, *Figure of the week: Foreign direct investment in Africa*, Brookings, October 9-2019. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2019/10/09/figure-of-the-week-foreign-direct-investment-in-africa/> Accessed on October 3-2020

⁵² *UAE invests US \$3 billion in Ethiopia*, All Africa, June 18-2018. Available at: <https://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00061931.html> Accessed on October 4-2020

⁵³ *UAE and Saudi Arabi announce \$3 billion aid for Sudan*, The National, April 21-2019. Available at: <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/uae-and-saudi-arabia-announce-3-billion-aid-for-sudan-1.851900> Accessed on October 4-2020

⁵⁴ KHAN, Taimur, *UAE and the Horn of Africa: a tale of two ports*, The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, March 8-2018. Available at: <https://agsiw.org/uae-horn-africa-tale-two-ports/> Accessed on October 5-2020

⁵⁵ MURIUKI, Caroline, *Berbera Corridor to boost trade between Somaliland and Ethiopia*, The Exchange,

Economic Zone in Berbera, as well as to expand its airport and its energy infrastructure⁵⁶. In short, the UAE is positioning itself to take full advantage of the region's promising economic growth potential.

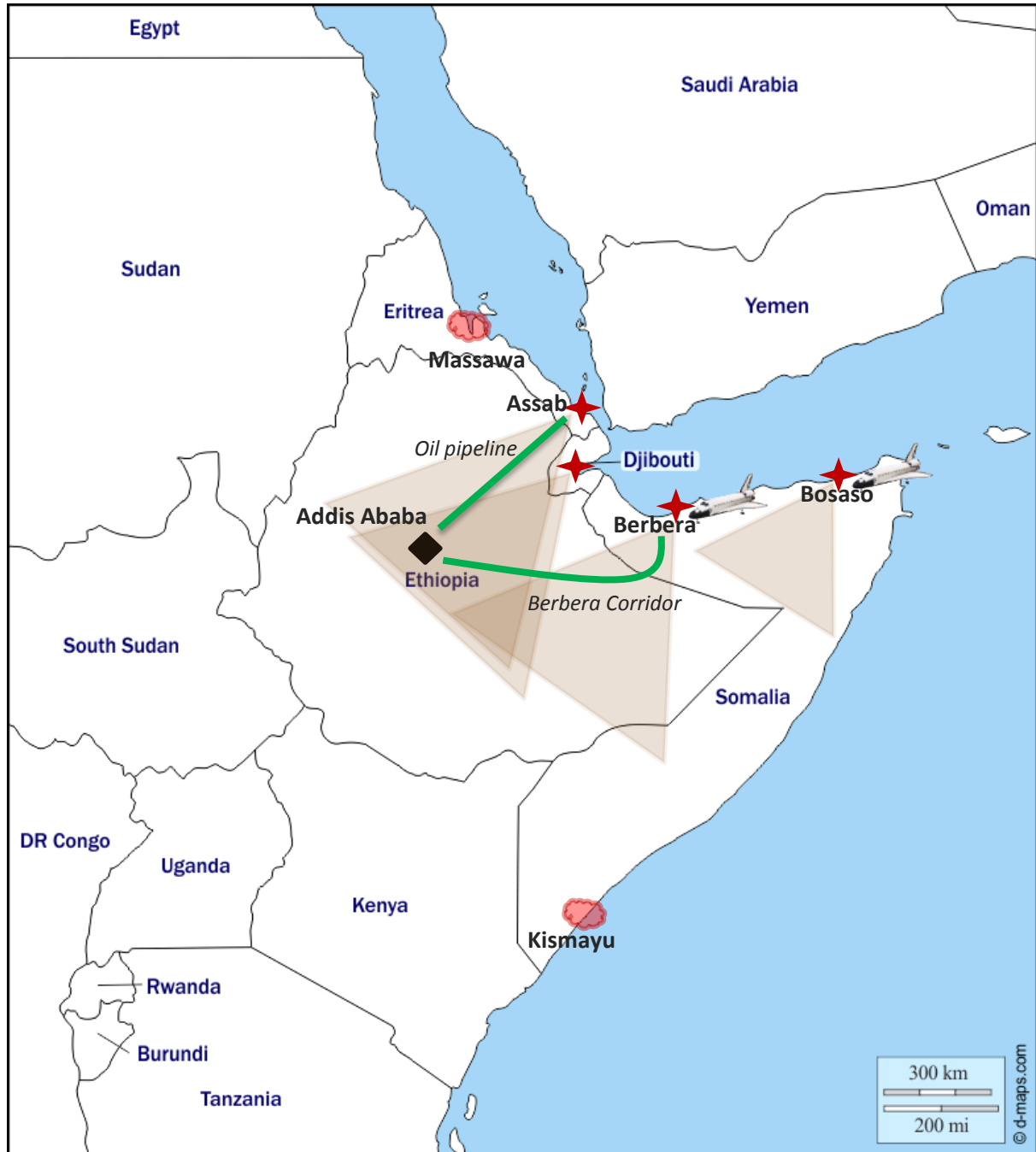






Figure 4. Emirati presence in the Horn of Africa. Source: D-maps.com. Prepared by the author.

June 10-2020. Available at: <https://theexchange.africa/industry-and-trade/berbera-corridor-to-boost-trade-between-somaliland-and-ethiopia/> Accessed on October 7-2020

⁵⁶ UAE to restore Berbera airport, build electricity plant, Busi Week, March 15-2019. Available at: <https://www.busiweek.com/uae-to-restore-berbera-airport-build-electricity-plant/> Accessed on October 7-2020

Legend

-  Ports operated by DP World or the Emirati Armed Forces. Djibouti unilaterally expropriated DP World's Doraleh terminal in 2018.
-  The hinterland -area of influence- of these ports.
-  Civil airports under construction (Berbera) and in the planning phase (Bosaso).
-  Potential port developments: Kismayu (Somalia) and Massawa (Eritrea).

Final thoughts

Although it may seem distant, Emirati foreign policy directly affects Spanish interests in its most immediate borders. In Libya, where the UAE has played a decisive role⁵⁷ in the conflict, the largest oil field is operated by Repsol, thereby making Libya Spain's third largest oil supplier⁵⁸. Abu Dhabi has the ability to prolongate the war, but it can also push its partners to come to the negotiating table and accelerate the peace process. Increased tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and its rivals – including the UAE, which sent fighter jets to Greece in August 2019 – could affect maritime traffic that passes through the Suez Canal, and even alter Algerian and Tunisian neutrality, turning those neighbours into more assertive players. As for the Sahel, Europe's southern border, the UAE is one of the largest funders of the G5, and in doing so, it contributes to greater regional stability. Abu Dhabi's ability to influence

⁵⁷ VIDAL, Albert, *Conflicto de Libia: escenarios y protagonistas*, Artículo 30, August 24-2019. Available at: <https://articulo30.org/politica-defensa/conflicto-libia-albert-vidal/>, Accessed on October 8-2020

⁵⁸ TANCHUM, Michaël, *Libya, energy, and the Mediterranean's new 'Great Game'*, Real Instituto Elcano, September 23-2020. Available at: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=%2Felenco%2Felenco_in%2Fzonas_in%2Fari110-2020-tanchum-libya-energy-and-the-mediterraneans-new-great+game Accessed on September 29-2020

events there is on the rise, after Mauritania announced in February 2020 that it would be taking the leadership in the G5. Precisely that same month, the UAE announced investments worth USD 2 billion in Mauritania⁵⁹.

When looking at the Emirati presence within Spain, it is surprising to see that FDI flows from the UAE surpass EUR 8.7 billion between 2009-2019, turning the federation into the ninth largest investor in Spain during that period. Most of its investments are concentrated in key sectors, such as energy, where the SWF Mubadala is the majority shareholder in CEPSA, holds 20% of Nortegas (Spain's second largest gas distributor), owns actions in Enagás, and until recently owned Torresol Energy, together with another Spanish company⁶⁰. The Emiratis also have shares in other Ibex 35 companies, such as AENA and Cellnex, in addition to positioning themselves as Spain's largest forage producer thanks to Al Dahra Fagavi⁶¹. The container terminal in the port of Tarragona is under the control of DP World, as is the maritime services company Reyser, which operates in 11 Spanish ports⁶². The UAE also has assets in the mining sector with the MATSA joint venture, and among tech start-ups, with investments in Glovo⁶³. The strategy followed by Abu Dhabi in Spain provides a better understanding of the scope of these investments and reflects the Emirati modus operandi set out in this document.

⁵⁹ *UAE announces \$2 billion aid for Mauritania*, Gulf News, February 2-2020. Available at: <https://gulfnews.com/uae/uae-announces-2-billion-aid-for-mauritania-1.69446667> Accessed on October 4-2020

⁶⁰ *Petroleum & Petrochemicals*, Mubadala. Available at: <https://www.mubadala.com/en/what-we-do/petroleum-and-petrochemicals> Accessed on September 30-2020

⁶¹ *Al Dahra Agriculture acquires 80% of Fagavi*, Clear Water International. Available at: <https://www.clearwaterinternational.com/es/transacciones/al-dahra-agriculture-acquires-80-of-fagavi> Accessed on September 29-2020

⁶² *DP World oficializa el desembarco en España con la compra del 60% de la estibadora de Tarragona*, Transporte XXI, July 1-2008. Available at: <https://www.transportexxi.com/dp-world-oficializa-el-desembarco-en-espana-con-la-compra-del-60-de-la-estibadora-de-tarragona/> Accessed on September 30-2020

Also: *DP World-owned P&O acquires Spanish maritime player*, Logistics Middle East, June 10-2017. Available at: <https://www.logisticsmiddleeast.com/article-13288-dp-world-owned-po-acquires-spanish-maritime-player> Accessed on September 29-2020

⁶³ *Sovereign wealth funds 2015*, Invest in Spain, 2015. Available at: <https://www.investinspain.org/invest/wcm/idc/groups/public/documents/documento/mde2/nje5/~edisp/doc/2016619757.pdf> Accessed on September 30-2020

In short, the smart usage of all these instruments has catalysed the UAE's rise to the podium of regional powers, the impact of which is perceived not only in the Gulf, but in places as remote as Madrid, Tripoli, Rabat or Addis Ababa. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the importance of territorial extension has diminished, thanks to new the information and communication technologies, offering excellent opportunities to small countries with little population⁶⁴. The UAE has capitalized on its competitive advantage, something that is reflected in the words of Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, which succinctly summarizes the attitude of the Emirati government in the face of its multiple challenges: 'Our vision is sharp, our goals are clear, our resources are huge, our will is strong and we stand tall, ready to face the challenges ahead'⁶⁵.

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⁶⁴ COATES ULRICHSEN, Kristian, *The Gulf States in International Political Economy*, 2016, Palgrave Macmillan, Accessed on September 30-2020

⁶⁵ BIN RASHID AL MAKTOUM, Mohammed, *My vision: challenges in the race for excellence*, 2012, Motivate Publishing. Accessed on October 10-2020