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UAE foreign policy patterns after 2018 until now based on discourse analysis

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Abstract

The foreign policy of the United Arab Emirates has been accompanied by obvious changes in its political orientations and behavioral patterns. Considering the nature of political developments in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, the United Arab Emirates has a range of its policies from Arab commitment and Islamic coexistence, peaceful and neutral behavior towards regional issues to participation in Arab-Western alliances, departure from neutrality and commitment to Arab and Islamic issues and the normalization of relations with Israel are included. Since 2018, the foreign policy of the UAE has undergone significant changes, which have been made in line with the realization of the country's grand goals. The most important

of these goals include confronting the increasing influence of regional countries, trying to increase regional power, strengthening maritime security, gaining the title of Arab and Islamic world leader, and diversifying the economy. The UAE's foreign policies have been organized and implemented in recent years to achieve these goals. The most important decisions and policies that make up the model of the UAE's foreign policy in the past 5 years include the normalization of relations with Israel, the expansion of feminist policies and de-escalation and the signing of trade agreements with various countries such as India, Britain, Turkey, South Korea, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Israel etc.

Keywords: UAE, Foreign Policy Model, Normalization of Relations, Arab World Leadership, De-Escalation, Economic Diversification, Discourse Analysis

1. Introduction

Among the Arab countries, the UAE has made more changes in the field of its foreign policy in recent years and witnessed the biggest changes and adjustments in its foreign policy approaches. At the time of the height of the Syrian crisis, this country was on the front line of the opposition to the Assad government, when the coup in Turkey occurred by the government of Tayyip Erdogan, it was accused of complicity and support for the coup plotters, and when the political relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran were severed, its relations reduced with our country. Also, in the case of the war in Yemen, it was placed on the Saudi front. Now, it has made a 180-degree turn in its foreign policy^[1].

At the current stage, the UAE is trying to restore relations with all the countries with which it has had challenging relations in recent years. This country recently sent its diplomatic officials to Syria and Turkey^[2] and also hosted the political deputy minister of foreign affairs of Iran. It seems that all these cases show that the UAE does not have any permanent enemies to achieve a superior regional position and improve its position in the West Asia region and is ready to accept any change.

In the current situation, the new approach of the UAE has been adopted with several important goals; First, the UAE has come to the conclusion that the Biden's government, compared to the Trump's government, is less interested in participating and interfering in the issues of the West Asian region and is trying to keep America away from the tensions in this region. Another important reason that has led the UAE to improve relations with the countries of the region is the pioneering of Saudi Arabia in the dialogue with Iran. This means that they should move towards reducing tension with neighbouring countries and the region by removing mental and psychological barriers^[3].

One of the important reasons for the change in the foreign policy of the United Arab Emirates is Abu Dhabi's strong concern about the effects of opening diplomatic relations between this country and the Zionist regime, increasing the pressure of public opinion in the Islamic world, and the loss of credibility of this country and its isolation among Islamic countries. This issue is indefinitely not favorable for UAE authorities and they are trying to free themselves from this trap by expanding relations with powerful countries of the Islamic world such as Iran and Turkey and continue to maintain their position among Islamic

countries^[4]. In this regard, after the recent political and economic agreements with the authorities of the Zionist regime, this country is trying to play a double-edged game for itself by approaching Iran, Turkey, and Syria as the frontline countries of the resistance front and exploiting it in the media and remove himself from the pressure of the public opinion of the Islamic world.

After nearly a decade of unveiling an aggressive and confrontational foreign policy in the Middle East regional system, the UAE is inclined towards reconciliation and de-escalation with rival and enemy actors. But the behavior of this model can be evaluated not in the context of retreating from the centers of crisis, but in the context of the transition from the expansion of power to the consolidation of influence and achievements based on maritime diplomacy. In other words, Abu Dhabi is trying to reorganize its foreign policy to create a balance between interests and commitments in competitive environments.

In general, this article seeks to find the pattern of UAE foreign policy from 2018 to now based on discourse analysis. Therefore, the most important decisions and behaviors and decisions of this country in the field of foreign policy during the mentioned period are examined and analyzed.

2. The principles of the new regional policy of the UAE

In recent years, the UAE has sought to gain more regional influence and has provided all-round support to its proxy activists in Yemen, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia for geopolitical dominance over these countries. The new regional policy of the UAE has been formed on this basis, the most important principles of which are stated below:

1. Containment of Iran
2. Strategic alliance with Saudi Arabia
3. Competition with Turkey
4. Normalization of relations with the Zionist regime
5. Strengthening the alliance with America

3. UAE foreign policy goals

Since 2018, the foreign policy of the UAE has undergone significant changes, which have been made in line with the realization of the country's grand goals. In the following, these goals are introduced and explained.

3.1 Confrontation with the increasing influence of regional countries

Since the formation of the Arab revolutions called the Arab Spring, people's desire for changes began, but in the meantime, some Arab countries in the region, including the UAE, who did not want these changes and considered them to be detrimental to their political systems, with significant revenues due to the oil made efforts to change this path. In the meantime, fundamentalist groups such as ISIS, which had introduced themselves as a government in countries such as Syria and Iraq and have now faced failure, are being moved to the eastern region, for example Afghanistan, to destabilize this region by UAE^[5].

The UAE fears that the Brotherhood-affiliated groups will become an alternative to their tribal government and kingdoms due to their roots in Arab countries and popular tendencies towards them. Therefore, in recent years, the UAE has spent a lot of money so that this alternative cannot spread politically in the region and enter other countries.

3.2 Trying to increase regional power

The analysis of the foreign policies of the UAE especially in the recent years and looking at the context of its behavior shows the strategy and macro regional policy of the UAE and its goal to become the top player in the region.

Unlike the past few decades, when the UAE focused more on internal issues such as development and interfered less in the countries of the region, it has currently defined a regional code for itself. That is, considering the developments that took place in Yemen and the influence that Saudi Arabia and the UAE exerted in the south of Yemen, now the UAE is seeking to play a role in the developments as a regional power, but now, considering the tension between Iran and USA, if a conflict occurs, the UAE will be the first country to be affected by this conflict^[6].

Simultaneously with the increase in the power of Bani Fatemeh in the government of the UAE, the regional expansionism of this country has also increased in such a way that since 2019, the UAE became an intervening element in the coup of General Burhan and Hamidti in Sudan (2019), the fall of the government Bouteflika's brotherhood in Algeria (2019), the fall of the government aligned with the resistance of Adel Abdul Mahdi in Iraq (2019) and the normalization process of the Zionist regime's relations with some European countries (2020).

In general, the most important strategic priorities and the model of the UAE's foreign policy to become a regional power are: strengthening the political, cultural, scientific and technological role of this country in the Arab world; strengthening military equipment and forces; Creating a strong economic and commercial network in West Asia, Africa and the Persian Gulf; restraining the Islamists; Curbing Iran's regional influence and simultaneously strengthening relations with the West, Russia, China and India.

3.3 Strengthening maritime security

The UAE's economy, supported by trade and shipping, drives foreign policy. This important issue is emphasized in the principles of the document of the next 50 years of the UAE, which was published in September 2021. Focusing on the maritime domain also allows the UAE to advance national and global goals and balance power ambitions with international image. In this framework, connecting the ports of the UAE, especially the strategic port of Jebel Ali, to the ports of the Gulf of Aden in the south of Yemen, dominating the strategic islands of Socotri and Mayon in Bab al-Mandab, being present in the ports of the Red Sea as well as the Mediterranean are part of this offensive strategy that the war in Yemen actually includes. It created a very suitable ground for mobilizing this goal^[7].

Attacks on merchant ships around the Arabian Peninsula represent a national security risk for the UAE along with its vulnerable geographical position vis-a-vis other countries in the region. In 2019, the UAE joined the US-led international maritime security structure to protect shipping and international trade in the Strait of Hormuz. At the same time, the headquarters of the French-led European mission to patrol and monitor the Strait of Hormuz was also established in the UAE. Active presence in southern Yemen and supporting the Southern Transitional Council and Tariq Saleh's forces in Bab al-Mandab is another part of this axis.

3.4 Obtaining the title of leader of the Arab and Islamic world

The disclosure of the correspondence of Youssef Al-Otaiba, the UAE ambassador in Washington, in 2017 and 2019 shows that the UAE has decided to "displace" the position of Saudi Arabia as the leader of the Arab and Islamic world and take its place. In other words, this conflict between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which was not very significant at first, is increasing, and the dispute over issues such as oil and economic competition is only a small part of the dispute, because there are deep and much bigger differences between these countries. In such a situation, in recent years, a significant change in the UAE's approach to foreign cases is evident^[8]. Ever since Saudi Arabia's sudden decision to reconcile with Qatar and improve relations with Turkey without coordination with the UAE, as well as the change of government in the United States, UAE has tried to establish proper relations with Qatar in the first place. Also, it restored his relations with Turkey.

Following the policies of Saudi Arabia and the United States, the UAE cut off diplomatic relations with Damascus, by sending its foreign minister to Damascus after 10 years, it took an important step towards reviving bilateral relations with Syria.

3.5 Diversification of the economy

In recent years, the UAE has adopted a policy of diversifying its economy, and despite its dependence on oil and gas, it wants to reduce its dependence on these revenues. This country has performed favorably in other fields such as steel, solar energy, tourism (Dubai) and in the field of air industry, and now the UAE air industry has become a brand. In the field of tourism, the UAE is one of the countries that has the highest number of tourists and has spent a large investment of energy revenues on it and has had an effective and positive performance in the field of tourism and attracting tourists^[9].

Another effective policy of the UAE in this regard is that it re-uses the export capacity, that is, the energy of other countries such as Iran, where the possibility of exporting is low or not available, is exported to other countries at a higher price.

Economy is the most important lever of influence inside other countries and causes security and political stability and prevents any tension and insecurity, and in recent years, the UAE has set a good pattern in the field of energy diplomacy for the all-round progress of economic, political and social programs for other countries.

4. UAE foreign policy patterns

The UAE's foreign policy has been organized and implemented in recent years to achieve the goals introduced in the previous section. In the following, the most important foreign policies of the UAE are introduced and analyzed.

4.1 Normalization of relations with Israel

The normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel, which was carried out recently and within the framework of the Ibrahim Agreement, can be considered the most important indicator of the traditional change of the UAE's foreign policy from the Islamic-Arab approach to the international region, especially after 2018.

The United Arab Emirates has experienced different orientations in its foreign policy, and now economic

preferences and justifications are one of the main factors in the UAE's decision to start official relations with the Zionist regime and abandon the cause of Palestine^[10].

What has been neglected in most of the existing analyzes about the beginning of official relations between the UAE and the Zionist regime, is the main goal and orientation of the UAE for this action. In fact, most of the analyzes in this area have focused on Israel's official presence in the Persian Gulf and its possible benefits for Trump and Netanyahu.

4.1.1 Negation of the Palestinian ideal with economic justifications

The strategy of economic development and the expansion of maximum prosperity due to oil revenues has led the UAE to adopt a compromise foreign policy at the cost of sacrificing Palestine. The crown prince of the UAE is at a crossroads between the acceleration of economic growth and development and the pursuit of the Palestinian cause, for which the weight of prosperity and development is greater for him. This idea can be seen in this country's recent action of sending a spacecraft from Japan and introducing itself as a space country. Of course, this is a duality created by the UAE, otherwise prosperity and economic growth do not necessarily depend on the relationship with the Zionist regime^[11].

4.1.2 The reasons for the UAE's relationship with Israel

The UAE's policy of normalizing relations with Israel, which is clearly a betrayal of Palestinian ideals, has several reasons, including demographic factors, containment of Iran, and reaction to changes in the foreign policy priorities of the United States. United States national strategy to gradual withdrawal of United States military forces from the West Asian region, security concerns and disappointment from the West^[12].

Economic benefits are one of the main priorities of the UAE's new direction in establishing relations with Israel. Ensuring sustainable investments in the energy sector, reaching new consumption markets and developing trade have been the main concerns of this country in this political action. In fact, in terms of economic issues, the year 2018 has been very prosperous for the UAE because the United States, in order to encourage the UAE to normalize and deepen its relations with Israel, considered a reward and signed a 50-year contract for an Emirati company. Based on that, this company was able to take over the management of a port in the state of Delaware, USA. Turning the threat of sanctions into an opportunity to buy weapons from America was another important reason for the normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel.

4.1.3 Consequences of the UAE's relationship with Israel

It seems that the UAE is taking this step in line with the interests of America and Israel. This decision of the UAE instead of providing regional peace and security (according to the rulers of this country); It will cause the spread of conflict and tension in the region centered on the cause of Palestine. In fact, other Arab countries in the region who want to make their relations with Israel public will look at the consequences of this decision of the UAE government.

4.2 Commercial agreements

An important part of the UAE's spending policy pattern since 2018 has been focused on signing trade agreements

with a range of countries. In fact, it has chosen these countries as its target markets. The government of this country announced in 2021 that it has put the immediate signing of a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement with 8 countries including India, Britain, Turkey, South Korea, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Israel and Kenya on its agenda^[13]. In these agreements, the areas of trade, foreign direct investment and sectors such as tourism will be considered. So far, new trade agreements have been signed with India and Israel. The annual balance between the government's revenues and expenses was a positive surplus between 2018 and 2019, but in 2020 it reached a deficit of 2.5%. In 2021, for the first time since 2015, the budget deficit has been predicted in the government assessment.

In 2020, the UAE released its long-term development strategy known as the 2017 Continental UAE and the National Agenda in 2021. At the heart of both strategies is the transition to a knowledge-based economy, which is based on increasing production, increasing the competitiveness of domestic companies, and investing in high-tech sectors. This requires reducing tension with different countries of the world and normalizing relations with them. Some estimates of the UAE government show that if these agreements are signed, the country's trade volume with its trading partners will increase rapidly. For example, it is predicted that if the comprehensive economic cooperation agreement is signed with India, the volume of trade between the two countries will increase from 40 billion dollars in 2020 to 100 billion dollars in 2025.

4.3 Expansion of feminist policies

Anticipating the future after oil, the United Arab Emirates has changed its diplomatic strategy in recent years by targeting the issue of women's empowerment in the domestic and international arena. Abu Dhabi's acceptance of the label of support for the Women, Peace and Security agenda may allow that country to gain a place at the United Nations and create a buffer against negative press coverage^[14]. The UAE's relatively strong position in several women's empowerment rankings has been a credit to the country. This issue is considered a fundamental point in the evolving diplomatic strategy of that country. Among the mentioned achievements, it is possible to mention the UAE's support for the training program for female peacekeepers focusing on women, peace and security, which was approved during the tenure of the UAE as the head of the United Nations Security Council in March 2022. Also, a booth dedicated to women was unveiled at the Expo 2020 event in Dubai. In addition, the UN Women Liaison Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council is located in Abu Dhabi.

In September 2021, the signatories of the Ibrahim Agreement, the United Arab Emirates, Israel, Morocco and Bahrain, issued a joint statement on "Women, Peace and Diplomacy" at the UN Human Rights Council.

Issues related to women's rights and empowerment provide a useful and relatively inexpensive cover for governments to strengthen their image in the international arena.

4.4 De-stressing

The limited opportunity to expand the UAE's influence in the Middle East and the fear of Tehran's possible provocation forces Abu Dhabi to return to the "balance of tension" policy^[15]. In other words, some indicators indicate that the UAE may return to its long-term policy towards the

region. In December 2018, the UAE restored diplomatic relations with Syria. Also, trade between the two countries reached 19 billion dollars in the same year. In July 2019, the UAE decided to withdraw a large part of its forces from Yemen, which showed the concern of the UAE leader and changed its military strategy to the former diplomatic approach. This retreat has been happening quietly for months^[16].

UAE's foreign policy actually benefits from flexibility and turning in different directions. For other competitors, especially the current Turkey, which is in an economic crisis, the economic power and investment of the UAE is of interest, and this issue makes the perception and mindset of decision makers to de-escalate faster. In Syria, after a period of accompanying the Assad overthrow project, since the end of 2019, the UAE has paid attention to the fields of rebuilding relations and active presence in the Syrian market. De-escalation with Qatar and ignoring the 13 conditions to end the blockade is another part of the strategy of resetting the foreign policy.

Therefore, the analysis of the discourses shows that the UAE, with the political-security focus of Abu Dhabi and the economic-commercial focus of Dubai, is trying to de-escalate the tension with the competing players in order to stabilize the influence and benefit from the crisis spillover benefits, which greatly affects the new intra-bloc and extra-bloc alignments and arrangements. In the meantime, the UAE's non-permanent membership in the Security Council for the two-year period of 2022-2023, which provides the country with legal and organizational benefits, especially in the issue of maritime security as the main link of maritime diplomacy in the current situation, shows the necessity of de-escalation.

5. Conclusion

An important part of the UAE's foreign policy model is de-escalation with regional countries. In this regard, the reduction of tensions with Iran, the resumption of relations with Syria and the reduction of military interventions in Yemen are the most important examples of the UAE's de-escalation. The most important part of the UAE's foreign policy model is the normalization of the country's relations with Israel. This normalization with economic goals is to reduce the international pressure caused by war crimes in Yemen and also to provide the possibility of buying weapons from USA. The UAE's acceptance of the tag of supporting the women, peace and security program with the aim of gaining a suitable position in the United Nations and creating a buffer against negative press coverage has been another part of the UAE's foreign policy in recent years. In addition, concluding a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement with 8 countries including India, Britain, Turkey, South Korea, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Israel and Kenya to benefit from the economic benefits of other countries is also an important part of the UAE's foreign policy model.

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