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The UAE's Humanitarian Diplomacy:
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Regional Leverage and
International Recognition**

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Introduction: Institutionalization and Rationalization of the UAE's Practices of Humanitarian Diplomacy

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) became the world's third-largest donor of humanitarian aid relative to Gross National Income in 2016.¹ The country was among the top five humanitarian assistance state-donors in the world in terms of US dollars in 2018.² There has been a constant growth of the share of humanitarian aid as part of the country's overall foreign aid within the last few years, and humanitarian aid reached to 18 percent of the UAE's overall foreign aid in 2018.³ The UAE has complied with international standards for transparency and accountability since 2010 and has reported its aid flows, including development aid and humanitarian aid, to OECD-DAC. In doing so, it is "the first country outside the DAC's membership to report in such detail".⁴

The astounding amount of humanitarian and foreign aid delivered by the UAE has drawn attention to the grand geopolitical ambitions of this young Gulf monarchy, once called a "diminutive state", a "micro state" and a "small state".⁵ Both federal state consolidation and national unification are political projects in progress in the UAE and all parameters of its strategically and pragmatically crafted foreign aid policy, which is vigorously responsive to regional and global changes and challenges, aim at gaining international acknowledgement, leverage, recognition and relevance.⁶

Humanitarianism was highlighted by the founding father of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan as a foreign policy priority and an important aspect of the Emirati identity in the 1970s.⁷ It has been institutionalized as "humanitarian diplomacy"⁸ as part of the UAE's Foreign Policy ever since. Among numerous ambitious efforts to introduce western practices and meet the international standards of institutional transparency, the Office of Public and Cultural Diplomacy was established under the Ministry of the Cabinet Affairs and the Future in 2014. The Office has been assigned to create an Emirati legacy in areas of intellectual capital, culture, development and humanitarianism.⁹

The first Soft Power Council convened in 2017 during the government's annual meetings to design the UAE "Soft Power Strategy" to promote the UAE's "modern and tolerant" global reputation with "humanitarian diplomacy" listed as the first of their "six main pillars that together form the framework for the UAE's public diplomacy".¹⁰ Though conceptualized and promoted as part of the UAE's soft power, humanitarian diplomacy and aid have been subtly embedded into the broader context of increasingly securitized Emirati foreign policy in recent years. Since 2001, the UAE's once humble, neutral and non-interventionist foreign policy has gained an assertive character with ambitions to undermine the Shi'a Iranian influence and Sunni political Islam (i.e. Muslim Brotherhood and ISIS) in the Middle East and Africa.¹¹

Humanitarian aid has been an integral and strategically formulated component of the country's foreign aid to serve the business and long-term economic interests of the Emirates in the Middle East, Africa and the rest of the world as well. The humanitarian aid sector has been embraced, especially by Dubai, as an innovative 21st century enterprise to practice, given the global potential to capitalize on the recent trend of privatization and commercialization of humanitarianism. Emirati foreign policy has demonstrated a pragmatic approach in responding to global geopolitical challenges, in consolidating domestic state formation, in asserting the country's economic sovereignty with rivals and partners and expanding the UAE's power of influence within the changing international order. This approach has instrumentalized foreign aid in successfully building alliances, economic partnerships and business contracts both in the global and the Middle Eastern and African political market places.¹²

1 MFA&IC 2016.

2 OCHA 2019.

3 MFA&IC 2018.

4 Smith 2011.

5 Miller and Verhoeven 2019, also see Mendelson 1972 and Ulrichsen 2012.

6 Young 2017, Barlett et al. 2017, and Henderson 2017.

7 Al Mezaini 2017.

8 De Lauri 2018.

9 MOCAF 2019.

10 UAE Government Portal 2019.

11 Al Mezeini 2017.

12 Young 2017, Ziadeh 2019.

Indeed, the UAE, with its expanding logistical capacities in commercial, military and humanitarian spaces from Africa to the Arabian Peninsula and Indian Ocean, demonstrates a fascinating 21st century success story of once a small state's push for leverage in the changing parameters of political economy and neoliberal governance in war and conflict zones.¹³

Historical Context of The Emirati Humanitarianism

The UAE is a very young nation state founded in 1971 through the unification of six sheikhdoms that are now the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Fujairah and Umm Al Quwain under the leadership of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan of Abu Dhabi. The sheikhdom of Ras Al Khaimah joined the union as the seventh emirate in 1972. Each one of the seven Emirates has so far demonstrated a quite distinct development trajectory, local cultural identity and geopolitical articulation with the rest of the world. The foreign policy of the UAE has been dominated by the richest Emirate, Abu Dhabi, and from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s was conflict-averse. Oil and aid (as opposed to military power and political aggression) were used as foreign policy tools to establish the Emirati presence as protective of the poor and oppressed within the broader Arab and Muslim world.

The UAE's steadfast participation in the oil embargo of the Arab members of the OPEC on countries supporting Israeli occupation of Palestine in 1973 was the first prime example of the new-born Emirati state's use of economic advantage (oil) to assert its sovereignty, independence and relevance in international politics and economic relations to penalize the foreign powers with intentions threatening the Arab solidarity in the Middle East. The UAE foreign policy goals to promote the Emirati identity along with Arab and Islamic solidarity abroad, with aid and oil as policy tools, resonated well with the regional themes of Arab nationalism and anti-Israeli sentiments in the Middle East in the 1970s. The young oil monarchy's humanitarian assistance to Palestine and Palestinian refugees continues today.

The UAE provided aid almost exclusively and without any conditions to Arab states and predominately Muslim countries

Despite the rhetorical commitment to the principle of non-discrimination in humanitarian assistance and charity work, from the 1970s to 1990s, the UAE provided aid almost exclusively and without any conditions to Arab states and predominately Muslim countries, following Arab and Islamic solidarity as leading concerns in foreign aid decisions.¹⁴ This form of foreign policy orientation is stated in the Article 12 of the 1971 UAE constitution: "The foreign policy of the UAE shall be directed towards supporting the Arab and Islamic causes and interests and towards establishing closer friendship and co-operation with all the nations and peoples on the basis of the principles of the charter of the United Nations Organization and international ideals".¹⁵

From an Emirati point of view, humanitarianism is deeply rooted in the foundation of the state and the legacy of the late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan who founded the Zayed Foundation for Charity and Humanitarian Works in 1992 in Abu Dhabi, and is commemorated at the official Zayed Humanitarian Work Day/Zayed Day for Humanitarian Action on the 19th day of the fasting month of Ramadan every year. Indeed, philanthropy, charity and humanitarian work in the UAE (as much as in the rest of the Islamic world) are historically ingrained in Islamic philosophy and the Emirati culture of giving and compassion, and has been officially promoted as a principle, not only unifying the UAE nation of the seven Emirates, but also defining the UAE state identity in public diplomacy at the international level.¹⁶ As proudly stated by President Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, son of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, "[Emiratis] are following in the footsteps of the father, the late Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, to provide humanitarian and development aid, which is a key component of the UAE's foreign policy. The country will continue following its cultural approach in its relations with other countries, and call for justice for the oppressed, and build bridges of love and cooperation between various people, to achieve peace and prosperity".¹⁷

¹³ Ziadeh 2019, Miler and Verhoeven 2019, Henderson 2017.

¹⁴ Al Mezaini 2017.

¹⁵ Federal National Council 2010.

¹⁶ Al Zaabi and Awamieh 2019.

¹⁷ Gulf News 2018.

Humanitarian Diplomacy to Counter-Balance Militaristic Orientation in Foreign Policy

Emirati humanitarianism has been institutionalized, rationalized and politicized through a discourse of “humanitarian diplomacy” that especially targets the populations in need of assistance in the conflict regions in which the UAE has been engaged over the last two decades. Following the 9/11 attacks in the US, the UAE has been committed to the US-led war against Islamist fundamentalism in all forms, including Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Yemen, ISIS in Syria, Al Shabab in Somalia, and Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Islamist fundamentalism emerged as a security threat within the UAE and in response, state surveillance over the Islamic charity organizations has drastically increased as precaution against fundamentalism taking root in the Emirati society. Further, the Islamic identity of the UAE has been carefully crafted away from political Islam and closer to liberal Islamic secularism.¹⁸ Due to overlapping security concerns and political interests, the UAE is a trustworthy partner of the US in the Middle East “in organizing, directing and funding anti-extremism initiatives”.¹⁹

The Islamic identity of the UAE has been carefully crafted away from political Islam and closer to liberal Islamic secularism

The UAE has also played an important role in confronting the Iranian expansionism in the Middle East. This has as much to do with defending the UAE’s economic interests as with combatting the risk of encroachment by the Shi’a fundamentalist regime of Iran in regions like Northern Iraq and Southern Yemen where the UAE has strategic investments. Accordingly, from an Emirati point of view, there is a strong association between those efforts to tackle religious fundamentalism and Iranian influence and to promote security, stabilization and reconstruction in war zones where the UAE security forces are in coalition or coordination with the US-led international coalition forces. The practices of humanitarian action have been embedded into military operations of intervention and stabilization (always in US-led international coalitions or in coordination with them) in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Libya and Yemen. Therefore, the drastic shift in the UAE’s foreign policy from non-engagement to engagement in strategic coalitions with the US and Europe as an ambitious political actor in regional conflicts has been parallel to the emergence of the UAE as a major player in the humanitarian aid sector. In the meantime, the geographical scope of the foreign and humanitarian aid by the UAE has expanded, though the top recipients are still Arab countries.

UAE foreign aid, including humanitarian aid, has been more assertively directed by security concerns and political interests since the dawn of the so-called “Arab Spring” in 2011. This kind of orientation in foreign aid policy in the broader Arabian Gulf region (including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar) has indeed developed parallel to the global trend of securitization of foreign aid as a consequence of the prioritization of war on terrorism and homeland security in the Western world.²⁰ UAE foreign aid with the aim of stabilizing favored regimes skyrocketed from 2011: to Egypt and Morocco against the threat of the political Islamist Muslim brotherhood, and to Yemen against the Sunni Al-Qaeda and the Iran-supported Shi’a Houthi rebels. When the Egyptian army toppled the elected government of the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt received an enormous amount of aid from the UAE in support of the new government, which made the UAE foreign aid increase by 375 percent in 2013.²¹ In 2013, Egypt received 78.6 percent of the overall UAE foreign aid; though the Egyptian share declined to 72 percent and 40 percent in 2015 and 2016 respectively. The support was mainly development aid to boost the banking system and be used in health, education, housing and infrastructure.²² However, Emirates Red Crescent and prominent charity organizations from the UAE continue to pursue humanitarian aid in Egypt.²³

Since 2013, the largest chunk of UAE foreign assistance has been channeled (consecutively) to Egypt, Yemen, Sudan, Jordan and Morocco. Yemen receives the largest share of the UAE humanitarian aid, while in Jordan the aid focuses on development and humanitarian emergencies mainly targeting accommodation of Syrian refugees.²⁴ As politically motivated development aid to Egypt declined since 2015, funds released have been channeled to East African countries like Sudan and Somalia, multilateral organizations and multi-country programs in the form of both development

18 Al Mezaeni 2017, Young 2017.

19 UAE Embassy-Washington 2019.

20 Duffield 2014, Young 2017.

21 OECD 2013.

22 Al Mezaeni 2017.

23 MFA&IC 2016.

24 MFA&IC 2016.

and humanitarian aid. In the meantime, the share of humanitarian aid within the overall UAE foreign aid has increased steadily: Yemen (75 percent), Jordan (3 percent) and Syria (4 percent) received about 82 percent of the UAE humanitarian aid in 2018 according to the last foreign aid report published by the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.²⁵

Yemen has received one of the largest chunks of UAE humanitarian aid for decades and has been the top UAE humanitarian aid receiver since 2009

For relatively stable countries where the UAE has been trying to combat the threat of Muslim Brotherhood, like Egypt and Morocco, UAE foreign aid has been predominately in the form of development aid since 2011. In failed or fragile states, like Yemen, Libya and Somalia, UAE development aid has been coupled with military interventions and significant amounts of humanitarian aid. Yemen has received one of the largest chunks of UAE humanitarian aid for decades and has been the top UAE humanitarian aid receiver since 2009. In 2015, 100 percent of the UAE foreign aid to Libya was in the form of humanitarian aid and emergency relief.²⁶ Somalia has geo-strategic importance for UAE economic interests in the seas around the Gulf of Aden and thus has been the second largest beneficiary of UAE humanitarian aid in Africa (after Libya) since 2014.

The UAE is generous in dispensing humanitarian aid to countries, especially to those regions controlled by the allies, where the UAE army has been engaged. The UAE humanitarian aid to Yemen, for example, aims to contribute to the stabilization efforts in territories controlled by the foreign armed coalition forces including the UAE army. The development aid from the UAE to Yemen aims to strengthen the infrastructure in the same areas where the UAE has economic interests and strategic investments. The UAE skillfully uses humanitarian as well as development aid to consolidate its image as a resourceful friendly power in the eyes of the political allies and their civilian constituency; Al Mezaini²⁷ calls this “winning the hearts of the Yemeni people”.

The Limits of Multilateralism in Humanitarian Aid and Assistance

The UAE mainly relies on its government entities and Emirati foundations in providing emergency relief and conducting humanitarian assistance projects on the ground in conflict and disaster. Along with the other humanitarian donor states in the Arabian Gulf, it has been criticized in the Western academic and policy circles for keeping a distance from multilateral organizations dominated by traditional Western donors and for challenging the Western norms and practices of the international humanitarian regime.²⁸ Although commitment to multilateralism seems to be limited, since the 2000s, the UAE government has shown increased levels of engagement with the Western governments, the UN and other multilateral organizations.

The UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, recently renamed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, has proven to be quite adept in embracing the Western rhetoric around humanitarianism and sustainable development. The Emirati humanitarian agenda incorporates the international principles and priorities highlighted by the UN agendas on MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) and SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), and Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action since early 2000s.²⁹ As a reflection of this trend of growing commitment to international agendas, the UAE funding support directed to multi-country aid programs and multilateral organizations doubled only from 2015 to 2016.

The United Arab Emirates became one of the three non-Western members of the OCHA (UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) Support Group in 2006; and the only non-Western and Arab country in the UNHCR Donor Support Group in 2009.³⁰ In 2009, the OECD welcomed the UAE as the first and only non-DAC “participant” in the Development Assistant Committee (DAC), which was a product of UAE assertiveness to strengthen relations with OECD through a commitment to transparency, professionalism and institutionalization in foreign aid sector. As a young state in terms of institutional consolidation and a “small state” with big ambitions, the UAE is seeking international recognition, acknowledgment and legitimacy in the international arena. The foreign aid sector is an important international space where the young nation with genuine efforts is committed to transparency and professional reporting of state activities. After 9/11, the UAE pledged that it would combat ISIS and Islamic extremism in an effort to secure international

²⁵ MFA&IC 2018.

²⁶ MFA&IC 2016.

²⁷ 2017: 237.

²⁸ Young 2017.

²⁹ See for example OCFA 2009 and MFA&IC 2016.

³⁰ Binder, Meier and Steets 2010.

legitimacy and assert itself as a trustworthy partner in international coalitions. This is significant, especially in the post 9/11 world, as other Arabian Gulf countries (such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar) have been accused of funding fundamentalist and/or political Islamist groups and networks both in the Middle East and globally. Nevertheless, this young ambitious Gulf state pursues its national security interests and shields political sovereignty in all means possible without submitting to the Western expectations.

As part of the international efforts to combat the threat of ISIS in the Middle East, the Global Coalition Against Daesh was formed in 2014. The UAE has been co-chair of the Working Group for Stabilization in Iraq together with Germany and the United States since 2015, and the third largest contributor to the UNDP launched and managed Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS) in Iraq after the US and Germany. The stabilization program aims to reconstruct the infrastructure and rehabilitate the towns destroyed by ISIS to enable the return of internally displaced Iraqis to their homes. In addition to provision of humanitarian assistance, about a dozen Emirati entities have focused on reconstruction and rehabilitation in areas of health, education, water and electricity since 2015.³¹

About a dozen Emirati entities have focused on reconstruction and rehabilitation in areas of health, education, water and electricity since 2015

The Syria Recovery Trust Fund (SRTF) is another recent foremost international engagement that exemplifies the UAE's willingness to embrace multilateralism and cooperate with the western world in case of overlapping political interests. The multi-donor trust fund was initiated by Germany, the UAE and the United States in 2013 with the German KfW Development Bank as the Trustee, "to channel grant funding from the international community in a transparent and accountable manner into projects inside Syria with the objective to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people" and "to finance priority projects for essential services in sectors such as water, health, electricity, education, food security, solid waste removal, as well as other sectors including rule of law, agriculture, transportation, telecommunication, public enterprise, and housing" (srtfund.org). Denmark, Sweden, Finland, the UK, Japan, France, Italy, Turkey and Netherlands joined the agreement in 2014. The "framework agreement" fundamental to the trust fund acknowledges the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as the legitimate representative of the Syrian People; therefore, explicitly supports a regime change agenda and uses humanitarianism as counterinsurgency in Syria.³² As of December 2019, the UAE contribution to the SRTF was about 7.6 percent (18.71 million Euros) of the overall contributions (246.43 million Euros), significantly less than that of Germany, USA, Japan, Kuwait and France, though the UAE is a founding as well as a steering board and management committee member.

On the other hand, the UAE disbursed about \$130 million and \$94 million to Syrian crisis in 2016 and 2018 respectively. About three quarters of the total amount was humanitarian assistance mobilized and managed by the Emirati government and humanitarian organizations in areas of action including emergency multi-sector aid, refugee camps and food relief for Syrians inside and outside Syria.³³ As part of these efforts since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, the UAE government has set up refugee camps and temporary shelters operated by the Emirates Red Crescent and independent from UNHCR for Syrians in Jordan, Northern Iraq, Lebanon and Greece. For the UAE government's public diplomacy goals, Emirati presence and visibility in the humanitarian space as a leading actor are important ambitions, and might have been shadowed had the UAE been involved in this space through multilateral organizations like UNHCR.

The UAE has strategic development goals intertwined into its humanitarian agenda in regions where there are economic and political interests at stake and stability is essential. Therefore, humanitarianism opens an extra space of operation to achieve strategic foreign policy goals, as well as to strengthen relations with the international community. In Yemen, Libya and Syria, the UAE government allocated about 20 percent of humanitarian aid for building coordination and support infrastructure (i.e. logistics and communications systems) to facilitate humanitarian aid delivery by regional and international humanitarian organizations, as well as Emirati foundations and organizations.³⁴ From 2012 to 2019, the UAE provided about \$4.73 billion humanitarian aid towards Syrian crisis and has recently contributed to the stabilization efforts in Syrian territories liberated from ISIS in collaboration with international partners. A total of \$1.9 billion in humanitarian aid

³¹ MFA&IC 2017, 2018.

³² Ziadeh 2019.

³³ MFA&IC 2016, 2018.

³⁴ MFA&IC 2016.

has been disbursed to Yemen between 2015 and 2019, making it the top foreign aid receiver from the UAE in recent years. Further, cooperation with the WFP, UNICEF, WHO, UNHCR and ICRC has deepened.³⁵

Through its independent humanitarian assistance activities on the ground, and pragmatist engagements with Western governments, the UN, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, the UAE seeks international acknowledgment and consolidates its presence as a relevant power actor in the Middle East and beyond in countries where it has political allies and economic interests. Larger contributions to multi-country humanitarian initiatives and multilateral organizations may be possible in the future as the UAE gains more say, presence and leverage within the international humanitarian regime currently dominated by the Western states and interests. The Governor of the UAE Central Bank responded to the IMF request for extra funds in 2009 saying “[we] will not be providing funds without extra voice and extra recognition”,³⁶ the Emirati stance regarding humanitarian aid to multilateral organizations may be the same.

Humanitarian Enterprise as Business

The UAE’s special interest in humanitarian aid also lies in the current trend of humanitarianism as business and the country’s ambition to diversify its national economy and consolidate its capacities in commercial, military and humanitarian logistics.³⁷ Over the last two decades, the UAE has proven to be a “global nexus state” with economic, political and institutional capacity to assert itself effectively in the areas of international trade, logistics and finance to achieve foreign policy goals.³⁸ The UAE logistics space is transnational and includes the ports, docks, highways, free zones and warehouses owned by the UAE state and UAE-based companies around the world.³⁹

As an “island of stability” with resources and a strategic geographical location with proximity to the conflict zones, the UAE houses the biggest humanitarian warehouse in the Middle East.⁴⁰ Dubai International Humanitarian City (IHC) is currently the largest humanitarian aid warehouse in the Middle East, and an independent, non-profit, humanitarian free-zone authority housing UN agencies, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and commercial entities operating in the humanitarian sector. The IHC has been instrumental in strengthening relations with the UN and international humanitarian organizations, attracting private companies operating in the humanitarian sector to the UAE, and expanding the Emirati logistics sector to also include humanitarian logistics. Annually since 2013, Dubai has hosted the Dubai International Humanitarian Aid and Development Conference and Exhibition (DIHAD) that brings together not only international and regional non-profit organizations, but also private companies and corporations operating in the sector of humanitarianism.

DIHAD is a platform for businesses operating in the humanitarian industry to showcase their services and products, and a major annual event for the UAE to promote its humanitarian image and “role as a world hub for local, regional and global humanitarian players” (DIHAD website). DIHAD has a different focus and theme every year. DIHAD 2019 was titled “People on the Move” and focused on refugees and internally displaced people in the Middle East. While there was a UNHCR and IOM predominance in the conference program, among the exhibitors were for-profit businesses such as Universal Logistics Bergen, O.B. Viik, Lupro Products, IPG Intelligent Packaging Group and Hallgruppen from Norway, Better Shelter from Sweden, GLOBALTT SPRL from Belgium, Nutriset from France, Real Food Systems from Switzerland, Spanish Kits and the 42 Degrees Company from Spain, and Toyota Gibraltar Stockholdings from Gibraltar. For-profit “social enterprises” like Better Shelter from Sweden are known for their cooperation with corporations (i.e. IKEA for Better Shelter) as well as UN entities (i.e. UNHCR for Better Shelter). The upcoming DIHAD will take place in March 2020 with the theme “Aid, a focus on Africa”; there are a multitude of issues on the agenda including conflicts, climate change, population growth, urbanization, education, employment and SDGs as well as natural resources, trade, investment and economic growth.

The UAE houses the biggest humanitarian warehouse in the Middle East

³⁵ Gulf News 2019.

³⁶ Ulrichsen 2011: 238.

³⁷ Ziadeh 2019.

³⁸ Molavi 2014, Henderson 2017.

³⁹ Henderson 2017.

⁴⁰ Ziadeh 2019.

Conclusion

The presence of humanitarianism in public diplomacy discourse has gained prominence in the UAE, especially together with UAE's aggravating foreign policy concerns following 9/11 and the Arab uprisings. Emiratis have been genuinely vocal and open about how they define humanitarian diplomacy as part of their public diplomacy and soft power, and in terms of their efforts for "nation branding" in the international arena. Accordingly, systematization and institutionalization of the UAE's humanitarian diplomacy have been consequences of Emirati efforts to enhance international cooperation with the Western world to consolidate the country's pro-Western stance in international politics concerning war and peace-making, and to reinforce the UAE presence as a power actor in strategic war zones and crisis situations as well.

Since the 2000s, the UAE has been an increasingly transparent and assertive new actor in international humanitarianism, innovatively following and being involved in the Western dominated global trends in humanitarian aid, humanitarian enterprise and security-oriented governance of conflict. The UAE has also adopted smart foreign policy strategies, not only with an effort to comply with Western liberal/neoliberal humanitarian norms, institutions and practices, but also to safeguard political and economic interests abroad in the face of regional and global challenges. Accordingly, the humanitarian face of Emirati foreign policy has contributed to the promotion of the country's image and branding as a young, dynamic, liberal state ready to cooperate with the Western international community in international humanitarianism in its own unique way claiming state sovereignty, regional leverage and international recognition.

There is a growing academic literature and policy debate on the so-called "emerging" donors or the non-Western "new" state actors in international humanitarianism. The UAE is not an "emerging" or "new" donor in the field and has a long history of humanitarianism as part of foreign policy. Other Arab states, such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, have longer histories of humanitarianism than the UAE. Despite this long history, international attention on these states as humanitarian donors has only recently emerged. However, their heightened interest to be recognized as "partners", "members", "participants" in the Western dominated international organizations and in international humanitarian space is new. Indeed, their conducting humanitarianism has been institutionalized and rationalized (i.e. goal orientation at the expense of values and ideals), ironically in compliance with the demands and interests of their Western allies in war zones as well as in international humanitarian space since 2000s.

In the academic literature, the UAE has been criticized for being "divergent" in terms of its aid mechanisms and motivations diverging from the traditional Western norms and practices.⁴¹ How to evaluate this kind of argument given the evolution of the Western humanitarian norms and practices further away from their traditional principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence towards securitization, politicization, privatization and containment in the 21st century? UAE humanitarian orientation has also been politicized and rationalized since 2001 with a rhetoric of "humanitarian diplomacy" in foreign policy, but especially in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings in 2011.⁴² However, institutionalized cooptation of humanitarianism and humanitarian action in pursuit of political and economic interests is not new, and is indeed a Western feature in modern history.⁴³ There is also a well-known global financial burden for targeting humanitarian crises especially in the Middle East and Africa, which is increasingly delegated to the "emerging" humanitarian state actors like the UAE and the other Gulf countries. Therefore, there are some questions that need to be addressed properly in comparative academic and policy research:

1. How different are the "non-Western" state donors from the established Western state and non-state donors in terms of their humanitarian diplomacy concerning decision-making about whom to target, how to target and when to target in highly politicized, militarized and privatized humanitarian space in the 21st century?
2. How relevant are the "non-Western" state donors to the humanitarian policy discussions in the arena of international humanitarianism that is continued to be dominated by the institutions, norms and practices embedded in the Western imperial legacy?
3. What are the underlying global structural forces changing the profile of the state and non-state donors of international humanitarianism in the 21st century?

⁴¹ See for example Young 2017.

⁴² Al Mezaini 2017.

⁴³ See for example Donini 2010.

There is also a well-known global financial burden for targeting humanitarian crises especially in the Middle East and Africa

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The project “Humanitarian Diplomacy: Assessing Policies, Practices and Impact of New Forms of Humanitarian Action and Foreign Policy” aims to study the policies, practices and impact of humanitarian diplomacy (HD) as conducted by select state actors and humanitarian donors (Qatar, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, UAE), and two traditional humanitarian actors (the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC). This study is of crucial importance in achieving two key objectives: (1) to understand the effects of the growing overlap between humanitarian efforts and states’ foreign policy; and (2) to understand if, how, and to what extent HD is an effective instrument to meet the challenge of leaving no one behind, as stipulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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