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Exploring the Reasons behind the MENA States` Normalization of Diplomatic Ties with Israel in 2020: A Comparative Case Study between Qatar and the United Arab Emirates

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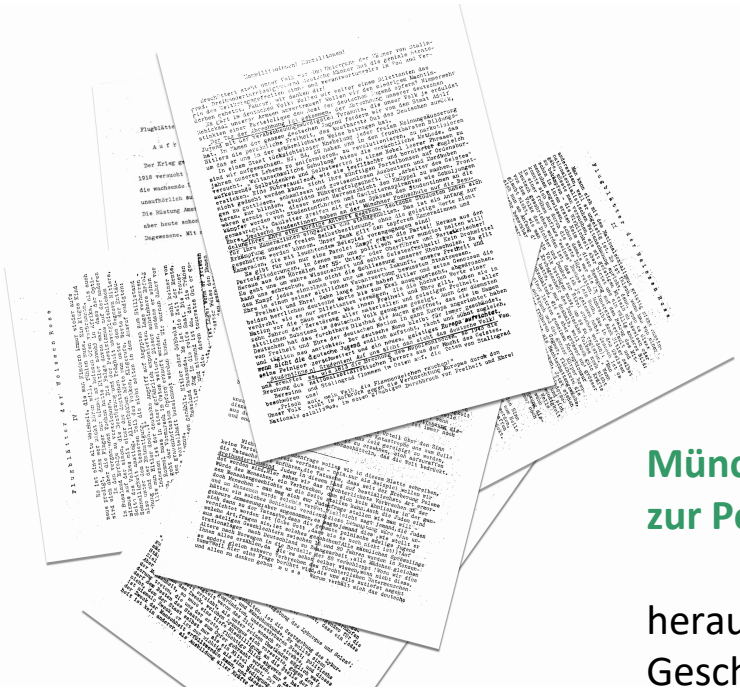

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List of Abbreviations:

AA	Abraham Accords
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FP	Foreign Policy
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
IR	International Relations
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
LNG	Liquid Natural Gas
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MSCD	Most Similar Cases Design
MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions
NA	North Africa
NAM	Non-Alignment Movement
R&D	Research and Development
UAE	United Arab Emirates
PA	Palestinian Authority
SWT	Sovereign Wealth Fund
TSR	Tacit Security Regime

1 Introduction:

"At first, we [didn't] negotiate nor bargain, then we traded peace for the sake of land, then we traded peace for the sake of peace, and now we are trading peace for the sake of ice-cream [...]", comments the presenter of a weekly political satire show following the news about the United Arab Emirates normalizing its diplomatic ties with Israel in August 2020 (AJ+ Kabrit, 2020). His comment refers to the three Nos of the Khartoum Resolution, namely: "no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it," which represented the official foreign policy stance of most Arab states since the state formation of Israel in 1948 (Arab League Summit, 1967).

Since its establishment in 1948, the Arab League declared that it would not accept the existence of Israel, marking the non-negotiation and bargaining period. However, in 1979 Egypt became the first Arab state to sign a peace treaty with Israel which entailed the latter's withdrawal from Egyptian territories captured in 1967. Thus, altering its foreign policy stance to peace for the sake of land. Fifteen years later, in 1994, Jordan became the second and only other Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel. Hence, peace for the sake of peace. At least, it was the only Arab state to do so until August 2020. A wave of normalization of diplomatic ties ensued almost thirty years after the last Arab states' peace agreement with Israel, viewed as a "cold peace". It started with the Abraham Accords signed between the United Arab Emirates, Israel, and the United States to mark the normalization of diplomatic ties. This event was followed by Sudan formally agreeing to normalize relations with Israel in October 2020, after which Morocco in December 2020 and Bahrain in March 2021 followed suit. Therefore, the research question: *"Why did MENA states normalize their diplomatic ties with Israel in 2020/21?"* naturally poses itself. Unlike the cases of Egypt and Jordan, two countries that share a border with the state of Israel and a history of armed interstate conflict, the normalization process does not seem to be prompted by any external events such as wars, border disputes, refugee questions, or water-related matters. So why was the position towards the status quo, one that has remained unaltered for decades, suddenly change?

This question is of relevance in international relations for a myriad of reasons. Firstly, the peace process between the Arab states and Israel has had a history of being deemed "intractable" and "protracted" with an "impressive resilience" to previous meditation efforts (Hitman, 2018, p. 51). Therefore, a shift in foreign policy with consequential regional band-wagoning effects is of scientific curiosity. Further, case specifically, the UAE, Sudan, Morocco, and Bahrain are all members of regional and international institutions like the

League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation that not only condemn the normalization of ties with Israel before the fulfillment of demands related to the Palestinian question but have also sanctioned states in the form of suspension (like the case of Egypt in 1979 by the League of Arab States) for establishing diplomatic ties with Israel (Johansson-Nogués, 2020, p. 111). Moreover, the normalization process represents an empirical anomaly for two reasons as it does not follow the sequential process of conflict resolution (Hitman & Kretcher, 2018).

Thus, rendering the normalization move theoretically puzzling as it goes against rigid norms that have historically existed in the affected countries' both bilateral and multilateral foreign policy. Moreover, due to the topic's relative novelty, there aren't many published studies. Nonetheless, two analytical approaches are especially prominent in the available studies. The first points to neorealist approaches whereby geostrategic interests MENA states share with Israel in containing the "Iran threat" are highlighted. The second focuses on the economic benefits MENA states could reap as a result of establishing diplomatic ties to Israel.

However, existing approaches still leave many questions unanswered. Why now? And if the security and economic interests states share are so homogenous and apparent, why didn't more MENA states normalize their diplomatic ties with Israel?

To fill this research gap and offer insights into interstate normalization this thesis will follow a y-centric small-N qualitative theoretical empirical comparative case study approach. Thereby, it will establish a comparison between Qatar – a state that has maintained the status quo – and the UAE – the first state to normalize its diplomatic ties with Israel in 2020. Moreover, building on different theory traditions namely realist, utilitarian-liberal foreign policy as well as constructivist foreign policy and adjusting them to the MENA region, this thesis will offer four reasons behind diplomatic normalization that shed light on several different aspects. First it will showcase how diverging domestic, regional and international threat perceptions can be decisive in normalizing diplomatic ties with Israel. Second it will not solely focus on economic benefits resulting from normalization, but also the state's economic landscape that might render them more inclined to establish interstate relations and tap into new markets. It does so by especially focusing on a state's degree of economic diversification. Third, it explores symbolic and ideational factors and how they can either hinder or enable interstate cooperation. Those aspects will be explored by following the subsequent structure.

First the term normalization will be defined and operationalized. After which a brief insight into why states have historically established and normalized diplomatic ties with

Israel will be established. This will aid in offering an overview of the theory traditions that have been especially influential in shifting states' foreign policy toward diplomatic relations. Further, it will generate an overview of existing scholarly articles on the topic of the Abraham Accords. Afterwards the thesis will present the theoretical background coupled with regional factors established in the literature review. Deduced from those two, the hypotheses and independent variables guiding this research will be elaborated on.

The thesis aims to analyze the reasons behind normalization, building on the variables explored in the existing literature. It will build on the neorealist balancing approach. However, it will focus case specifically on the concerned countries to explore how divergent threat perceptions and economic cost-benefit calculations can be. Since so far, academic literature has either focused on one country or painted the countries that normalized ties with the same brush, this study will conduct a most similar cases design to control for more variables than the ones established. After presenting constructing the research design and methodology, the empirical findings along with their interpretation will be presented. Lastly, this study's limitations will along with future research prospects.

2 Literature Review and Theories:

2.1 Defining Normalization:

To answer the research question "Why did some MENA states normalize their diplomatic ties with Israel meanwhile others maintained the status quo?", the term normalization itself ought to be defined. The first clause of the Abraham Accords titled "Establishment of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Normalization" reads, "Peace, diplomatic relations and full normalization of bilateral ties are at this moment established between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel" (Abraham Accords Peace Agreement: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization between the United Arab Emirates and Israel, 2020, Article 1). This declaratory statement does not only indicate a significant and unprecedented shift in regional foreign policy (FP), but it also establishes the distinction of normalization from a peace treaty and establishing diplomatic relations.

Peace agreements can result in numerous outcomes, among them positive and negative (cold) peace. Negative or cold peace refers to an absence of violence. Yet, unlike positive peace à la Galtung, it does not entail aspects such as structural integration or commitments to peace education, etc. (Grewal, 2003). On account of this, both the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel and the one between Jordan and Israel have always been referred to as a "cold peace," yet when the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan signed a

peace treaty with Israel, it has been almost exclusively referred to as normalization. This raises the question of why there is a distinction between the two peace settlements.

Although academic literature does not have a singular definition for the term or a theory of normalization, and the term itself varies according to the case at hand, normalization can be traced to the literature on conflict resolution (Hitman & Kertcher, 2018). To establish a deeper understanding and challenge the applicability of Western conflict resolution theories to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Hitman and Kretcher re-analyze the definition of normalization. They argue the term is often interchangeably used with peace settlement and reconciliation. To define and distinguish the term, they build on Feldman's work who splits the concept of reconciliation into two categories: reconciliation as "philosophical/emotional" (Versöhnung) and reconciliation as "practical/material" (Aussöhnung) (Feldman, 1999, p. 334). In applying this distinction to the term, they differentiate between normalization as the practical and material aspect of peacebuilding and reconciliation as the philosophical and emotional aspect. Accordingly, on the one hand, normalization is manifest through multiple channels such as "diplomatic relations, cooperation on economic issues, security arrangements, and other affairs" (ibid., p. 50). On the other hand, reconciliation is a strategy that focuses on cultural aspects and deals with issues such as the media representation of actors, representation in educational curricula, and cultural exchange. Moreover, Hitman and Kretcher criticize the prominent dyadic sequential view of conflict resolution that mainly presupposes a process of conflict emergence, escalation, de-escalation, and settlement, seeing as they do not deem peace settlements a prerequisite for normalization. Instead, they view normalization as a multi-dyadic process that can occur prior, during, and after a peace settlement. According to this definition of de facto normalization, almost all North African and Southwest Asian states have engaged in the process. However, although reductionist, this paper only considers official and explicit de jure normalization occurring after a peace settlement, so the scope of analysis can be limited. Thereby, normalization is defined as:

> the official establishment of diplomatic relations, economic cooperation, and security arrangements that take place after de jure state recognition in the form of a peace settlement. The normalization process can engender reconciliation which is manifest through – among other factors – more positive media and educational representation of the conflict party as well as cultural exchanges.

Having elaborated on what normalization is, *why* it takes place remains unanswered. To establish an understanding of why normalization occurs in the absence of a theoretical

framework, the following chapters are dedicated to offering a broad and case-specific overview of states that have undergone the normalization process.

2.2 Historical Background on Normalization with Israel (1970s - 1990s):

There are a myriad of case studies on diplomatic normalization. Those range from cases about US-Cuban normalized relations under Obama (Biegon, 2020; Leogarde, 2015; Piccone, 2017; Zawatsky & Gemma, 2015) to the establishment and normalization of interstate ties after the Cold War (Ijiri, 1990; Inoguchi, 2013; Suryadinata, 1990; Cha, 1996; Woosang, 1993). The main reasons behind diplomatic normalization between former adversary states identified by authors are domestic pressures such as a shift in public opinion, ideational shifts resulting from generational changes, and voter preferences (Grenier & Gladwin, 2014; Piccone; 2017; Zawatsky & Gemma, 2015). Additionally, domestic pressures from economic elites and groups that pursue the maximization of their economic interests can also contribute to shaping foreign policy (Biegon, 2020; Ijiri, 1990; Leogarde, 2015; Piccone, 2017; Woosang, 1993). Moreover, authors point to security benefits resulting from cooperation that sometimes aid in countering a regional hegemon as grounds for normalization (Biegon, 2020; Cha, 1996). Lastly, normalization or establishing diplomatic ties can often help attain regional and international legitimacy, which can also improve one's reputation/image line and create opportunities in starting negotiations with other (previously hostile) states (Suryadinata, 1990).

Having offered a brief insight into why states can alter their foreign policy stance from one of hostility to normalization, the following aspects draw the gaze to the reasons behind why states have historically established and normalized ties with Israel.

Egypt, Jordan, and Israel:

Before 2020 Egypt and Jordan were the only two Arab states to have signed a peace treaty with Israel. Unlike the case of GCC countries, Egypt and Jordan are countries that border Israel, have engaged in armed conflicts due to, among other reasons, territorial disputes, and are strongly impacted by the Palestinian question (Musmar, 2021). For the case of Egypt, the Camp David Peace Accords in 1979 marked the secession of a decades-long armed conflict, including four wars with its neighbouring state. Through signing the Peace Accords, Egypt restored Sinai without military means, reduced its military expenditures by 18% from its GNP, and secured an annual aid from the US of $1.3 billion in military assistance. Moreover, it received $250 economic assistance resulting in a total of $69 worth of US assistance since 1979 and received military aid from the US in arms sales, military

training, and intelligence sharing (ibid., 2021). Jordan is not dissimilar from the case of Egypt either. Jordan's peace treaty with Israel also marked a ceasefire between the two warring states, negotiated water rights, established cooperation on issues related to Palestinian refugees, and ensured that Jordan would be supplied with natural gas. Moreover, the US also supported Jordan militarily and economically for the peace treaty by providing it with F-16s, counterterrorism facilities, and offering intelligence partnerships (ibid.). Economically the US forgave Jordan's debt and increased economic assistance, that Jordan is considered the world's largest recipient of US foreign aid (ibid.). Conclusively, one can claim that for the "first phase" of Arab-Israeli peace, the main drivers were rational cost-benefit calculations to ensure domestic security and sovereignty by ensuring border security and stable economies even when they came at the cost of being cast out as a regional pariah. However, unlike the cases mentioned above of diplomatic normalization, the peace process was not a "people-to-people" approach that saw domestic or regional support. In fact, the main hurdle to normalization with Israel identified in the Egypt-Israeli, and Israeli-Jordanian peace processes are the "immaterial" aspects (Aulas, 1983), such as the backlash from domestic and regional societies who established Islamic, Arab Marxist, Arab nationalist counter-normalization narratives (Salem, 2005). Hence, the classification as cold or negative peace. Consequently, their peace processes prove challenging compared to the 2020 wave of normalization, seeing as it thematizes states aiming to resolve inter-state conflicts and, in turn, had a different agenda than that of the signatories of the Abraham Accords. A state that might be more comparable to the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan would be India.

India:

India initially voted against the UN partition plan establishing the state of Israel equating Zionism with racism, calling it "the child of British imperialism" (Abhyankar, 2012, p. 6; Singh, 2018), refused the latter's membership to the UN, was the first non-Arab state to recognize the state of Palestine in 1988 and was among the last non-Arab states to fully establish diplomatic ties with Israel as late as 1992 (Hafeez, 2009). Today it is Israel's largest arms importer (Haaretz, 2018), and both countries' bilateral trade (excluding defense) reached US$ 4,14 billion in 2020 (Embassy of India, 2021). So, how did this come to be?

Like many Arab states, India pursued a pattern of backchannel diplomacy and economic and security cooperation with Israel between the 1950s until the 1990s, when those channels were officialized (Sharma & Bing, 2015). However, unlike Egypt and Jordan, India has never engaged in an armed conflict with Israel, making the case more similar to GCC

countries. The change in India's FP stance is generally ascribed to three phenomena. First, a shift toward a more economically liberal FP and general appeasement of the USA as the world's only superpower after the fall of the Soviet Union during the post-Cold War era (Hafeez, 2009; Rubinoff, 1995). Second, the strategic cooperation with Israel on security matters such as counter-terrorism training and defense technology development (Chengappa, 2004; Hafeez, 2009; Rubinoff, 1995). Beyond economic and security pragmatism, authors point to a third factor as the cause behind departing from animosity to cooperation, namely an ideational shift (Chengappa, 2004; Hirsch & Miller, 2021; Prashad, 2015). Ideational issues are viewed as especially prominent in forming novel bilateral interstate relations (Hirsch & Miller, 2021). In this context, ideational aspects, i.e., aspects states view to be pivotal in their identity formation, are defined by differing factors: regime ideology, a shared traumatic experience, religion, and historical heritage (ibid., p. 360). Accordingly, India identified more with Arab states in Israel's state formation period seeing as the former shared similar values with the Arab states resulting from their shared colonial experience and regime ideologies. That period was thus marked by India's domestic influences, Afro-Asian solidarity, anti-colonial assistance of Arab nationalism opposing Western influence, as well as values of the Non-Alignment Movement. However, with the shift toward a more neoliberal FP, India witnessed a decline of said values (Purayil, 2020).

Conclusively, it can be said that the shift in India's FP and the beginning of their diplomatic normalization process with Israel can be attributed to three factors: pursuing economically utilitarian liberal foreign policies, security cooperation to balance domestic and international threats, as well as an ideational shift that enabled deviating from the values of the era of anticolonialism, Third-Worldism and Afro-Asian to ensuring Washington's goodwill. Thus, this covers the reasons for the peace treaties between Egypt, Jordan, and Israel and the reasons for normalization in general except for the focus on domestic factors and legitimization processes.

2.3 UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan Normalization with Israel

Similar to the case of India, the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan have never engaged in armed combat with Israel, making the hostility ideological or even symbolic in nature (Jones & Guzansky, 2019). When the gaze is drawn to the literature of the most recent Israeli normalization – the Abraham Accords – most scholarly articles have been focused on the case of the UAE with brief mentions of Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco (Dazi-Héni, 2021; Hagemann, 2021 Sorkin, 2021). Thus, most analyses are GCC-centric, i.e., do not focus on

North African regional dynamics, which renders the following listed reasons behind the diplomatic normalization limited to the regional scope of GCC member states.

When the normalization process with Israel is explored, most authors point to the Abraham Accords as a long-cumulated process that has spanned over the past three decades through unofficial channels in trade, tacit security cooperation, exchange of know-how in research and development (R&D), and technology, especially in cybersecurity, surveillance and agriculture (Dazi-Héni, 2021, Hagemann, 2020; Hitman & Kertcher, 2018, Jones Guzanky, 2019; Segell, 2021; Sorkin, 2021). Consequently, the idea of de facto state recognition of Israel and cooperation on economic and security matters was not a novel one. In fact, de facto state recognition of Israel by GCC countries was initiated as early as the 1990s by Qatar and Oman when both states opened trade offices with Israel in their capitals (Roberts, 2017). However, it is the de jure state recognition and the resulting normalization of diplomatic relations that represent a major paradigm shift. Prior to signing the Abraham Accords, Jones and Guzansky (2019) made the case that Tacit Security Regimes (TCRs) best explain ties between Gulf Monarchies and Israel. The reason being, that TCRs – in the realist definition of the term – allow for long-term security and economic cooperation where state interests overlap, yet they do so in the absence of official agreements or institutions. This has historically allowed Gulf monarchies to achieve maximum utility in pursuing their perceived mutual interests with Israel, such as security cooperation, especially in countering Iran, yet without experiencing any legitimization backlash resulting from domestic and regional ideational/emotive hindrances surrounding cooperation with Israel, i.e., forsaking the Palestinian cause. Accordingly, any shift in GCC states' Israel FP was unforeseeable, seeing as for decades the costs of official normalization such as domestic and regional backlash outweighed the benefits of official ties. So, what changed?

Aside from scholars viewing the official normalization as a long-overdue process, articles on the AA cite two reasons to be the most important: overlap of security interests (Dazi-Héni, 2020; Hagemann, 2020; Ray & Webber, 2020; Rehman, 2020; Segell, b, 2021; Syed & Ahmed, 2021) and overlap of economic interests (Egel, Efron, & Robinson, 2021; Ray & Webber, 2020).

The GCC-Israeli overlap in security interests is attributed to domestic, regional, and international security paradigm shifts after the 2010/11 Arab Uprisings. Domestically, authors point to GCC states and Israel being equally threatened by political Islam movements like Muslim Brotherhood (MB) or Hezbollah (Dazi-Héni, 2020; Hagemann, 2020; Rehman, 2020). Due to changing landscape after the Arab Spring and the rise of political Islam, GCC

states looked to Israel "with fresh eyes" (Segell (b), 2021, p. 252). On the regional and international level, authors point to the Iranian threat as an overlap between the GCC states' and Israel's security FP, especially after the US signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) (Dazi-Héni, 2020; Hagemann, 2020; Ray & Webber, 2020; Rehman, 2020; Segell, b, 2021; Syed & Ahmed, 2021). Israel and several GCC countries strongly condemned the JCPOA and viewed it threatening to their security (Norlen & Sinai, 2020). Thus, this pushed many GCC, who already have a history of security cooperation with Israel, to seek more cooperation in light of their common major regional threat (Segell (b), 2021). Further, most GCC could not purchase certain weapons from the US due to their hostile stance toward Israel. However, after the normalization, it is rumored that the US is considering arms sales to GCC countries, including F-35 aircrafts (ibid.). Consequently, the regional and international threats resulted in a new nexus, namely the Iran vs. GCC nexus, which led GCC states, who now share a common threat with Israel, to seek closer ties.

The other important aspect in literature is the economic benefits resulting from normalized bilateral and plurilateral trade ties. Egel et al. (2021) argue that potential economic benefits achieved through bilateral UAE-Israeli trade in goods including oil, arms, and services like health, water, as well as agriculture, cyber-security, and technology could reach $6.5 billion dollars within a decade. This can thus create 150.000 to 4 million jobs in the future. Further, among the sectors that can be expanded is the tourism sector in the UAE, which witnessed a boost after 130.000 Israeli citizens visited the UAE between September 2020 and February 2021 alone (Middle East Monitor, 2021). Moreover, beyond private bilateral trade, the USA, Israel, and the UAE established a $3 billion fund called the Abraham Fund to promote regional economic cooperation and economic growth (Egel et al., 2021). Economic benefits resulting from the plurilateral trade ties are estimated to reach a total of $75 billion in economic excess for the signatories of the accords. The GCC countries' increased inclination towards recategorizing their economic strategies through expanding their trade relations and regional economic ties stems from their departure from exclusive dependence on one resource - fossil fuels - that is strongly and rapidly depleting (Ray & Webber, 2020).

Beyond economic and security factors, few authors briefly touch on the American and Israeli domestic roots prompting the Abraham Accords, such as the re-election of Trump in the USA and Netanyahu in Israel. This approach focuses on how a diplomatic victory in the MENA region could benefit their respective campaigns, especially in light of the failed "Deal of the Century" (Dazi-Héni, 2020; Segell, 2021). As a result, those domestic factors are

viewed to have then created an external form of coercion on MENA states. External coercion coupled with incentives such as ensuring Washington's goodwill, strengthening economic ties, arms deals, or even in the cases of Sudan and Morocco recognition and legitimacy, are thus considered a motivation for the signing of the accords (Yossef, 2021). Although this approach does not consider the position of MENA states and their respective decision-making apparatus, it does link the domestic root of FP.

Lastly, on the ideational front, two others attribute the change in FP to the individual Arab leaders' decline of Nasser-style Pan-Arab and Pan-African regional ideologies and the emotional symbolism and values that are considered to be prerequisites for regional hegemonism (Segell a, 2021). This decline in ideology is not only attributed to a value shift but a generational shift of leadership, especially in the case of the Gulf monarchies (Barany, 2021).

Conclusively, the main reasons identified in literature explaining why the AA accords took place are that GCC states and Israel overlap in economic and security interests stemming from domestic and regional security and economic concerns. Also mentioned are ideational shifts that are not in the foreground of analyses. Nevertheless, disregarding the fact that scholarly articles barely cover the North Africa region and covering why Morocco and Sudan might normalize ties as well, they cease to answer why not all GCC member states have normalized diplomatic relations with Israel if the causal link between overlap in security, economic interests, and diplomatic normalization were that apparent. Hence, prompting this thesis to explore those very reasons more thoroughly and adding factors that seemed to be of importance in historic normalization processes such as ideational shifts and domestic public opinion. In order to do this, insight on why states change their foreign policy stance needs to be established against the backdrop of foreign policy theories.

2.4 Theories: Realism, Utilitarian-Liberalism, and Constructivism

In offering an overview of why states undergo bilateral normalization processes using case studies on diplomatic normalization with Israel, as well as with other states, three reasons appeared to be most prominent due to their frequency: overlap of security concerns, the overlap of economic interests as well as ideational shifts/ a shift in domestic, regional, and international norms. Those three factors can be categorized under mainstream international relations (IR) theories: Neorealism, utilitarian-liberalism, and social constructivism. Hence, in the following segment, said theories will be briefly presented, reflected on, and adjusted to a theoretical framework suitable for analyzing the FP of MENA

states. Thus, constructing a final analytical framework to guide in producing and exploring this thesis' assumption.

Realism:

Although Waltz's 1979 neorealism IR theory is one ill-suited for analyzing states' foreign policy/ policy shifts, as it is system theory focused on outlining state behaviour in the international anarchic world order, authors nonetheless view its main argument stating that FP is determined by a state's relative power position to be applicable to foreign policy analyses (Baumann et al., 2001; Fearon, 1998, Waltz, 1979). For purposes of this study, the most relevant premises Neorealism establishes about the international state order, focus on changed interstate behavior (and, in rare instances, interstate cooperation). Those premises postulate that states are monolith rational actors that are existentially threatened. To survive and improve their relative power position, they maximize their power capabilities[1] through a "self-help" process of internal and external balancing. Internal balancing refers to maximizing ones' domestic economic and military capabilities. Inversely, external balancing points to strengthening ones' power position through military alliances, security regimes, and at times band-wagoning. The process of external balancing usually takes place when states share common threats. An outcome like alliances and band-wagoning due to shared threats is precisely what is most relevant to analyze Arab-Israeli normalization as a plethora of scholarly articles point to the security overlap in countering the Iran and political Islam threat in the region. However, as Nonneman (2003) highlighted, traditional IR theories like neorealism have an underlying Eurocentric bias with a hyper-focus on structuralist approaches that ceases to explain sudden shifts in MENA states' FP. He calls to attention that:

> "[t]he foreign policy 'role' of MENA states (as that of many other developing states), must be seen as defined through the lens of the leaderships' perceptions about the security of their regime, and about the opportunities and challenges presented by both their domestic and their external environments" (ibid., p.121)

This falls more within the theory tradition of Neoclassical Realism. Seeing, as Neorealism views state behaviour as solely and ultimately determined by structural elements such as a uni-/bi-/ multi-polar world order, Neoclassical Realism à la Rose (1998) and Schweller (2004) fills the explanatory gap. Sharing almost all fundamental assumptions with neorealist theory, neoclassical realism focuses on two more aspects: threat perception and the

[1] Herewith, "hard power" capabilities are measured in "size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence" (Waltz, 1979: 131).

complex nature of state units. Contrary to neorealists, neoclassical realists view states as complex and shaped by "unit-level factors such as state-society relations, the nature of their domestic political regimes, strategic culture, and leader perceptions" (Ripsman, 2011, p. 1). By departing from purely systematic considerations to portray states' FP, neoclassical realism establishes that threat perceptions – which can, in turn, determine their FP – are shaped by cognitive and domestic level structures rendering them prone to change. Moreover, a divergence in threat perception can result in a different balancing outcome such as overbalancing (when states are perceived more threatening than they are), and under balancing or nonbalancing (when states are perceived less threatening than they are), etc. (Schweller, 1998; Wohlforth, 1993).

Conclusively, deducing from the outlined theoretical foundations, the following aspects are deemed necessary in understanding foreign policy shifts: hard power capabilities and divergence in threat perceptions. Lastly, mentioned threat perceptions can stem from domestic political or societal factors.

Most GCC states except for Saudi Arabia are not categorized – solely by looking at their hard power capabilities – as traditionally powerful due to their small population and territory and, in some cases, low military capabilities. Therefore, it is expected that all GCC pursue the same FP as also implicitly indicated in the literature review. Accordingly, this FP would be external balancing through security cooperation, tacit security regimes – as mentioned in the literature review – or even band-wagoning. Nevertheless, after the signing of the AA, GCC states showed divergent reactions, with Bahrain following in the footsteps of the UAE while the rest maintained the status quo. Thus, directing the attention to divergent threat perceptions that might push GCC states toward cooperating with other states that possess high hard-power capabilities and shared threat perceptions. In this case, Israel. Moreover, as demonstrated by a plethora of scholars after the 2010/11 Arab Uprisings, new regional constellations emerged with a political Islam/groupings vs. ancién regimes nexus as well as the Iran vs. GCC nexus.

As a result, "Divergent Threat Perceptions" was theoretically deduced as the first independent variable in explaining why some GCC would pursue normalization with Israel meanwhile others would maintain the status quo.

X1: Divergent Threat Perceptions

Moreover, the following directional hypothesis was also deduced from the laid out theoretical approach coupled with case-specific literature:

H1: The higher the perceived threat of (domestic) political Islam and of Iran, the higher the likelihood of diplomatic normalization with Israel

Utilitarian-Liberalism:

Another aspect frequently mentioned in literature is the overlap of economic interests between Israel and the Gulf monarchies. The assumption persists that normalization may have been prompted by the promise of reaping high economic benefits drawing the theoretical perspective to the impact of economic factors on FP.

As mentioned above, resource endowment and economic capabilities constitute hard power capabilities which render them vital in understanding states' foreign policy positions. Utilitarian-Liberalism builds on the same approach as Neoclassical Realism that rejects the unitary system perception of states and favors one that pushes economic interests and cost-benefit calculations to the foreground of foreign policy. Correspondingly, Utilitarian-Liberalism claims that rational utility-maximizing actors who are the most assertive and dominant domestic actors can – via financial means – shape foreign policy that is aligned with their primary interests and preferences (Freud & Rittberger, 2001). Utilitarian-liberal approaches are agency-based and structural-based[2]. The agency-based one focuses on individual and or group action shaping foreign policy. Herein political actors, i.e., administrative actors, political-administrative actors, or private actors like companies, economic pressure groups, political advocacy groups, can shape foreign policy preferences. This approach proves the most challenging in the application to the case at hand for numerous reasons. First, the private sector in most GCC rentier states is virtually non-existent, as exemplified by the more than 75% of nationals working in the public sectors in Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE (Halaoui et al., 2017). Moreover, due to the illiberal political status of GCC states, economic pressure groups and political advocacy groups do not exist (International Labor Organization, 2021). Thus rendering most economic policies shaped top-down by political-administrative actors who are ruling family members. Even Nonneman's (2003) analytical framework falls short in explaining how divergent approaches to the economy can result in a shift in foreign policy, as in his MENA-centric FP analytical framework, he only distinguishes between rentier and non-rentier states, as well as capabilities in the form of economic, technological, and demographic advancement.

[2] The structural-based theories claim that democratic states are more likely to have a peaceful, cooperative foreign policy, meanwhile authoritarian states do not. Thus, this stream of literature is thus inapplicable in explaining why Gulf states normalized diplomatic ties with Israel, therefore it is disregarded.

Considering that most GCC states share incredibly similar economic, technological, and demographic capabilities and that it is difficult to systematically operationalize the position of individual political-administrative actors, mainly because they do not have party programs or campaigns, etc., the view can only be cast on emerging or new economic policies as an indicator of economic interests. Since a plethora of authors have pointed to the rising importance of economic diversification for GCC states' fossil fuels export-dependent economy (Aker & Aghaei, 2019; Kabbani & Mimoune, 2021; Mishrif, 2018; Tok, McSparren, et al., 2017; Ulrichsen 2017), as well as its positive impact on establishing novel interstate partnerships and foreign investments (Bartlett et al., 2017; Young, 2017), the impact of economic diversification on changing a states' foreign policy toward diplomatic normalization will be explored. The positive relation between economic diversification, i.e., "when the country's income is generated from different sources that are not related to each other directly" (Aker & Aghaei, 2019, p. 2873), is strongly interlinked with private sector development as well as export diversification (ibid.; Al-Roubaie, 2018). The central assumption is that with economic diversification comes an incentive to establish a more robust private sector. Along with the private sector, a plurality of actors pursuing different interests and new niches emerge, and consequently, a need for R&D arises. Thus, this plurality of actors can cause a shift in foreign policy. Moreover, export diversification prompts and allows states to tap into more regional and global markets, which can push FP toward cooperation with Israel.

Thus, resulting in the variable:

X2: Economic Diversification

This is coupled with the hypothesis:

H2: The higher the degree of economic diversification, the higher the likelihood of diplomatic normalization.

Constructivism:

As highlighted in the literature review, especially in the case of India and briefly in the literature on the AA, domestic factors including public opinion, ideations, and norms are contributing factors in the shaping of foreign policy. This builds on the constructivist approach in FP and other factors that will be outlined in this segment.

The constructivist approach differs from the neoclassical realist one, whereby not only does it consider domestic political regimes, strategic culture, and leader perceptions as far more than mere intervening variables in producing FP, it underlines how domestic social shared values can shape leader's perception against the backdrop of constructed regional and international norms as well. It views FP as shaped by intersubjectively constructed identities through socialization processes (Boekle et al., 2001). Constructivist FP theory is divided into two aspects. The first, transnational constructivism describes the impact of international norms on FP – in the case of GCC states, prominent transnational norms such as pan-Arabism and Islam are especially important (Nonneman, 2003; Boekle et al., 2001). Transnational norms are measured in international treaties/ international law (ibid, 2001). The second aspect is societal constructivism, which deems norms shared within domestic societies as especially influential as they can be transferred onto FPs (ibid). Societal constructivism is measured in constitutions, party programs, parliamentary debates, and survey data (ibid, p. 131). Consequently, those ideas, norms, and values, whether they are a state's self-perception of its cultural identity, or how said state is viewed by other states, shape interstate interactions. Said norms are constantly in flux and subject to change, a shift in them can change FP and alter a states' perception from hostility to cooperation and vice versa. Beyond the mechanism of how norms, values, and identities are produced as well as their resulting impact on FP, authors point how state identities and norms are utilized to imporove their FP ties and international standing (Tok, McSparren, & Olender, 2017; Zeineddine, 2017).

Due to their lack of hard-power capabilities GCC states, are strongly reliant on the image and identity they produce for both economic as well as security reasons. Thus, they concentrate their resources in strengthening their soft-power à la Nye (2004). Nonneman (2003) even highlights that the level of consolidation a MENA state's national identity is a domestic determinant of its FP. This employment of a positive national identity image is a concept called state branding which is frequently used in understanding the FP of small states like Switzerland (Saad, 2020). National identity is described to "[…] [constitute] the 'essence' of nation branding as the brand comes not only from the products and company but also from the culture of the country in its widest sense" (Saad, 2020, p. 242). The term Nation Branding itself refers to "the discursive commodification of a nation-state through marketing and image strategies in order to affect in positive terms the perception of foreign publics" (Villanueva, 2007, p. 53). There are several channels through which nation brands can be promoted: tourism, government policies (domestic or aimed at the foreign sector),

population's reputation, cultural heritage, and an investment-friendly landscape (Saad, 2020). In other words, it's where constructivist ideational aspects and realist security and utilitarian economic factors intersect.

Additionally, seeing as state brand is a government strategy, this adds a top-down approach of identity and norm construction especially in regard to Pan-Arab values, as briefly touched upon by Segell (2021, a). Further, it also borrows from the literature on India's support for Pan-Arab/Pan-African values and how it resulted in animosity with Israel. Thus, this results in the following independent variable:

X3: State Brand

Whereby, the assumption is established that:

H3: The more modern[3]/international identity a state tries to project in juxtaposition to a traditional/Pan-Arab identity, the higher the likelihood of diplomatic normalization.

Having established the top-down approach of constructed identities and brands in addition to their impact on FP, this variable explores the constructivist domestic ideational and normative background being transferred onto FP.

Thus, resulting in a final independent variable:

X4: Domestic Public Opinion

Lastly, the hypothesis reads:

H4: The more favorable the views the domestic population has of Israel/ establishing diplomatic ties, the higher the likelihood of diplomatic normalization.

3. Research Design and Methodology:

To explore and operationalize the posed hypotheses, this thesis follows a small-N (n=2) y-centric qualitative theory-guided empirical case study approach. Thereby a comparative most similar cases design (MSCD) study is conducted. A MSCD entails the comparison of two or more very similar cases which however have different outcomes (dependent variable).

[3] The term does not support the notion that a clash between Western and Arabic and Islamic matters exists and that the latter are in conflation with modernism à la Huntington. Therefore, when it refers to Western vs. Arab it refers to a reductionist view grounded in both Western literature and the view held by reactionary Islamists who view "overt modernity […] as the antithesis to the mode of society they prefer and agitate for" unless otherwise specified (Lekhraibani et. al., 2015, p. 109)

In doing so, the reasons (independent variables) behind the divergence in outcome can be explored thoroughly.

3.1 Case Selection:

Similar cases selected for this study out of the total possibilities in the universe of cases are the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. The United Arab Emirates being the first Gulf Cooperation Council member state and first Arab state since 1994 to establish official diplomatic ties to Israel, meanwhile, Qatar, a state very similar to the United Arab Emirates, maintained the status quo. Those cases were purposefully selected out of MENA countries that have established official diplomatic ties with Israel before and in 2020/21, and countries that did not, i.e., all other Arab MENA states. The presented cases would have allowed for either the employment of a most different cases design – in case countries that established diplomatic ties to Israel were compared to one another – or the selected mode of analysis – a MSCD. The latter was preferred, as it more optimally controls for factors that do not demonstrate causal links to the dependent variable and thus aids in identifying the independent variables (Lauth et al., 2015). Moreover, to ensure the suitable applicability of the selected cases to the research design, both cases are required to share very similar context factors. Accordingly, the following section highlights the cultural, demographic, economic, geographic, and political similarities between Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are often viewed as similar states regarding their state formation experience, cultural commonalities, and shared familial and tribal links (Roberts, 2017). Specifically, the following table showcases their plethora of similarities regarding their demographic makeup (see Table 1) for a demographic comparison between Qatar and the UAE.

As per the classifications put forth by the Centre of Small States, the World Bank, and the UN Forum of Small States, both countries fall under the category of small states seeing as their population size exceeds 1,5 Million yet is less than 10 Million (Gussen, 2019; World Population Review, 2021). Moreover, nationals in both states are considered a minority, as they do not exceed 12% of the total population (World Population Review, 2021). Thus, both are strongly reliant on expatriates and are marked by high migration rates (ibid., 2021). Ethnically both states share a roughly similar demographic makeup divided in ca. 60% of the total population from South and Southeast Asian countries, 10-15% from other Arab countries, and ca. 15% from other countries (see Figure 7). Moreover, both are Muslim majority states with the same Shia-Sunni ratio (see Figure 5 & 6).

Additionally, both countries have a high gender imbalance, seeing as women make up less than 35% of the total population. Lastly, Qatar and the UAE are marked by a high degree of urbanization at 90% and above and a high literacy rate at more than 90%.

Beyond demographic similarities, the two Gulf states also demonstrate numerous political commonalities (see Table 2). Historically prior to their establishment in 1971, Qatar and the UAE were British protectorates which led to a similar formative experience of the two neighboring countries. Almost thirty years post-independence both states permanently adopted constitutions built on a combination of civil and Islamic law (Hukoomi, 2021; The United Arab Emirates Government Portal, 2021).

The resulting political system is an absolute hereditary monarchy in Qatar and a federation of seven hereditary monarchies in the UAE. Both of which constitute the executive powers in the two states. Legislatively, Qatar and the UAE have a unicameral council, half of which is appointed by the executive. The other half are either directly elected by the respective state's nationals (Qatar) or indirectly via an electoral college whose members are chosen by the seven federal monarchs in proportion to the size of their federation (UAE). Moreover, political parties are banned in either state, which – among other factors – categorizes both states as unfree according to the Freedom House Index. Lastly, the judiciary is also appointed by the executive, which in turn highlights the executives' absolute power monopoly over all political institutions in both states.

Economically the two GCC members are not dissimilar either. After Saudi Arabia, both states have the second and third highest GDP and the highest and second highest GDP per capita in the region. The income inequality (GINI) is also relatively close. Furthermore, both states score very high on the human development index and have one of the lowest unemployment rates regionally and globally. Lastly, they share an almost identical GDP composition by economic sectors (see Table 3).

In summary, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates possess considerable cultural, demographic, economic, geographic, and political similarities, legitimizing the case selection and the appropriate applicability of the MSCD.

3.2 Methodology:

In general, all hypotheses and variables will be explored in a qualitative manner.

As pointed out by many authors who have written extensively on the topic of GCC and GCC foreign policy there is a general lack of systematic data that are available (Jones & Guzansky, 2019; Roberts, 2017). Therefore, the methods of extracting the information rely primarily on

secondary sources and occasionally primary sources applied heuristically such evidence found in a state's constitution, public opinion surveys, official government statements, etc.

The dependent variable *Y* is *Diplomatic Normalization*. Recalling its definition from the Literature and Theories chapter, diplomatic normalization will solely be measured in de jure normalization i.e., in the form of an official peace treaty between a MENA state and Israel.

As for the first independent variable *Threat Perception*, building on the neorealist as well as the neoclassical realist approach it is measured in Qatar's and the UAE's hard-power capabilities and secondary sources on the respective states' domestic and regional threat perceptions.

The second independent variable *Economic Diversification* is measured in hydrocarbon exports share of GDP, hydrocarbon sector-related exports share of GDP, FDI inflows share of GDP, investment in R&D, and evidence resulting from official diversification policies found in economic strategy programs and secondary literature.

The last two constructivist variables: *State Branding* is mainly measured with the help of secondary sources especially those on especially tourism and cultural branding, states' constitutions to get insights about the states' self-perceived national identities, as well as official FP statements.

Domestic Public Opinion is the only variable solely using primary data for its measurement, namely, it presents the results of public opinion surveys conducted in Qatar and the UAE.

Divergence in domestic and international threat perception:

4. Empirical Findings and their Interpretation

4.1 Threat Perception

H1: The higher the perceived threat of (domestic) political Islam and of Iran, the higher the likelihood of diplomatic normalization with Israel

Reads the first hypothesis. Thereby it assumes that when states share common threat perceptions that their balancing approaches are then identical, whereby when threat perceptions differ, the balancing approaches do as well.

There have been critical historic events that have permanently shaped the threat perceptions of the UAE and Qatar and consequentially their security FP. Those events include the islands dispute between the UAE and Iran, the Iran-Iraq war as well as Iraq's invasion of

Kuwait and finally the Arab Uprisings (Salisbury, 2020; Zaabi, 2019). The UAE and Qatar are both small states geographically surrounded by regional hegemons such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and previously Iraq. After their state formation the Qatar and the UAE both followed the "ideal" small states[4]' FP of band-wagoning (Sulaib 2017). However, after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, both Qatar and the UAE recognized that they are neither protected under the Saudi umbrella or that GCC states function as a counter-bloc to regional security threats (Hashim, 2020).

After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Qatar conducted its own form of internal and external balancing in the realist sense. Recognizing that it cannot possess hard-power capabilities, it decided to host and help build the US largest military base in the MENA region (Wallin, 2018). The military base, Al Udeid, allowed for the relocation from the Prince Sultan Airbase in Saudi Arabia in 2003 after the US invasion of Iraq. Moreover, it signed a security agreement with the US (Roberts, 2017). Thus, this granted Qatar an enormous deterrent capacity. In addition to that, Qatar started pursuing the same policy between 2014-2017 by hosting Turkish forces, alongside the US forces, the French forces, and the British forces as well (Hashim, 2020, p. 35).

Oppositely, the UAE saw itself capable or external balancing and thus underwent an extreme military build-up. Currently it's considered the […] most active and combat-proven military in the Gulf […] (ibid., p. 37).

Having established the different balancing approaches, both states pursued which according to neoclassical realism would suggest, divergent threat perceptions, how those states perceive Iran and political Islam will be highlighted.

During numerous occasions it was made evident that Qatar does not regard Iran with as much hostility as its GCC counterparts. For example, Qatar was the only country in the UN Security Council to vote against resolution 1696 which called on Iran to cease nuclear enrichment, it abstained from resolution 1757 calling to investigate the assassination of Lebanon's prime minister in Teheran, and in 2007 it invited Iran's president for the first time to attend a GCC summit (Roberts, 2017). Even when it came to conflicts between Iran and the US, Qatar did not abandon Iran's side, as exemplified by the fact that when Hilary Clinton delivered an anti-Iran Speech at Doha Forum in 2010, Qatar allowed Iranian warships to dock at its ports or when Bush requested that Qatar close Iranian bank accounts, Qatar refused to

[4] i.e., exhibiting low participation in world affairs, addressing a narrow scope of foreign-policy issues limited to their geographic area, only soft-power instruments, emphasizing principles of international law, choosing neutral stances (Sulaib, 2017)

do so (ibid., p. 74). Though Qatar's use of this hedging and regional Omni-balancing, it managed not to have hostile relations with either the US or Iran. Moreover, Qatar has found a way to cooperate with Iran seeing as both states share a third of the world's oil and gas reserves with Iran, namely the South Pars Field and its extension that was mostly funded by Qatar, the North Dome (Macaron, 2017; Naheem, 2017). In addition to that, Qatar has been subject to more territorial as well as political threats by Saudi Arabia than, it was by Iran, considering that Qatar has accused Saudi Arabia of attempting to instigate a coup in Qatar (Roberts, 2017, p. 98).

Inversely the UAE has had a more hostile history with Iran, starting with the dispute over the three islands from which UAE nationals have been evicted by Iran (Zaabi, 2019) and further perpetuated by domestic Sunni and Shia splits (Roberts, 2017). This leads to the subsequent point: domestic threats during the Arab Uprisings.

On the domestic level, Qatar, not unlike the UAE tried to capitalize on the changes in re-drawing new regional constellations which it can exert the maximum amount of influence (Matthiesen, 2018; Roberts, 2017; Ulrichsen, 2018). Qatar financially supported emerging political Islam groups like the MB in Egypt, Libya, and Ahrar El Sham and the Nusra Front in Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas (Roberts, 2017). In supporting emerging political groups in the MENA region, it would ensure power and influence in the region without using military force. The UAE was bankrolling anti-political Islam groups like the Zintan Brigades militia, the Libyan National Army in Libya, and later the Sisi government which overthrew the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Egypt (ibid.). Most political Islam organizations like the MB posed domestic threats to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain. For instance, the UAE's local MB group – Islah – gained political and social momentum in many emirates, resulting in them obtaining ministerial positions and thereby structurally consolidating an oppositional force (ibid.). Thus, political Islam posed a domestic threat to the monarchies' powers and authority

Thus, the reason behind the development of two separate camps, namely the pro and anti-political Islam dichotomy, has domestic roots. Qatar as a unitary state was never threatened by political Islam ideologies since the government has an absolute power monopoly. However, "the UAE's federal system provided multiple nodes of authority that diluted and stymied Abu Dhabi" (Roberts, 2017, p. 558). Consequently, a new nexus arose in the MENA region after the Arab Uprisings – the political Islam vs. traditional powers nexus, which was reflected in GCC member states' support for either group of the political

Islam camp or of a secular camp. Due to this changing landscape, GCC states looked to Israel who also views numerous political Islam organizations as a threat to their domestic security.

Conclusively, the UAE and Qatar although similar in their traditional hard power capabilities, do in fact differ in their threat perceptions. Meanwhile the UAE and Israel share the same threat perceptions, namely Iran and political Islam and therefore, they resort to security maximizing cooperation. Moreover, as highlighted in the literature review and proven in this paragraph, the UAE's "overbalancing" approach, engenders need for arms purchases. Thus, rendering Israel a strategic partner. Meanwhile Qatar has not undergone external balancing through militarization due to its differing threat perception from those of the UAE and Israel. Accordingly, it is not inclined to have a more formal security arrangement for arms' sales. This hereby validates the hypothesis, that threat perceptions can engender diplomatic normalization.

4.2 Economic Diversification

In recent years especially with the dip in oil prices by 70% from 2014-2016, GCC rentier states have become increasingly aware of their extreme economic volatility resulting from their mono-source-based economy (Mishrif, 2018). Moreover, hydrocarbon-based economies are unsustainable due to the ultimate exhaustibility of natural resources leading to estimates predicting that GCC states will deplete their wealth by 2034, in case they do not introduce new economic policies (Kabbani & Mimoune, 2021). It is suggested that GCC states have already started tapping into 2 trillion worth of accummalated assests invested in sovereign wealth funds (SWF) for future generations (ibid). Thus, to overcome this "resource curse" and thereby ensure their regime security (Jones & Guzansky, 2019) many GCC states among them Qatar and the UAE, launched economic programms to revolutionize their economies. Qatar's National Vision 2030 was thereby launched in 2008 and the UAE's National Vision 2021 was launched in 2010 (Miniaoui, 2020). The aim of both is economic diversification by reducing their dependence on hydrocarbon exports and the resulting hydrocarbon sector – and hydrocarbon sector-related shares of GDP (Kabbani & Mimoune, 2021). However, they have both approached their national visions differently and at different paces. Qatar seems to be less in a rush to diversify its economy – as opposed to Bahrain, Oman and the UAE – seeing as it has one of the largest LNG reserves in the world that is estimated to maintain sufficient production for the next 45 years (Mishrif, 2018). One of the chapters in its National Vision programme is even dedicated to the slow pace of economic

diversification as to not “stress”, “overheat” or “imbalance” its current economy (General Secretariat For Development and Planning, 2008, p. 6).

When the gaze is drawn to economic diversification measurements it is important to consider the hydrocarbon sector’s share of GDP, as it highlights whether an economy is shifting from being mono-source-based to being diversified and profiting from several sectors. As showcased in the following chart, the UAE managed to significantlly reduce its hydrocarbon sector share of its GDP to almost 30%, meanwhile, Qatar’s is at 40%, which is higher than the GCC average by 8.5 percent points (See Figure 1).

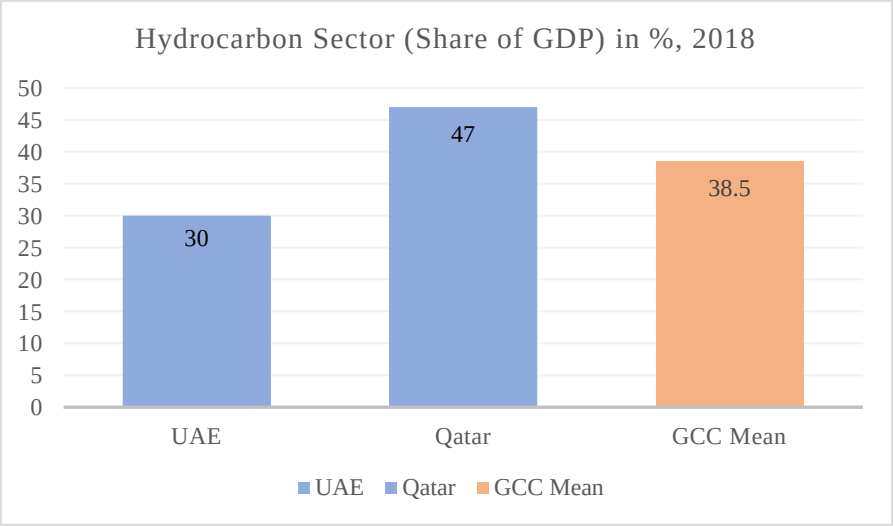

Figure 1: Hydrocarbon Sector (Share of GDP) in % 2018
Source: Kabbani & Mimoune, 2021

When considering export diversification which is also strongly linked to private sector development and the improvement of investment/start-up landscape as established in the literature, the UAE shows a relatively high export diversification rate. In comparison to Qatar, the UAE reached almost eight times higher revenues from non-hydrocarbon related exports. While Qatar’s hydrocarbon-related exports make up almost 95% of its total exports, the UAEs’ are only at 58% (see Figure 2).

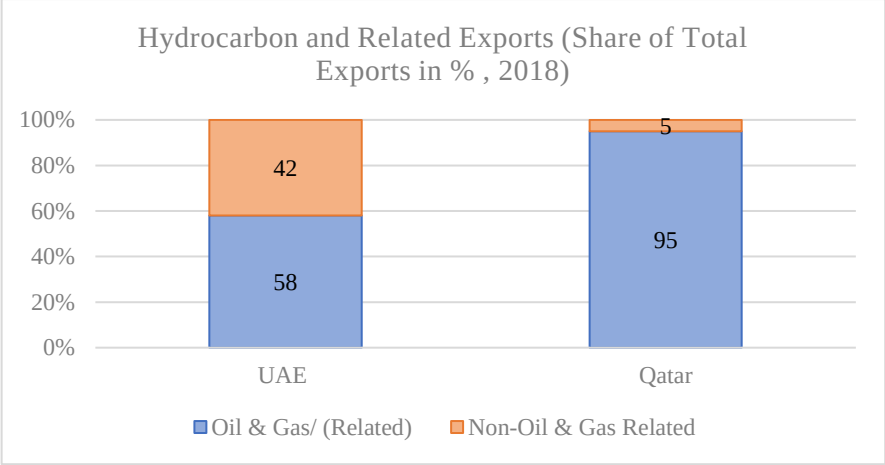

Figure 2: Hydrocarbon and Related Exports (Share of Total Exports in % 2018)
Source: Kabbani & Mimoune, 2021

Moreover, the UAE was able to generate regional and global above average revenue from foreign direct investments (FDIs) (see Figure 3).

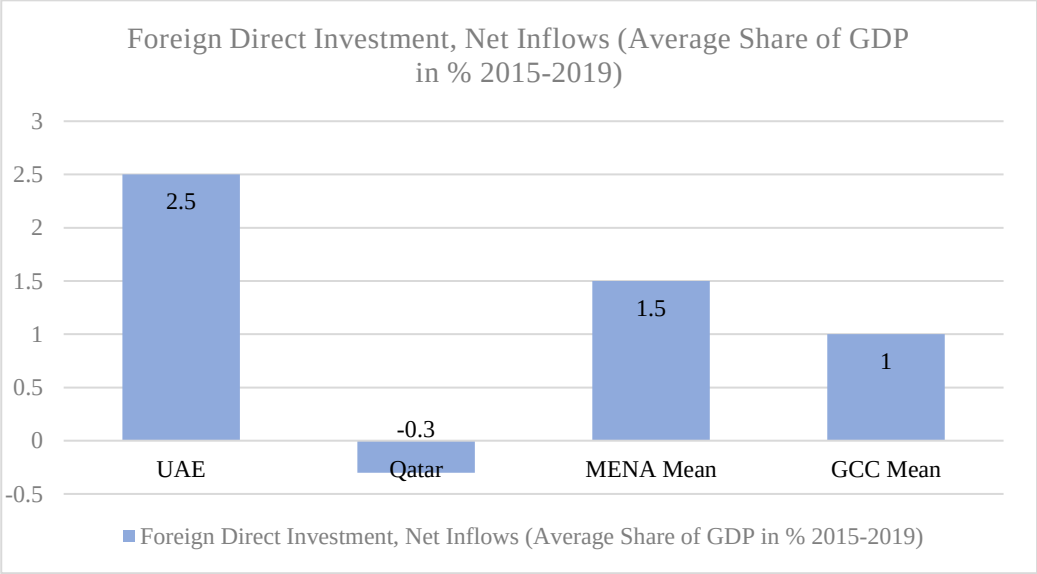

Figure 3: Foreign Direct Investment, Net Inflows (Average Share of GDP in % 2015 - 2019)
Source: Kabbani & Mimoune, 2021

Those three factors that the UAE has been trying and succeeding to develop new revenue systems through interstate relations especially as indicated by the FDI net inflows in addition to the non-hydrocarbon-related exports.

Beyond non-hydrocarbon economic sectors, states can diversify their economic sectors via services like tourism (Mishrif, 2018). In that regard, the UAE has especially strengthened its tourism sector. While Qatar's travel and tourism sector has contributed to

about 7,5% of its GDP (Dizon, 2021), the UAE's tourism sector contributed to almost double at 14% contribution to GDP in the year 2014 with Dubai generating 31% of the federal state's GDP (Aker & Aghaei, 2019).

Having presented the findings on the degree of economic diversification of Qatar and the UAE, H2 reading: The higher the degree of economic diversification, the higher the likelihood of diplomatic normalization with Israel can be confirmed.

Seeing as the UAE and Qatar share incredibly similar economic, technological, and demographic capabilities and illiberal government forms, their pursued economic strategies offered an insight on their interstate cooperation in regard to Israel. Considering UAE is venturing into new sectors, and expanding its tourism, it is logically conclusive that it would seek out cooperation with Israel. This is due to the fact, that Israel is the highest regional as well as global R&D expenditure which is strongly interlinked with advancing economic diversification (OECD Data, 2021; The World Bank, 2021). When the view is cast to Qatar, it is considered to still be driving a mono-source-based economy, which has not created an incentive of tapping into new niches yet.

4.3 State Branding

Strongly interlinked with the aspect of economic diversification is the state brand. Most GCC states share more similarities than they do differences. This puts them in a competition to project different state brands that contrast the strongly homogenous crowd with the logic of: "Every dollar of FDI and every engineer that goes to Abu Dhabi is one dollar that does not go to Doha" (Roberts, 2017, p. 121). Moreover, due to their lack of hard-power capabilities, they need to exert more effort in their soft-power to both attain regional and international influence and strengthen the hard-power capabilities that they actually possess, such as resource endowment and strong economies. Accordingly, nation branding serves as a significant tool in their reputational and image capital and a stimulant to their economies especially considering that nation branding can boost the economy by attracting investors and increasing exports (Keskhodar, 2016; Saad, 2020; Zeineddine, 2017). There are several channels through which nation brands can be promoted: tourism, government policies (domestic or aimed at the foreign sector), population's reputation, cultural heritage, and an investment-friendly landscape (ibid.). Having offered insights in the previous chapter on establishing an investment-friendly landscape, this part aims to shed more light on how states try to promote their image and thereby maximize their soft-power through tourism, cultural

heritage, and government policies that can impact a state's foreign policy. The aspect of population reputation will be further explored in the Public Opinion chapter.

The UAE:

The UAE's foreign policy, especially in the aspect of nation branding and soft-power, is split between two time periods: (1971–2004) and the post-Zayed era (2004–today) (Saad, 2016; Ketbi, 2021). Thereby the Zayed era was marked by a FP matching the archetypal role of a "small state", including a strong commitment to pan-Arab - especially the Palestinian cause - and pan-Islamic affairs with 9% of the state's GDP going to foreign assistance (ibid.). Meanwhile, the post-Zayed FP shows a more active, assertive, western outward-looking FP with an international and global orientation. Ever since 9/11, the UAE firmly aligned itself with the USA in its so-called war on terror by increasingly focusing on its soft power. A soft power that distances itself from what the world views as "Arab" and "Islamic" (Almezaini, 2018). Thus, it has been seeking to be more "western" and attract the support of the West, especially in countering Iran. Thereby its "[…] overt modernity is construed by reactionary Islamists as the antithesis to the mode of society they prefer and agitate for" (Lekhraibani et al., 2015, p. 109). It has been working on its soft power and state brand through tourism and sustainable energy.

Little Sparta, Dubaization, Dreamscape of Neoliberalism, and Kingdom of Bling are some of many words used to describe the UAE, which is indicative of its nation brand (Keshodkar, 2016; Zaabi, 2019). While Little Sparta refers to its growing hard-power capabilities and ambitions, Dubaization is a term used to describe futuristic urbanization and cities with pioneering architecture. Dreamscape of Neoliberalism and Kingdom of Bling refer to its luxury tourism and financial hub brand (Zaabi, 2019). The reason why, World Expo 2020, Formula One Race 2021, Zaha Hadid architecture, and images of the tallest building in the world, the world's biggest shopping mall, the world's largest airline, and world's busiest airports are some of the images associated with the UAE and Dubai specifically, reflects the UAE's state branding efforts. It demonstrates how the UAE has been transforming its image into a global hub of development and prosperity and showcases its disinclination to still be strongly affiliated with pan-Arab matters (ibid.; Lekhraibani et al., 2015). Its tourism brand isn't that of heritage, history, and culture like that of India or Egypt; it focuses more on man-made futuristic material aspects such as its palm island group, underwater hotel, Ferrari world, etc. (Saad, 2020). In doing so, the UAE was able to establish

a distinct brand for itself and significantly expand its tourism sector, with Dubai becoming the world's 7th most visited city in the world, hosting over 14 billion tourists in 2016 alone (Zaabi, 2019).

Politically the UAE has reflected its modern futuristic brand as well by hosting the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) – the first international organization solely dedicated to renewable energy – which won the bid against Austria and Germany (ibid.). Moreover, it started the construction project of Masdar city hosting IRENA to be completely carbon-free solely running on renewable energy.

Aside from hosting an inter-governmental organization, the UAE's official FP stance on its government page strongly highlights its active global responsibilities, leadership, and focus on economic cooperation (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2019).

Conclusively, it can be said that the UAE tries to project a distinct image of modernity and luxury to attract tourism, investment, economic exports as well as to be viewed as an advanced active state that possesses values aligning with those of North Atlantic states.

Qatar:

In contrast to the UAE, Qatar is a "traditional state" that also "adheres to the universal values of democracy, solidarity and human rights" (Roberts, 2017, p.121)

In juxtaposition to the UAE's, especially Dubai's mass-market approach to tourism, Qatar established a niche market focusing on the MICE subsector of tourism. This subsector in tourism revolves around promoting a state's image through hosting meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (Roberts, 2017). Some of the events it promotes its image through are by hosting the WTO in 2001, the Pan Arab Games in 2011, the 2021 FIFA Arab Cup, the 2022 World Cup, the Asian Games in 2006, as well as being home to American and British universities like Virginia Commonwealth, Weil Cornell Medical, Georgetown University, Northwestern, and University College London (ibid.). Through establishing this niche for itself, Qatar does not only distinguish itself from other GCC states, but it also reflects its leadership's sensitivity to and aversion from overt Westernisation like the case of the UAE (ibid.).

Moreover, instead of an active global "Little Sparta" role, Qatar has established its main source of diplomatic soft power and state brand in the role of the impartial mediator. One anonymous Qatari official describes Qatar's FP as the following:

"The idea is to try to keep everybody happy — or if we can't, to keep everybody reasonably unhappy. […] If that makes the Americans or the Russians a little cross, well, tough luck" (Worth, 2008).

In contrast to Saudi Arabia's geographic largesse and Kuwait's FP image of extending foreign aid due to its early fossil fuel boom, Qatar had the advantage of being relatively unknown regionally and globally after its state formation. This clean slate rendered Qatar impartial when it came to regional and global conflicts. Thus, seeing as the prerequisite for mediation is impartiality (Akpınar, 2015), Qatar capitalized on its impartiality status and transformed it into being a third-party mediator in regional and global conflicts to gain reputational and legitimization status (Roberts, 2017). This impartiality allowed it to step in when talks between 2008 Shia Lebanon and Saudi Arabia were failing, as it held no overt animosity toward any party. Ever since it has partaken in numerous mediations and hostage release situations like the release of US journalist Peter Theo Curtis who was held in Syria, the release of the last US serviceman held in Afghanistan by the Taliban, the release of 48 Iranians held in Syria, as well as 45 Fijian peacekeepers, 13 Greek Orthodox nuns, 30 Turkish diplomats and security personnel, a Swiss national in Yemen in 2013 and Djiboutian soldiers captured by the Taliban, etc. (ibid.). Moreover, Qatar held numerous inter-and intrastate mediations like the talks between the Yemeni state and the Houthis, the Sudanese government and the Darfur rebel movements, mediations between Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the US, mediations between Hamas and Fath, and most recently, mediations between the USA and Afghanistan (Sulaib, 2017). Qatar's stance as a neutral peace-promoting mediator is alose reflected on its government's official international affairs page, which ascribes the state the following FP role: "[mediation of] disputes between conflicting parties to achieve peaceful resolutions, […] [b]olstering humanitarian assistance in regions of conflict and war […], [s]upporting and strengthening efforts to reduce anticipated humanitarian needs in complex emergencies, […] [and] building alliances and finding solutions to conflicts through dialogue and mediation, while respecting the rights of sovereign nations".

Mediation has become such an integral part of Qatar's FP that it is constitutionally enshrined in Article 7 of its constitution, which reads: "The foreign policy of the State is based on the principle of maintaining international peace and security by encouraging the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means and supporting the people's right to self-determination and non-interference in internal affairs of the State, and cooperation with peace-loving nations" (The Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar, 2004).

Ulrichsen explains that the main reason as to why Qatar pursues a FP of mediation reads as follows: “The most convincing explanation of Qatari regional and peace-making efforts lay in a multifaceted strategy of political and economic liberalization, state branding, and pursuit of an independent foreign policy” (Ulrichsen, 2013).

Conclusively, the establishment of two fronts, one supposedly adhering to international law and hosting important cultural and political events in addition to offering financial support to organizations like Hamas, Hezbollah, and the MB, thus put Qatar “[…] in the unique position to be able to call Tel Aviv and Teheran in the morning and the hills of southern Lebanon and the Washington Beltway in the afternoon” (Roberts, 2017, p. 66).

4.4 Domestic Public Opinion

When the gaze is drawn to public support of ones’ country, either recognizing the state of Israel and/or establishing diplomatic ties with it, public opinion surveys in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates shed an ambiguous light. The ambiguity can be mainly attributed to the general suppression of free speech, a lack of independent media, and the fact that both countries do not regularly partake in public opinion surveys like Arab Barometer, Pew Research, or the World Value Survey (Rahman, 2021). Thus, leading to distorted and often ambivalent conclusions regarding public opinion. Nevertheless, the subsequent conclusions can be drawn from the limited and sporadic surveys available.

UAE:

A face-to-face survey by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy conducted in October 2020 interviewed a nationally representative sample of Emirati citizens. The results suggest that surveyed Emiratis were almost evenly divided between supporters and opponents of the Abraham Accords, with 47% viewing the peace treaty positively meanwhile 49% had negative views of it (Pollock & Cleveland, 2020). Among Arab publics, 47% ranks highest in support of the Abraham Accords, followed by Bahrain at 45%. The UAE also has the highest number of surveyed participants (19%) favorable of diplomatic normalization who claimed to be “very positive” about the agreement. The positive views on the matter have been rising continuously since the signing of the accords. In 2018 only 19% somewhat supported “work[ing] with Israel on other issues like technology, counter-terrorism, and containing Iran” (ibid., 2020). Further, one month before the signing of the accords, only 14% of the surveyed agreed with the statement that those who “want to have business or sports contacts with Israelis should be allowed to do so” (ibid., 2020). In October, a mere two

months after the signing of the agreement, the number of those strongly agreeing and somewhat agreeing with the mentioned statement rose by 25% percent points arriving at 39% approval.

Qatar:

Having established insights into UAE public opinion regarding peace with Israel, the following segments explore Qatar's stance on the matter. The same survey suggests that 40% of Qatari participants approve of the UAE and Bahrain peace agreement with Israel, rendering them the fourth highest in approval score after the UAE (47%), Bahrain (45%), and Saudi Arabia (41%) (ibid., 2020). However, besides the questions concerning their approval of the peace agreement and their approval of Hamas (47%), Qatari views on Israel and Palestine are not included further in the survey (Corona & Pollock, 2021).

A different survey, namely the Arab Opinion Index by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, casts a different image (2020). Although the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies survey explores the views of a larger number of Arab states (13 countries) than that of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (six countries), it does not include the UAE in its sample. Therefore, a precise equitable comparison between the first and second survey findings cannot be conducted, primarily due to the sample difference. Accordingly, the proceeding comparison is broadly generalized and heuristic in nature. However, the survey's results might be further distorted by factors other than the ones mentioned above, such as the interviewer effect, bystander effect, and social desirability bias, as they arise more strongly in face-to-face interviews as opposed to the "sealed envelope technique" (Krumpal, 2013). Moreover, reports about UAE governmental crackdowns on critics and opponents of the Abraham Accords might have further perpetuated said effects and biases (Al-Shamsi, 2021; Middle East Eye, 2020).

When asked about their "attitude toward the Palestinian cause," 88% of the surveyed Qatari nationals claimed "the Palestinian cause concerns all Arabs and not the Palestinian people alone," with a total aggregate of 79% in support of this statement (ibid., 2020, p. 54). Moreover, 88% of the Qatari nationals opposed the diplomatic recognition of Israel, with only 3% expressing support and 9% either declining to reply or do not know the answer. Among the Gulf states represented in the interview, Qatar scores highest in its rejection of establishing diplomatic ties seeing as 10% of the surveyed Kuwaitis supported the diplomatic recognition, and 65% of Saudi Arabians rejected it. Thereby placing the regional aggregate

over the years (2011-2020) at 6% in supporting the establishment of diplomatic ties and 88% in rejecting it. Thus, rendering Qatar the lowest among the represented GCC member states in supporting the diplomatic recognition of Israel. The main cited reasons for opposing diplomatic recognition of Israel in the Gulf are the alledged state's "[…] colonialist nature, racist and expansionist policies, and persistence in appropriating Palestinian land" (ibid., 2020, p. 56). Furthermore, compared to the total aggregate of the 13 surveyed Arab countries, Qatar scores lower than average in their support, seeing as the average is at 6% expressing support for the diplomatic recognition of Israel and 88% opposing it (ibid., 2020, p. 55). These findings starkly contrast those of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy which indicated that 40% of the surveyed Qatari population and 41% of Saudi Arabians supported diplomatically recognizing Israel (Pollock & Cleveland, 2020).

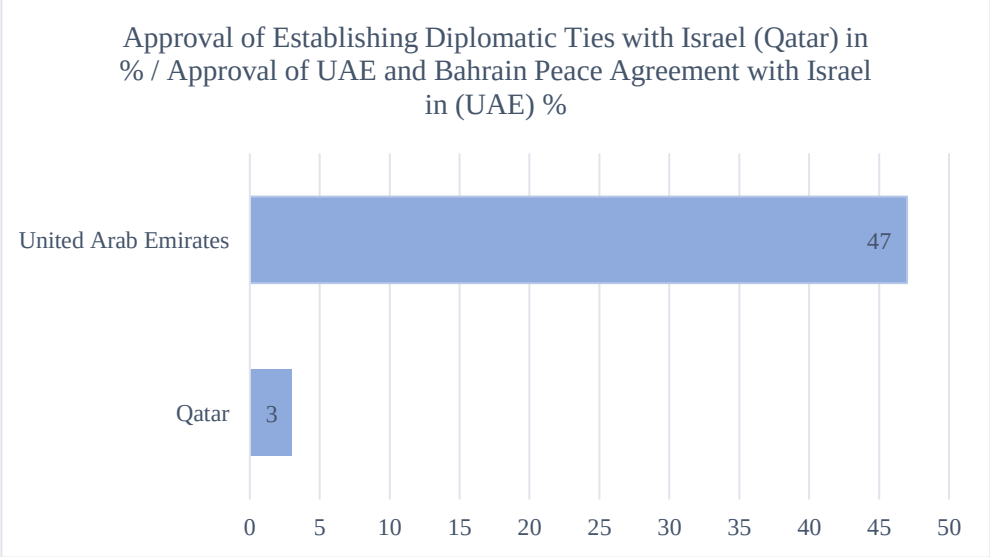

Figure 4: Approval of Establishing Diplomatic Ties with Israel (Qatar) in % / Approval of UAE and Bahrain Peace Agreement with Israel
Source: Arab Opinion Index, 2020; Corona & Pollock, 2020

Conclusively, the results of two different surveys that supposedly share the same methodology, sample size, and temporal framework, present extremely divergent findings, which impedes drawing overt inferences. Nonetheless, both surveys suggest that the majority of Qatari nationals reject the recognition of the state of Israel meanwhile, the first survey demonstrates the dichotomous split of UAE public opinion between support and rejection of diplomatic recognition. The sudden increase in support is attributed to two factors. Firstly, it is speculated that the sudden shift can be traced back to patterns of self-censorship prevalent in the country and the unwillingness to openly counter the official stance of the UAE government, as highlighted in the limitations of face-to-face interviews above. The second

assumption proposes that there may indeed be a change in the tide and that public opinion is growing strongly favorable of the Abraham Accords because of the witnessed benefits thereof, including business opportunities and due to the growing frustration with Palestinian leadership and Hamas (ibid., 2020).

As a result of the ambivalent findings the final hypothesis *H4: The more favorable the views the domestic population has of Israel/ establishing diplomatic ties, the higher the likelihood of diplomatic normalization,* cannot be fully confirmed.

4.5 Limitations:

There are numerous limitations that this thesis faces. The first and main limitation this thesis faces, is the scope of the analysis. Most mentioned literature and theories were adjusted to GCC FP; therefore, the applicability of the proposed assumptions is regionally limited and might not be generalizable enough to include NA states.

Moreover, among the limitations is also the variable selection. Only the most frequently occurring variables in the literature review were selected, and those backed by the theories. However, many other variables were mentioned in the literature review that could not be included due their difficulty in operationalization such as individual leader's perceptions in the form of generational shifts, or a variable like external coercion prompting normalization processes. The inclusion of more variables would not have allowed for an in-depth qualitative analysis. Another limitation the variables proved to have, is that they can be strongly interlinked like the interaction between state branding and economic

Moreover, the scope of the thesis did not allow for dyadic or multi-dyadic approaches which are favored by authors who analyse GCC FP. Future studies could include the US' state interests for example as the brokering party or Israel's willingness to sign the accords as well.

5. Conclusion

This thesis discussed the various reason explaining normalization, or lack thereof, amongst MENA states. By conducting a MSCD comparing the different positions of the UAE and Qatar on Israel, this thesis aimed to answer the research question of "*Why did MENA states normalize their diplomatic ties with Israel in 2020/21?"*. The analysis of H1 through H4 is meant to grant us an answer, in spite of the hurdles highlighted in the literature review and the limitations chapter. Through the findings one can conclude that

when GCC states are aligned with Israel in their threat perceptions and balancing approaches, then diplomatic normalization is plausible. Moreover, when the gaze is cast to a GCC state's degree of economic diversification, the higher it is, the more likely for that state to seek to expand its market especially by establishing interstate relations that can contribute to increasing R&D possibilities. Moreover, inducing from the presented findings, when GCC states project a "mediator"/neutral or a Pan-Arab identity, the less likely it is to establish diplomatic ties with Israel, seeing as it will either lose its "impartiality" status and accordingly its regional standing. As for the more "modern" and "Western" identity, it increases the likelihood of diplomatic normalization.

As highlighted in the limitations, future research would benefit from multi-dyadic approaches and analyses that are inclusive of North Africa as well. Moreover, the separation of variables or observing to what extent they impact each other would also highlight the effect of each isolated variable.

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Appendix

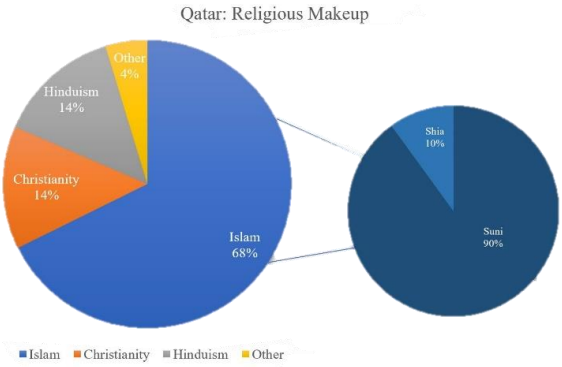


Figure 5: Qatar Religious Makeup
Source: World Population Review, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2009, p. 41

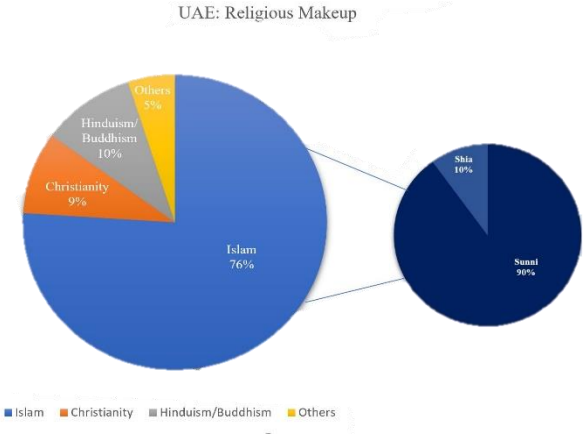


Figure 6: UAE Religious Makeup
Source: World Population Review, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2009, p. 41

Demographics	**UAE**	**Qatar**	**Similarities**
Population Size	9.157.000	2,949,324	Small States > 1.500.000 < 10.000.000
Nationals' population in %	11.6%	10.5%	High migration rates; High reliance on expatriates
Religion	76% Muslim	67,7% Muslim	Muslim Majority
Female population in %	30.88%	25.09%	High gender imbalance
Urban Population in %	87.3% of total population	99.3% of total population	High degree of urbanization
Literacy Rate in %	93.8%	93.5%	High literacy rate

Table 1: Demographic Comparison Between UAE & Qatar
Source: World Population Review, 2021; Snoj, 2019

Political System	**UAE**	**Qatar**	**Similarities**

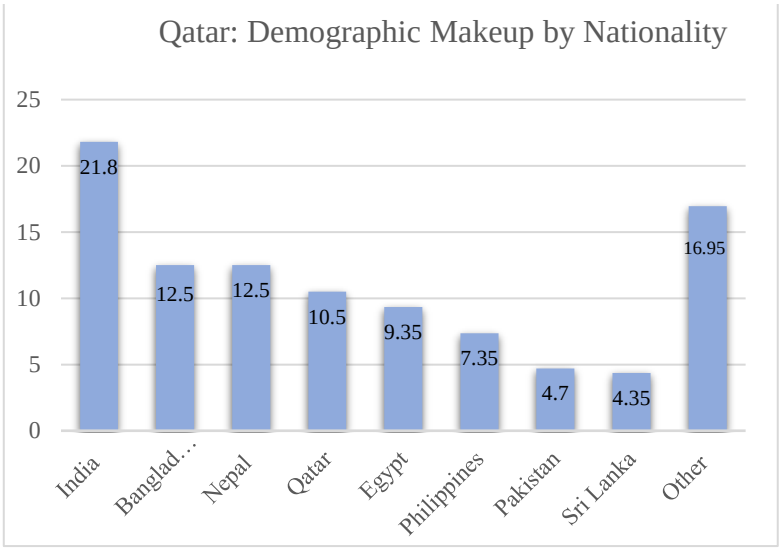
Freedom House Index Score	17/100	25/100	Unfree Score
Independence	December 1971 (British protectorate prior)	September 1971 (British protectorate prior)	Similar state formation history
Legal System	Mixed System of Civil and Islamic Law	Mixed System of Civil and Islamic Law	Identical Legal System
Executive	Federal Monarchy	Absolute Monarchy	Hereditary monarchic systems
Legislative	Unicameral Council: 20 members appointed by rulers of the seven constituent states, 20 members indirectly elected by an electoral college	Unicameral Council: 15 seats appointed by the head of state; 30 seats voted on in general elections	Unicameral Councils: 50% of the council appointed by the executive and 50% by Emirati and Qatari nationals; Political Parties Banned
Judiciary	Federal Supreme Court: Judges appointed by the head of state and approved by rulers of the seven constituents	Judges appointed by the head of state	Executive appointment of the judiciary

Table 2: Political System Comparison Between UAE & Qatar
Source: The World Bank, 2021; United Nations Development Programme, 2021; World Population Review, 2021

Economy	**UAE**	**Qatar**	**Similarities**

GDP	$421.142 Billion	$157.838 Billion	Second and third-highest GDP in the region
GDP Per Capita	$40.325	$61.264	First and second highest GDP per capita in the region
GINI	32,5	41,1	A somewhat similar distribution of income
Human Development Index	0.890	0,848	Score very high on human development index
Unemployment Rate	1,2%	0,6%	Lowest in the region and the world
GDP Composition by Sector of Origin	- agriculture: 0,9% - industry: 49,8% - services: 49,2% (2017 values)	- agriculture: 0,2% - industry: 50,3% - services: 49,5% (2017 values)	Same GDP composition by sector of origin

Table 3: Economy Comparison Between UAE & Qatar
Sources: The World Bank, 2021; United Nations Development Programme, 2021; World Population Review, 2021



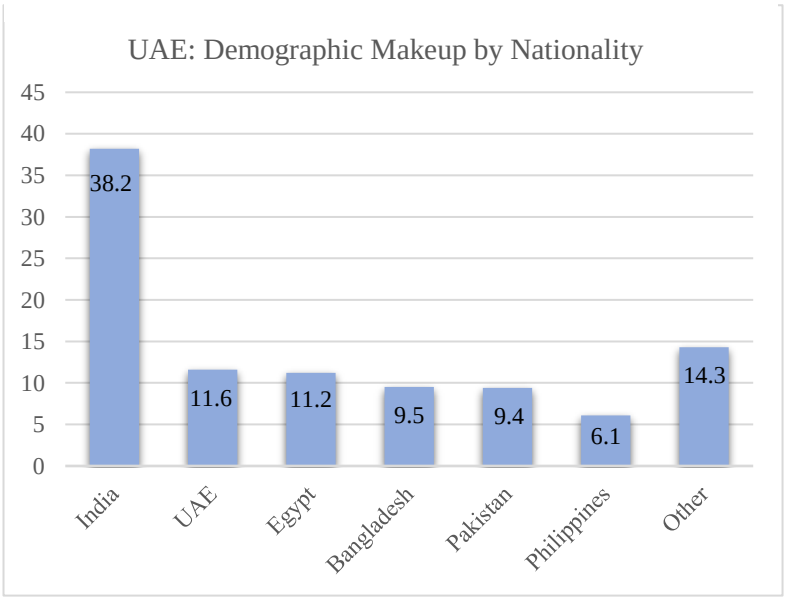


Figure 7: Qatar's / UAE's Demographic Makeup by Nationality
Source: World Population Review, 2021