

AFRICA POLICY OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES

Sergey V. Kostelyanets¹

Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

Abstract: Since the early 2000s, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been paying special attention to the development of political and economic ties with African countries. Fundamentally, Africa policy of the UAE has come to reflect imperatives of external and internal security (e.g. countering Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood movement, ensuring food security) and commercial interests of the ruling elite (servicing trade and financial flows between East, West and South). Economic cooperation between the UAE and Africa is already comparable in scale with that of other major partners of the continent – European countries, China, India, and the United States. For some countries in Africa, the UAE has become a leading trading partner. The UAE also increasingly began to act as a direct investor in Africa. Transport, port infrastructure, airports, telecommunications and tourism have become the main areas of application of Emirati investments. The UAE also developed military ties with Africa. In particular, the UAE engaged in military construction on the Red Sea and in the Gulf of Aden and also intervened in the conflict in Libya. Africa policy of the UAE is characterized by a bold combination of economic and military-political cooperation. The intensive use of mechanisms of soft and hard power by the UAE in Africa has dramatically strengthened the position of Abu Dhabi on the continent, but has also significantly increased political risks as the country has become entangled in Africa's conflicts and domestic politics.

Keywords: UAE, Africa, foreign policy, investment, military relations.

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the United Arab Emirates celebrated its 50th Anniversary of Independence. On December 2, 1971, six of the seven emirates of the British protectorate of the Trucial States announced the establishment of an independent federation called the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The seventh emirate, Ras Al Khaimah, joined the federation on February 10, 1972. The independent development of the UAE was accompanied by notable economic growth and social progress, but little political change. Just like at the beginning of its independent history, 50 years later, the UAE is still a union of seven absolute monarchies. The general policy of the UAE is determined by the Federal Supreme Council, which consists of the heads (emirs) of the seven emirates. While major decisions are made by simple majority vote, only the emirs of Abu Dhabi and Dubai have veto power. The federal government is responsible for dealing with issues related to defense, foreign policy, immigration, citizenship, health care, justice, and education (“United Arab Emirates’s Constitu-

¹ sergey.kostelyanets@gmail.com

tion,” p. 25-26). The state is traditionally headed by the head of the richest emirate – Abu Dhabi, while the government is led by the emir of the second most important member of the federation – Dubai. In fact, these two emirates control the UAE and its foreign policy. After Abu Dhabi provided a \$10 billion loan to Dubai in 2009 to prevent the bankruptcy of the latter, the role of the richest emirate in political decision-making in the UAE has become exceptionally high (“Constructing Commercial Empire,” 2019).

For 33 years (1971–2004) and until his death, the UAE was presided over by Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, Emir of Abu Dhabi, an influential and charismatic leader who was guided by the principles of Arab and Muslim solidarity and contributed to the emergence of the Emirates as an important player and mediator in conflicts in the Gulf region. In 2004, Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, son of the late Zayed bin Sultan became Emir of Abu Dhabi and, accordingly, the president of the UAE. Under Khalifa bin Zayed, his brother Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan Al Nahyan, as well as Emir of Dubai Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, became the main decision-makers of UAE foreign policy (Almezaini, 2012, p. 45). During this period Africa became a significant foreign policy vector for the Emirates. After Khalifa bin Zayed suffered a stroke in 2014, Mohamed bin Zayed became the *de facto* ruler of Abu Dhabi and the entire UAE. In May 2022, Khalifa bin Zayed died, and Mohamed bin Zayed formally ascended the presidency and consolidated his grip on the UAE and its foreign policy.

APPLIED METHODS

Methodologically, the study drew on primary (state and corporate) and secondary (scholarly and media) sources to identify and analyze fundamental processes and forces of change within the overarching paradigms of International Relations. The author applied various methods – analysis (including media content analysis), concretization, generalization and grouping of information, functional and comparative analyses – to critically assess information and achieve results. Furthermore, the application of the principle of historicism allowed the author to evaluate the UAE’s Africa policy as a holistic historical process, to highlight the patterns of its development, and to identify key drivers of change. Accordingly, the study employs an integrated approach to the processes and phenomena under consideration.

FINDINGS

It will be argued that the Africa policy of the UAE closely intertwines the issues of external and internal security of the state (countering Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood and ensuring food security) and commercial interests of its ruling elite (servicing trade and financial flows between the East, West and South). As far as security issues are concerned, the UAE responded preventively, greatly increasing its military footprint in North and East Africa and adjacent maritime areas and interfering in internal African matters on a number of occasions. As for the economic dimension, on the one hand, the UAE used its companies to strengthen Emirati soft power in Africa; on the other hand, diplomatic channels and political pressure endowed national (often family) Emirati businesses with a competitive advantage in a number of African countries. Overall, over the past two decades, the UAE has become one

of the key political and economic foreign actors in Africa. The UAE's Africa policy has been increasingly assertive and multidimensional, with the Gulf state simultaneously becoming a top investor and trading partner of the continent and establishing there an unprecedented (for a non-Western actor) military presence. In Africa, the UAE has effectively conjugated its two main foreign policy goals – countering the rise of political Islam and emerging as the principal financial and logistical gateway between all parts of the Old World.

DISCUSSION: THE UAE'S CHANGING FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES

Under the new leadership since 2004, the foreign policy of the UAE has undergone major changes. In an attempt to strengthen its international position, in 2007 the UAE joined an alliance of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan (the so-called “Arab Quartet”), whose activities were primarily aimed at containing – with the support of the West – the influence of Iran and Shiites in the Middle East. In 2010, Abu Dhabi joined the sanctions against Tehran, despite the importance of trade with Iran for the Emirati economy and close Arab-Iranian cultural ties. At the same time, the territorial dispute between Abu Dhabi and Tehran over the islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs, located at the mouth of the Gulf near the Strait of Hormuz, which had been occupied by Shah Iran back in 1971 and historically had been part of the Persian Empire, escalated noticeably. The location of these three islands has long been strategically important, but at the present time their importance has especially increased, since a third of the world's seaborne transportation of oil and over a quarter of the world's exports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) are carried out through this area (“The Strait of Hormuz,” 2019). In general, the main characteristics of the foreign policy of the UAE since 2004 have included the strengthening of military-political ties with Western countries (primarily the United States and France), worsening relations with Iran, less involvement in intra-Arab affairs and more interest in Africa (Almezaini, 2012, p. 46).

Mohamed bin Zayed's personal prioritization of establishing strategic ties with the United States may be traced to the early 1990s, when the “favorite son” of Zayed bin Sultan convinced his father to transfer \$4 billion to the US treasury to cover some of the costs of the 1990–1991 Gulf War. In 1991, shortly after the end of the war, the prince arrived in Washington as Commander-in-Chief of the UAE Air Force to acquire US-made attack helicopters and multi-role fighters in such numbers that the US Congress expressed fears that the deal would completely destabilize the Gulf region. A representative of the US State Department had to convince congressmen that the UAE “would never become a threat to stability and peace in the region” (“The Most Powerful Arab Ruler,” 2019).

According to Western diplomats, Mohamed bin Zayed is obsessed with the fight against Iran and the Islamist movement Muslim Brotherhood (“The Most Powerful Arab Ruler,” 2019); Tehran is considered to be dangerous to the UAE as a potential hegemon in the Gulf and a sponsor of Shiite parties and groups throughout the Arab world, so mostly poses an external threat to the security of the Emirates, while the Brotherhood is seen as an internal, direct threat to the state structure of the Emirates, since the Brothers seek to win the support of the main part of the Emirati popula-

tion – Sunni Muslims. The political goals of the Brothers run counter to the internal policy of the UAE leadership, which is aimed at further strengthening of the monarchical system. Emirati officials have publicly stated that the Muslim Brotherhood is destroying the “integrity and sovereignty of states”, poses a “serious threat to the security of the Gulf”, and plans to “seize power in all states of the Gulf” (Braude, 2013). In the eyes of the ruling elite of the UAE, Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups have a lot in common, as they spread Islamist ideologies at the international level (“Intra-Gulf Competition,” 2019).

In addition to dealing with the Islamist threat, Mohamed bin Zayed has been facing the challenge of diversifying the UAE’s economy by reducing its dependence on hydrocarbon exports. The tactics chosen by the government of the Emirates is the establishment of the UAE as a trade and financial hub – a kind of “gateway” between various parts of the Old World, including between African countries and China. According to experts, the launch of the Chinese Maritime Silk Road project has become a catalyst for Emirati activity in the African direction (dos Santos, 2015). Since the ruling families of Abu Dhabi (Al Nahyan), Dubai (Al Maktoum) and other emirates hold controlling stakes in most Emirati corporations, the foreign policy of the UAE in Africa has become, in fact, a derivative of the commercial interests of the tribal aristocracy. It is also important to note that Africa has become one of the most important sources of food products for the Emirates, which is dependent on the continent for 90% of its food imports.

A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Africa, especially its East Coast, served as an important trade direction for historical Oman (the territory of modern UAE and Oman, or eastern Arabia) even in the ancient period. Arab navigators used the steady seasonal winds to navigate towards the African continent in December and return to the coast of Arabia in March. A significant proportion of the goods they purchased in Africa – ivory, rhino horn, tortoiseshell and palm oil – were then resold to India. Later, during the Islamic period, Omani traders began to establish trading posts on Africa’s East Coast – in Malindi and Mombasa (modern Kenya), on the islands of Kilwa and Zanzibar (Tanzania), and in Sofala (Mozambique) (Voronkov, 2012, p. 82-83).

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Portuguese carried out a swift (by historical standards) campaign to capture and subjugate ports on the coast of the Indian Ocean. In 1507, Portugal conquered the city and fortress of Hormuz (Iran) on the shores of the eponymous strait, and then a number of coastal cities of historical Oman itself, and for a long time restricted the participation of the Omanis in the trading system of the Indian Ocean. Only at the end of the 17th century, the Omanis managed to restore their trading positions in East Africa, freeing Mombasa, Kilwa and Zanzibar from the Portuguese. In the 18th century, Omani merchants once again occupied a crucial position in the trade between India and East Africa, successfully competing with the British East India Company. However, already at the beginning of the 19th century, as a result of British military expeditions, Oman became a protectorate of the United Kingdom, which received full control over the foreign trade of the territory, which in turn led to the practical elimination of the Omani merchant class. It was only after gaining independence in 1971 that the con-

stituent emirates of the UAE got the opportunity to independently develop maritime trade with other states (Voronkov, 2012, p. 84-85).

In the early years of independent development, the Emirates faced a number of foreign policy challenges. In addition to Iran's already mentioned annexation of the three islands, Abu Dhabi was shocked by the 1973 Arab-Israeli war (the Yom Kippur War), which ended in Israeli military victory. In 1973, the UAE joined the Arab oil embargo on the United States, which provided significant logistical support to Tel Aviv during the conflict. In the 1970s, the Arab-Israeli confrontation became an important factor in the UAE's Africa policy. For instance, the central theme of the 1977 Arab-African summit in Cairo was the condemnation of Israel. The UAE and other Gulf monarchies for many years continued to provide financial assistance to African countries that severed relations with the Jewish state. At the same time, Abu Dhabi took an emphatically neutral position in another important confrontation in the region – the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq war – and tried to mediate between warring states. In 1990–1991, Abu Dhabi participated in the Gulf War on the side of the international coalition, but in the aftermath of hostilities the monarchy provided large-scale humanitarian assistance to Iraq (Almezaini, 2012, p. 41).

The crisis in Kuwait has clearly demonstrated the inability of the Arabian monarchies to independently protect themselves from external aggression. In this connection, the UAE and other countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf² (GCC) started to give priority to collective forms of deterrence of potential aggressors, with a special emphasis on obtaining security guarantees from the United States and other Western states. In 1994–1996, the UAE signed defense and security cooperation agreements with the US, UK and France. Thus, under President Zayed ibn Sultan until 2004, the military doctrine of the Emirates was purely defensive in nature and was based on the military-political union of the GCC member states and security guarantees provided by leading Western countries. The economic policy also remained quite conservative and focused on the development of oil production.

The beginning of the 21st century proved “stormy” in the Gulf. Several individuals born in the Arabian Peninsula took part in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, with half of the terrorists flying directly from Dubai and the rest having visited the UAE shortly before the attacks (“The 9/11 Commission,” 2004). Financial ties between Al Qaeda and Emirati companies were widely reported in the American press (“UAE: Financial and Transit Hub,” 2017). As a result, the US government demanded from the Emirates not only tougher measures to combat terrorism, but also to reform the political system. Zayed bin Sultan, who rightly feared that large-scale reforms would lead to the end of the monarchy, limited himself to cosmetic measures, but the apprehension of Islamic radicalism penetrated all government bodies of the UAE (Almezaini, 2012, p. 42).

Despite the fact that the Emirates opposed the invasion of US troops and their allies in Iraq in 2003, they unwittingly found themselves drawn into the campaign on the side of the allied coalition. The main outcome of the war for the region was the disruption of the fragile balance of power between Iraq, Iran and the Arab monarchies: Baghdad was taken out of the game, and Tehran was steadily building up its military power and influence in the region. The aggravation of relations between

2 The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (Gulf Cooperation Council – GCC) was established in 1981 by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman.

the Gulf countries and Iran under the circumstances became a matter of time. The events of the Arab Spring in 2011 further complicated the geopolitical situation in the region, bringing the Muslim Brotherhood and their sponsors, Turkey and Qatar (“Hearing,” 2018), to the forefront.

THE TRADE AND INVESTMENT DIMENSION

On February 9, 2020, in Addis Ababa, Reem Al Hashimi, the UAE’s Minister of State for International Cooperation, spoke to representatives of the member countries of the African Union about a new Emirati project for Africa. Called the *Consortium for Africa*, the project involved a \$500 million investment in digital technology and youth (“UAE Consortium for Africa,” 2020). The initiative was no coincidence: the UAE had become one of the largest investors in Africa. Although trade and economic relations between the Emirates and African countries began to develop in the 1970s, their explosive growth took place at the beginning of the 21st century. Indeed, this has been also facilitated by the UAE’s rapid economic development: whereas in 1999 the country’s GDP stood at \$84 billion, in 2014 it surpassed \$400 billion (“United Arab Emirates GDP,” 2022).

Just in 2002–2013 non-oil trade between the UAE and African countries increased by 700% (dos Santos, 2015). A significant part of it was for re-export, but the UAE has increasingly begun to act as a direct investor. In 2016, the Emirates took the 2nd (after China) place in the world in terms of annual investment in Africa – it invested more than \$11 billion (“EY’s Attractiveness Program,” 2017), and the volume of accumulated investments by 2018 exceeded \$25 billion. In terms of trade with African countries in 2018, (about \$48 billion) the UAE was in the 5th place in the world (after the EU, China, India and the USA) among non-African players. By 2020, trade turnover fell to \$46 billion due mostly to COVID-19 restrictions, yet the UAE became the second largest market in the world after China for African products (over \$28 billion in annual value) (“Bilateral Trade,” 2020). For some countries in Africa, the UAE has become a leading trading partner (Kostelyanets, 2014, p. 33). Transport, port infrastructure, airports, telecommunications and tourism have become the main areas of application of Emirati investments.

The UAE purposefully developed transport and logistics infrastructure, becoming a key hub connecting Asia and Europe with Africa. In 2000, DP World, one of the world’s largest port operators, came to Africa, taking control of a terminal in Djibouti. In 2012, DP World completed the construction of a container terminal in the port of Dakar (Senegal), which became the most productive and modern container terminal in West Africa. As of 2020, DP World operated seaport terminals in Africa in Dakar, Djazair (Algiers) and Djen-Djen (Algeria), Sokhna (Egypt), Berbera (Somaliland), Maputo (Mozambique), Luanda (Angola), as well as dry ports in Komatipoort (South Africa) and Kigali (Rwanda) (“DP World,” 2020). The latter is one of the largest logistics projects in Africa, designed to expand Rwanda’s trade exchange with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Tanzania and Burundi (“Dry Port,” 2019).

Etisalat, another Emirati transnational corporation, is one of the largest mobile operators in the world (more than 150 million subscribers). The African market has been a priority for the company for more than 20 years. In 1999, Etisalat bought a stake in the Tanzanian operator Zantel, and this was the company’s first invest-

ment outside the UAE. In 2004, Etisalat became a co-owner of the operator Canar (Sudan), in 2005 it acquired Atlantique Telecom (Benin, Burkina Faso, Togo, Niger, Central African Republic, Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire), in 2007 – EMTS (Nigeria), in 2014 – Maroc Telecom (Morocco). As of 2019, Etisalat owned the following shares in telecom operators in Africa: 66% of Etisalat Misr (Egypt), 48% of Moov (Benin, CAR, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Togo), 48% of Tigo (Chad), 25% of Gabon Telecom (Gabon), 48% of Maroc Telecom (Morocco), 30% of Onatel (Burkina Faso), 25% of Sotelma (Mali), and 20% of Mauritel (Mauritania) (“Etisalat,” 2019). By 2021, Etisalat slightly increased its share in most of the listed African operators and also consolidated its holdings in Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso and Mauritania under the brand Moov (“Etisalat Annual Reports,” 2022). In 2019, Etisalat joined the consortium building the Africa-1 submarine telecommunications cable worth \$600 million and 20,000 km long, which should be ready for service by the end of 2023. It will run along the northern and eastern coasts of the continent, connecting Egypt, Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar and South Africa, and will also land in France, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Pakistan (“Africa-1 Submarine Cable,” 2019).

Emirates – one of the world's largest airlines, which is based in Dubai, ranked 3rd (after Turkish Airlines and Air France) in 2015 in terms of the number of destinations in Africa among non-African carriers (“Turkish Airlines,” 2014). In 2022, Emirates operated flights to 22 cities on the African continent. Approximately 10% of the airline's revenue came from the African direction (“Flights to Africa,” 2022). The UAE's second largest airline, Etihad, in 2020 had 5 destinations in Africa (“Etihad Airways,” 2020).

Other Emirati companies active in Africa include Royal Group, Shafa Al Nahda and Essar Projects (Construction), LuLu Group (Retail), Dubai Islamic Bank and Nimai Capital (Finance), Al-Dahra (Agriculture), Emirates Global Aluminium (mining), Yahsat (satellite communications), investment funds Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, The Investment Corporation of Dubai, Dubai Holding and Khalifa Fund for Enterprise Development, etc. (“GCC governments,” 2019). In addition, many African companies have moved their headquarters to Dubai or Abu Dhabi (“Constructing Commercial Empire,” 2019).

Emirati investments play an important role in narrowing Africa's infrastructure gap, which is considered one of the key obstacles to the development of national economies and the deepening of integration processes among the countries of the continent. Although companies from the UAE tend to follow the government's strategy of redirecting trade, financial and human flows between Africa and the world through the Emirati hub, a number of projects also aim at developing intra-continental transport and telecommunications links.

Experts consider the largest UAE corporations, in particular DP World, as the instruments of Emirati foreign policy. However, it seems that the relationship between Emirati business and UAE leaders is more symbiotic. For instance, the ruler of Dubai, Emirati Prime Minister Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum owns 80% of DP World (“Dubai Ports World,” 2020), while Emirates, Etisalat and most other major Emirati companies are controlled by public investment funds. State-linked firms are always set to capitalize on any improvement in bilateral ties, while Emirati diplomats effectuate return on investment in the broadest sense (Mason & Mabon, 2022, p. 105-106).

THE MILITARY-POLITICAL DIMENSION

In the 2010s, the Africa policy of the UAE underwent significant changes: the emphasis shifted towards military-political activity. During this period, the Emirates built several military bases in the region, took a direct part in operations against Islamists in Libya, Somalia and the Egyptian Sinai (“The Most Powerful Arab Ruler,” 2019), and also contributed to the success of military coups in Egypt and Sudan. On a less controversial note, the UAE facilitated a peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which was signed in 2018.

The reason behind the intensification of foreign policy activities in Africa was twofold: on the one hand, it was the proliferation of piracy off the coast of Somalia, which threatened commercial interests of the UAE, and, on the other hand, the Arab Spring, which threatened to undermine the foundations of the monarchical regime. As Mohamed bin Zayed noted, in 2011 the UAE “suddenly found itself to be the only stable Arab state out of 22” (“Constructing Commercial Empire,” 2019). In 2010, the Emirates joined the international campaign against Somali pirates, which for many of its participants became an excuse to establish a permanent military presence in East Africa. In the context of ensuring the safety of navigation, since 2010 military installations of Italy, Japan and China have appeared in the region (see, e.g.: Kostelyanets & Okeke, 2018). The UAE has also joined the fight against the terrorist organization Al-Shabaab, which has been operating in Somalia since the mid-2000s (Kostelyanets, 2017, p. 121). The Emirates has entered into cooperation agreements with the Federal Government of Somalia and the authorities of the autonomous regions of Puntland and Somaliland. As part of these agreements, the Emiratis helped create the Puntland Maritime Police and built a military training base near Mogadishu to train the Somali National Army.

The events of the Arab Spring provided the Muslim Brotherhood with an opportunity to noticeably strengthen its political positions in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, which caused great concern in Abu Dhabi. Although the UAE Air Force took part in the NATO air campaign against the forces of the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, the Emirates did not receive the political and economic dividends in post-Gaddafi Libya that they had expected. Moreover, in 2012, Mohamed Morsi, a representative of the Brotherhood, came to power in Egypt, which threatened to radically change the balance of power in the Middle East, weaken the Gulf monarchies, and infect their societies with a “spirit of change” under the banner of political Islam.

With the support of the UAE (and Saudi Arabia), the legitimately elected President of Egypt Morsi was removed during a military coup in 2013. The Emirates acted similarly in Sudan in 2019, where, on the wave of popular discontent, they brought to power the Sudanese military, who took on a commitment to rid the country of the influence of the Brothers. The issue of Iran’s influence in the Horn of Africa was largely resolved by the UAE and Saudi Arabia back in 2014-2015 in the course of negotiations with Eritrea, Djibouti and Sudan. These African countries, which had previously provided Tehran with the opportunity to use their ports to transport weapons to Palestine, Lebanon, Somalia and Yemen, agreed to lower the level of relations with the Islamic Republic and support the actions of the Arab coalition in the war against the Houthis in Yemen in exchange for substantial economic assistance (see, e.g.: Kostelyanets, 2016).

In 2015, in the Eritrean city of Assab, the UAE began the construction of an extensive military base, including an airfield, sea docks and a tank base. According to some reports, the total cost of the 30-year lease of the base for Abu Dhabi was to be set at \$500 million (“The UAE Joins,” 2018). In 2021, however, the base was abandoned as Emirati involvement in the conflict in Yemen was scaled down. In 2017, the Emirates embarked on another project – the creation of a naval base and a commercial port (managed by DP World) in Berbera. Under a 25-year lease agreement, the UAE committed to invest \$1 billion in infrastructure projects in Somaliland (“Somaliland,” 2017). Although the President of Somaliland announced in 2019 that the UAE base would be converted into a civilian facility (“Somaliland UAE military base,” 2019), the Emirates still face the economic challenge of linking Berbera with Ethiopia via a transport corridor in order to compete more effectively in the lucrative Ethiopian market.

In the mid-2010s, the UAE began to provide significant military support to the Libyan National Army (LNA), led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, which opposed the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli. Coincidentally, GNA enjoyed the support of Qatar, Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood. Since 2017, an Emirati air base has been operating in Libya, near the city of El Marj, from which unmanned aerial vehicles of the UAE Air Force have been supporting the LNA (“UN team,” 2018).

In recent years, the UAE has significantly stepped up its diplomatic activity in the Sahel, seeking to strengthen its position against various Islamist groups in the region, including those supported by Turkey, Qatar or Iran. As part of this strategy, the Emirates provides support to the joint multinational anti-terrorist forces of the Sahel Five (the G5 Sahel Joint Force), which comprises military units from Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger. In 2019, the UAE donated 30 armored vehicles to Mali (“On the Delivery,” 2020). In the same year, rumors appeared about the creation of an Emirati military base in northern Niger (“The Emirates,” 2019), though this has never materialized. In early 2020, during the visit of the Mauritanian leader Mohamed Ould Ghazouani to Abu Dhabi, cooperation in the field of military activities and security was discussed, and the establishment of an Emirati military facility near the border with Algeria was mentioned in Mauritanian press (“Mauritania,” 2020). It seemed that these rumors were not groundless, although the discussions probably focused on granting rights to the UAE special forces to use these bases periodically.

African countries also played an important role as suppliers of manpower against the background of the unwillingness of the Arabs of the Gulf to suffer heavy losses in ground operations in Yemen and in Libya. Sudanese, Eritreans and Somalis fought on the side of the coalition against the Yemeni Houthis, while mercenaries from Chad, Sudan and some other countries of the continent participated in battles on the side of Libya’s LNA.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although the Africa policy of the UAE may currently be characterized by a fairly effective combination of politics and economics, in many respects it is a forced response of the Emirates to security threats, which include the military-political strengthening of Iran and the general increase in tension in the Gulf; the growing

popularity of political Islam, which does not accept monarchical forms of government, in the Arab world; and the growing volatility of the global hydrocarbon market, which requires oil-producing states to make efforts to diversify their economies. At the same time, the risks associated with such an aggressive Africa policy of the UAE are very significant. The combination of hard power and economic presence has considerably strengthened the UAE's positions on the continent, yet Abu-Dhabi's disposition to interfere in domestic politics and conflicts in African countries poses immensurable risks to the long-term viability of its Africa policy. The conflict involving the Emirates in Libya is especially difficult to resolve, and the deployment of Turkish military forces in this African country has shown that other players are also ready to raise the stakes in the struggle for influence on the continent. In fact, since then the UAE have turned toward rapprochement with Turkey and reduced its military footprint in the region. However, Abu Dhabi's interference in the internal affairs of African countries still undermines the sovereignty of the latter, increases political turbulence, and coincidentally also forms a negative image of the Arab monarchy among Africans. For example, dozens of protests took place in Sudan against the UAE's interference in the country's affairs and the sending of Sudanese mercenaries to Libya.

On the other hand, the scale of the UAE's economic cooperation with Africa is already comparable with that of other major partners of Africa – European countries, China, India, and the United States. The importance of Emirati companies, primarily DP World, which already operates over 70 ports in 40 countries of the world, for the development of the infrastructure of the continent and its integration into the world economy is difficult to overestimate. The competition of Emirati and other companies for servicing the trade and financial flows of the young and developing continent opens up more opportunities for Africans and allows them to choose the best terms, which contributes to the prosperity of Africa.

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