

## Competing Policies towards the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gulf: The Cases of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates

### Körfez’de Müslüman Kardeşler’e Karşı Çatışan Politikalar: Katar ve Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri Örnekleri

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#### Abstract

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar are similar in many aspects, including social structure, political life, and religious identity. However, there exists a considerable difference in their foreign policies toward one of the most important regional non-state actors, the Muslim Brotherhood. Since its independence in 1971, Qatar has developed strong relations with the Muslim Brotherhood organization. On the other hand, some of the Gulf countries, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, have remained skeptical toward having good relations with the movement. Particularly, after the Arab revolutions of 2011, the Emirati leadership pursued an anti-Muslim Brotherhood policy together with other regional allies. During this period, Qatar was under severe criticism as a consequence of its support for the Muslim Brotherhood movement. This distinction might be observed comprehensively in practice, yet it has not been adequately examined in a historical and ideological context. There is a lack of studies on the core determinants of Qatar and the UAE’s policy toward the Muslim Brotherhood. In light of this gap in literature, this work seeks to clarify why these two countries have such diverging policies toward the movement. Therefore, this study focuses on how the policies of Qatar and the UAE toward the Muslim Brotherhood diverged significantly, particularly in the past two decades.

#### Keywords

Foreign policy, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Muslim Brotherhood, Gulf

#### Öz

Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri (BAE) ve Katar pek çok noktada benzerliklere sahip olmakla birlikte bölgesel politikalarda önemli farklılıkları olan iki ülkedir. Bu farklılıklar arasında en belirgin olanı iki ülkenin bölgenin en geniş toplumsal tabana sahip hareketlerinden olan Müslüman Kardeşlere yönelik politikalarıdır. Müslüman Kardeşler hareketiyle olumlu ilişkileri bulunan Katar, bu politikayı bağımsızlığını kazandığı 1970’li yıllardan bu yana sürdürmektedir. Doha yönetiminin Müslüman Kardeşlere desteği özellikle 2011 yılındaki Arap devrimleri sonrasında artmıştır. Buna karşın BAE, Bahreyn ve Suudi Arabistan gibi Körfez ülkeleri Müslüman Kardeşler hareketinin siyasi bir aktör olmasını engellemeye çalışmış ve hareketin Ortadoğu genelinde siyasi ve sosyal süreçlerden dışlanmasına yönelik politika yürütmüştür. Aralarındaki farklılıklar pratikte kapsamlı bir şekilde gözlemlenebilse de tarihsel arka planıyla ve ideolojik bağlamda yeterli derecede incelenmemiştir. Bu nedenle Katar ve BAE’nin Müslüman Kardeşlere yönelik politikasının dinamiklerini inceleyen çalışmaların literatüre katkısı olacağı düşünülmektedir. Buradan hareketle bu çalışma söz konusu iki ülkenin Müslüman Kardeşler hareketine yönelik politikalarının neden farklılaştığını tarihsel bir perspektifle ele almaktadır. Katar ve BAE’nin Müslüman Kardeşler hareketine karşı politikalarının nasıl ve neden önemli farklılıklar gösterdiği, iki ülkenin harekete yönelik politikalarını şekillendiren temel dinamiklerin ne olduğu bu çalışmanın temel araştırma konusudur.

#### Anahtar Kelimeler

Dış Politika, Katar, Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri, Müslüman Kardeşler, Körfez

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## Introduction

Since its establishment in Egypt in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) movement has become one of the most important social organizations throughout the Middle East. Despite the policies of repression implemented against the organization by some of the countries in the region, particularly by Egypt, the movement continued its activities and became a transnational grassroots organization. While the Muslim Brotherhood attempted to play a role in the Egyptian political landscape during the Hosni Mubarak era, the organization became one of most important political actors in the country in the period following the Arab revolutions that began in 2010 in Tunisia. The political instability of the Egyptian revolution tempted the MB leadership to enter the political scene in the country. Therefore, the organization became a political actor after years of experience as a civil society movement (Pargeter, 2016).

In the early stages of revolutionary transformation in Egypt, the movement did not have a clear vision with regard to its role in the political landscape. It was founded by Hasan al-Banna in 1928 as an NGO for helping poor people and supporting education. It mainly used the discourse of “Da’wa,” which means “invitation,” urging people to obey Islamic principles and to establish a political and economic order governed by Islam. In the formation of the MB movement’s ideology, the idea of Islamic reform put forward by innovative figures such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida were influential (Zollner, 2009). The prominent emphasis of the movement was protecting Islamic values against rising socialist and nationalist ideologies as well as Zionist activities the effects thereof. The movement in the course of time increased its political effectiveness, starting from Egypt and spreading to other countries. The MB opened representative offices in Jordan (1946), in Syria (1937), in Lebanon (1936), and in many other Muslim countries in a short time. It also established a hierarchical structure and was linked to armed-forces like Hamas, which has been fighting in the Palestinian conflict since 1987 (Wickham, 2013). After Egypt signed the Camp David Accords with Israel in 1979, execution and prison sentences were given to members of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the organization was divided into many groups, such as Takfir wal-Hijra, Jihad al-Islami, and Jamaat-e-Islami. Despite being effective in the Syrian uprising in 1982, it lost great power after the Hama Massacre in Syria (Pargeter, 2013). Still, the movement contributed to the development of political Islamic thought and pioneered the establishment of almost all political Islamic movements. It also put an emphasis on social reform and social justice issues, such as the right to a living wage, adequate education, and satisfactory social services (Wickham, 2013).

However, with widespread popular support, the MB constituted a serious potential for political leadership in the post-revolutionary era. This was not limited to Egypt. Supporters of the MB were further motivated when the organization rose to leadership positions in Egypt. These developments caused disturbance for regional actors that were traditionally supportive of the political status quo. The possibility of Ikhwan’s contribution to regional political transformation made a great impact on the opposing camp to reconsider their policies toward the organization (Dihstelhoff & Lohse, 2020). In the aftermath of the revolution of 2011, a member of Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammad Morsi, was elected as president in Egypt. As the organization now became the strongest political actor in the

country, some of the autocratic regimes in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain, worried that sympathizers of the Muslim Brotherhood might initiate similar uprisings in their countries. However, there was a different kind of reaction as well. It was observed that the leading countries in the region adopted two different approaches in this period. While countries like Qatar and Turkey encouraged regional transformation and supported the MB movement, countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia supported the political status quo and worked to prevent the movement from consolidating power in the region (Lynch, 2016). These different approaches created tension among Gulf countries, which had been in close cooperation for many years under the umbrella of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Thus, the reason why specifically these two countries with very similar regimes, Qatar and the UAE, differ in their MB policies has emerged as an important research question.

These differences became more visible following the election of MB member Mohammed Morsi as the president of Egypt. While Qatar supported the Morsi government, the UAE and Saudi Arabia worked hard to remove him from power (Kirkpatrick, 2015). Riyadh and Abu Dhabi provided political and financial support to the military coup that took place on July 3, 2013, which toppled the first democratically elected president of Egypt, Mohammad Morsi. The MB's removal from power was warmly welcome by the UAE and Saudi Arabia (Telci and Rakipoğlu, 2018). In the following period, Abu Dhabi and Riyadh started a region-wide initiative to demonize the MB (Mason, 2018). The most serious step in this regard was its declaration as a terrorist organization. Another initiative of the UAE and Saudi Arabia was to target countries that supported the MB organization - namely Qatar and Turkey. This further highlighted the division between the UAE and Qatar with regards to their political approach toward the MB. Finally, as the two countries have become active foreign policy players in the Middle East, there has been increasing interest to study the foreign policy choices of Doha and Abu Dhabi (Ulrichsen, 2012; Roberts, 2017).

In recent years, the main dynamics that shaped Qatar and the UAE's policies toward the MB are closely related to the Arab revolutions of 2011. As the organization aimed to become an active policy player, the positions of Qatar and the UAE took different turns toward the movement. While Qatar chose to stand by the MB in the hope that this would strengthen Qatar's regional influence, the UAE thought otherwise. The UAE considered the rise of the MB as a political actor as a direct threat to its regime. This differing threat perception toward the MB was the main determinant of the diverging policy choices of Qatar and the UAE toward the organization (Roberts, 2017).

The most riveting question in that period was specifically as to why the UAE took such a rigid position against the MB movement. On the other hand, the underlying motives behind Qatar's intense support to the extent of jeopardizing its affairs with its neighbors are an issue of concern as well. From this point of view, this study will primarily examine the attitudes of the two countries toward the MB against a historical backdrop and will then discuss the internal and external determinants steering the MB policies of Doha and Abu Dhabi. Additionally, the study will analyze how the MB policies of these two countries took place at the level of action and discourse and which actors came to the fore in the process.

### **Nasser's Crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and the "Exodus"**

Following its establishment in 1928, the MB became one of the most vibrant civil society organizations in Egypt. Since its establishment, the MB has not refrained from political opposition to Egyptian governments. The movement opposed the alliance agreement between Egypt and Britain in 1936 and organized demonstrations protesting the decision of the Wafd Party and Britain. First, they decided to participate directly in the 1941 elections. The violent reaction they received from the Egyptian government began in 1948 following the assassination of the then-Prime Minister of Egypt Mahmoud El Nokrashy by a Muslim Brotherhood member (Arı and Koç, 2014). However, during the political transformation in Egypt in the 1950s, the organization experienced a difficult period as it had major divergences with the new administration led by Gamal Abdel Nasser. The Free Officers' coup in 1952 had made a great impact on the movement's political existence and activities in Egypt (Cleveland & Bunton, 2009). The Muslim Brotherhood provided support to Nasser in carrying out the coup; however, the relationship between Nasser and the movement became tense following Nasser's rise into power in the country.

The disagreement between the MB and the Nasser administration deepened rapidly. The assassination attempt against Nasser on 26 October 1954 was a turning point in this regard. The ideological and political gap between Nasser and the MB appeared to be based on Islamism versus Arab nationalism, and the increasing political influence of the MB challenged Nasser, who aimed to establish unity for all Arabs and was addressing the Arab nation while the MB, with their discourse of "Da'wa," was reaching out to all Muslims and wanted Egypt to become an Islamic state governed by Islamic principles. Nasser, hence, started the biggest crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt's history, ordering the arrest of thousands of its members, many of whom were given long prison sentences while some of the leading members were sentenced to death (Pargeter, 2016; Wickham, 2013). With the increasing political pressure on the movement, thousands of MB members migrated to the Gulf region, which was in the process of development thanks to the newly discovered oil and gas reserves.

A final development during the period was particularly decisive in the MB members' decision to migrate to the Gulf region. This was the execution of Sayyid Qutb, a leading intellectual member of the MB. This significantly affected the other members of the organization and forced them, out of fear of execution, to relocate to Gulf. During this period, while some MB members migrated to Saudi Arabia, others preferred to relocate to other Gulf countries. Specifically, Qatar and the UAE opened their gates to the members of the MB organization. This process further accelerated after these two countries gained independence in 1971. The main purpose of these countries accepting members of the MB was to benefit from their experience in numerous fields, such as civil society, religious services, politics, and, most importantly, education (Alnogaidan, 2011). While Gulf countries were widely illiterate at the time, they were strict believers in Islam. The two most important services that MB members would provide were educational and religious services (Al Mansouri, 2012; Roberts, 2014). As a result, following their resettlement in the Gulf region, MB members widely dominated the intellectual sphere in these countries in a range of scholarly activities. In the establishment of their national education systems, both Qatar and the UAE were in need of a wide range of service providers. For this

reason, they opened positions for educated professionals and academics. Therefore, many MB members found positions in Qatar and the UAE and started to form a new diaspora (Freer, 2018).

Various dynamics played a role in the decision of the MB members to resettle in these two Gulf countries. The first was the socio-cultural similarity between Egypt and the Gulf region with regards to religion, ideological stance, and language. The second was the economic opportunities in the Gulf region. Following the discovery of oil and gas, Gulf countries started to establish themselves as economic powerhouses in the region. This attracted the attention of the MB members, who were under heavy domestic pressure. Another dynamic was the urgent need for qualified staff in the fields of education and other service sectors in Qatar and the UAE (Al Mansouri, 2012; Wickham, 2013; Roberts, 2017). This encouraged many members of the MB in Egypt to migrate and fill these positions in Gulf countries.

This process of migration from Egypt to the Gulf coincided with the emergence of the region as an economic hot spot. Following their independence in 1971, Qatar and the UAE garnered huge revenues from their oil and gas reserves, making themselves more attractive not only for regional but also for global powers. These two countries transformed this economic wealth into investment to support the institutionalization process of their state structures (Miller, 2016). During this process, the MB played a significant role in the state formation of both Qatar and the UAE, with particular support in sectors such as education, religious services, and civil society (Freer, 2018). Therefore, it can be argued that the MB was heavily involved in the state-building process of both countries, making the organization a crucial part of the social and political structure in the Gulf countries for many years.

Finally, one of the main reasons why Gulf states welcomed Muslim Brotherhood members was the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Even though the migration had started much earlier, the revolution in Iran became a source of ideological concern for Gulf states, and they choose to side with the Muslim Brotherhood ideology rather than the expansionist Shia ideology. While the Iranian threat against Gulf countries continued, the countries also started to worry about the motivations of the MB domestically and regionally. As the movement gained popular support and sided with organizations like Hamas, the perception of certain Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain, toward the MB changed. This became more obvious in the post-2011 period, where these three countries decided to designate MB as a terrorist organization.

### **The Muslim Brotherhood in the UAE: Its Rise and Fall**

As argued above, the Free Officers' coup in 1952 was a turning point for the MB organization in Egypt. Following the rift between the movement and the Nasser administration, many members decided to move abroad to escape the oppressive policies of Cairo (Zollner, 2007; Al Mansouri, 2012). While the initial destination for Ikhwan members was Saudi Arabia, many of them migrated to the UAE and Qatar as well. These two countries, however, were unable to utilize their oil resources at full capacity during the 1950s and 1960s, and therefore, many members of the MB chose to stay in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi leadership also aimed to transform the country into a modern state and

decided to benefit from the Muslim Brotherhood's educated and experienced members for that reason. Although Islamic movements regained strength after the defeat in 1967, they continued to face severe oppression in Egypt. Attractive opportunities in newly established and developing Gulf countries encouraged the members of the MB to settle in these countries, and they found important job opportunities as well as civil society activities, especially concerning youth and religion (Obaid, 2020: 116; Pargeter, 2013).

Some of the MB members from Egypt, such as Abdul Badi Saqr, decided to settle in Dubai where they established their own schools under the name of "Madrasat Al Iman". During this period, Emirati Sheikh Abdullah bin Al Mahmoud was the director of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments in the United Arab Emirates. An Egyptian teacher, Abdel Wedud Al Shalbi, also actively supported the activities of the movement. Therefore, the members of the MB in Emirates consisted of a group of teachers coming from Qatar or Egypt and Emirati citizens who had returned to their country after studying abroad, including in Egypt (Al Otaybi, 2012).

In 1974, the movement was institutionalized under the name of "*Cam'iyyat Al Islah vat Tawcih Al Ectimai*" (The Reform and Social Orientation Community). Various scholars such as Sultan bin Kayed al-Qasimi, Muhammed bin Abdullah al-Aglan, Abdurrahman al-Bikr, Muhammed Hasan Raqit Aal Ali, Hasan al-Doqqi, and Said Abdullah Harib al-Mehiri were key figures who were considered to be the founding fathers of the MB organization in the UAE. Sultan bin Kayed al-Qasimi was elected as the chairman of the organization (Al Otaybi, 2012).

The members of the MB who came to the UAE during that period aimed to protect their institutionalized structure by establishing in 1974 a new local organization, called the Islah Movement. The organization would expeditiously become one of the most powerful civilian and political actors in the country. The Islah Movement, which was active in student societies of universities, also had a profound influence in the Ministry of Education of the UAE. The Egyptian MB members, who had social, religious, and linguistic similarities with the UAE society, attempted to encourage the Emirati citizens to join the movement by instrumentalizing various tools.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the movement strove to expand its ideology to broader communities and began publishing the Al-Islah magazine in 1978. During this period, some members of the movement participated in local radio and television programs to promote their ideology (Freer, 2018).

At the time, many of the activities of the MB were approved and supported by the UAE leadership, and the movement was even allowed to participate in the political sphere. The movement organized public activities and took part in the first government of the UAE in 1971 by obtaining one ministerial position. Said Abdullah Selman, who was from Ras Al Khaimah and was one of the founding members of the Islah Movement,

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<sup>1</sup> Many UAE citizens, who sympathized the MB movement at the time, kept their distance to the movement in the following years. The UAE citizens, who have close relations with the MB especially in line with the increasing restrictive policies of the UAE government, cut their relations with the movement by supporting the policies of their own governments. Many young citizens of the UAE, who were members of the movement, declared their loyalty to their governments and reported to their governments the ideological structure and strategic objectives of the movement. A comprehensive interview was held on December 14, 2018 in Malacca, Malaysia, with a UAE citizen, who was a former member of the MB and works currently in Al-Ayn Municipality.

served as the Minister of Housing in that government. Another prominent figure of the Islah Movement, Muhammed Bin Abdurrahman al-Bikr, served as the Minister of Islamic Affairs and Foundations in the 1977 government. Finally, another member of Islah, Said Selman, was appointed as the Minister of Education in 1979 (Ulrichsen, 2017).

The movement particularly played a significant role in the educational activities of the UAE from 1977. The members of the MB showed a substantial presence in the education sector during this period, and this situation continued until 1983. It might be observed that the MB movement had a serious presence not only in the ministry but also in primary and secondary schools, universities, and student societies at the time. In those years, the “Sisters” – members of the MB in girls’ schools across the UAE -served actively in student societies and organized events (Al Mansouri, 2012).

The increasing infiltration of the Islah Movement into the social sphere through summer schools, religious education, scout camps, and other social events aimed at the UAE’s youth caused a disturbance for the Abu Dhabi administration. As Friday sermons delivered by MB members became increasingly political, the Emirati leadership decided to take a bold step against the organization. The Minister of Education Said Selman and Minister of Justice Mohammed Bin Abdurrahman al-Bikr, who were both members of the MB, were dismissed in 1983 (Alnogaidan, 2011). Said Selman was also dismissed from his position as the chancellor of the UAE University. After these developments, the activities of the MB movement began to be restricted in most fields, particularly in the judicial and educational systems.

Following the appointment of Abdullah Omran Taryam as the Minister of Education, the influence of the MB movement began to decrease in the education sector. With a new and more liberal approach to education in mind, the new minister ordered modern dress in schools in 1979 and introduced various courses such as English in 1988 and dance and music in 1989, which substantially contradicted the curriculum developed by the Islah ideology. Following these developments, the movement started to protest decisions of the new minister, and the rift between the movement and the government further deepened (Alnogaidan, 2011).

The Al-Islah magazine was one of the platforms where dissension between the Islah Movement and UAE administration were revealed to the public. In an article published in the Al-Islah magazine on March 5, 1979, the Administrative Council of the Islah Movement reported that they disapproved of some of the decisions taken by the UAE leadership. The article also suggested that the oil revenues should be spent on religious services and that extravagance must be avoided (Al Mansouri, 2012). In another article published in July 1980, the director of Dubai TV was targeted. While the letter harshly criticized the director, it also called for his resignation because of his alleged involvement in corruption (Alnogaidan, 2011).

The Al-Islah magazine became more rigid toward the end of the 1980s. In addition to being a media outlet providing social messages, the magazine also began to be perceived as political opposition. Throughout 1987, the journal heavily criticized the decisions taken by Ahmed Humaid Al Tayer, who was then the Minister of Education. Another decisive moment for the increasing divergence between the Islah Movement and the government

was the decision of the Ministry of Education to remove members of Islah from the board responsible for preparing the educational curriculum. The organization heavily criticized this move in several articles in the *Al-Islah* magazine in 1988 (Al Mansouri, 2012).

The Chairman of the Islah Movement, Mohammad al-Mansouri, also made comments and criticized the Minister of Education for dismissing Islah members from the committee at the ministry (Al Yadiwi, 2006). Al-Mansouri also used a religious discourse to criticize the Minister of Education. On a number of occasions, he publicly cursed the Minister of Education, Al Tayer. In response, Al Tayer accused al-Mansouri for illegally preaching in mosques and asked authorities to ban him from delivering sermons (Ulrichsen, 2017).

Until these disagreements, the Islah movement had exerted serious influence over the social and political spheres in the UAE, particularly in the higher education system and related institutions. They controlled student societies and organized events that gathered students from all levels. Fearing the loss of their privileged positions in the education sector, they reacted strongly against the government's new attitude, which aimed to exclude the members of Islah from this sector. The movement considered these policies as a direct threat to its existence. As the division between the movement and the government deepened, the intensity of the Emirati leadership's response also changed (Alnogaidan, 2011). Abu Dhabi started to consider that the Islah movement had begun to pose a serious threat to the country. After this message was made known to the organization through different mechanisms, the movement decided to take new action. The board of the Islah Movement convened in mid-1989 and announced that it would no longer continue its activities as it did before (Alnogaidan, 2011). It was, however, too late to make such a decision. The UAE government had already started to take steps aimed at stopping the activities of the organization in the country.

The first serious move of the UAE administration toward the MB was the suspension of *Al-Islah* magazine. The magazine was banned from publishing from November 1988 to April 1989. Even though this ban was lifted in mid-1989, the magazine continued publication with completely different coverage. It no longer touched upon political matters but rather focused on culture, ethics, and religion. With the decreasing importance of the *Al-Islah* magazine, the movement also lost its effectiveness in the social and political life in the UAE (Al Mansouri, 2012).

### **Rising “Hand in Hand”: The Muslim Brotherhood in Qatar**

After the 1950s, the wave of immigration continued and the Qatari branch of the movement was finally established. The organization was popular particularly among the youth and Qataris who had returned to their homeland after studying in Egyptian universities. This did not include Al-Azhar, as there were not any known figures that taught or held administrative position at the university. However, it was the case that some students might have been influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood's leading intellectuals who did not have formal affiliation with the university. The interaction between Qatar and Egypt further intensified with the increasing number of Qataris studying in Egypt and expatriates, particularly teachers, education professionals, and religious clerics, who had moved from Egypt to Qatar. Thanks to this interaction, the MB movement found sociological support and ground in Qatar. Due to this popular support, the movement

started to publish a magazine called “Al Ummah Al-Qatariyya”. The magazine continued publication until 1999 and published a total of 72 volumes until the movement decided to stop publication the same year (Freer, 2018).

In line with the attitude of the Qatari branch of the MB, Al Ummah Al-Qatariyya magazine refrained from criticizing the Qatari administration. While the magazine largely focused on Islamic guidance, it also published articles on social, political, military, and financial issues (Freer, 2018). The magazine touched at the same time upon regional and international politics as it repetitively published stories about the threat posed by Israel toward Muslim countries in the Middle East.<sup>2</sup> Apart from the magazine, the MB’s existence in Qatar was also related to three influential figures in the movement: Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Jasim Sultan, and Abdel Baky Sakr. They and many other influential figures left Egypt for Qatar in the 1960s (Roberts, 2014).

Following Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s arrival in Qatar in 1961, the MB movement started to be more active in the social, religious, and political spheres of the country. During his studies at Al-Azhar University, al-Qaradawi played an important role as a student society leader and came to the fore among the MB members during his period in the late 1940s and early 50s (Freer, 2018). Following his graduation, al-Qaradawi became one of the most influential and respected figures in the organization.

When the Egyptian regime increased pressure on the MB movement, al-Qaradawi left the country and resettled in Qatar. After his arrival, he was appointed as the head of the religious organization in 1961 and later given Qatari citizenship in 1969. Qaradawi supported the establishment of Qatar’s education system and initiated the foundation of the Faculty of Theology at Qatar University in 1977. He later became the head of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, with its head office located in Doha. All these institutions played a major role in the education of the Qatari elites who later became leading figures in the country’s social and political life (Warren, 2021).

During those years, al-Qaradawi was offered a head position at the MB organization in Egypt. However, he refused the offer and decided to continue his engagements in Qatar. Meanwhile, al-Qaradawi continued to participate in the organization’s international meetings as a representative of Qatar. Although al-Qaradawi did not have major initiatives within the MB organization, he continued to be considered as one of the most senior and respected figures of the movement. During those years, Qaradawi developed close relations with Al Thani, Qatar’s ruling family. His relatively moderate views<sup>3</sup> were warmly welcomed by the ruling elites in Qatar, where a strict form of Salafism was not accepted. This has led Qatar to have a different kind of religious and social structure that is more liberal compared to other Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia (Roberts, 2014). Qaradawi’s close relationship with the Qatari leadership continued in the new millennium as well. In 2004, the Qatari Emir supported the establishment of the International Union of Islamic Scholars, with al-Qaradawi at its head. Qaradawi became one of the most

2 Al Ummah Al-Qatariyye Journal Archive, <https://archive.org/download/Mqummm>

3 About what we mean with moderate view of him “his opinions about takfir – declaring someone non-Muslim- and democracy. He also disagrees with Sayyid Qutb on the concept of “Al Jaheliyya”. Also see: “Yusuf al-Qaradawi: “Last Words About Sayyid Qutb”, <https://bre.is/9dKQKjWo>; Mehna Al Houbeyli, “Scholar Qaradawi and His Methodology About Moderate Islam”, <https://bre.is/tDmyv4kp>.

well-known Islamic scholars with his TV program *Sharia and Life*, broadcasted on Qatari network Al Jazeera (Cherribi, 2017). The show is said to have attracted around 35 million weekly viewers.

Another important person that stands out in the foundation and institutionalization of the MB movement in Qatar is Jassim Bin Sultan, the founding member of the movement in the country. Jassim Bin Sultan was one of many Qatari students who went to Egypt in 1973 for higher education. During his studies in Egypt, Jassim Bin Sultan joined the MB, as it was the universities where the movement was the most active across the country (Freer, 2018). During this period, Bin Sultan was influenced by the books of leading intellectuals of the movement such as Said Hawwa (a member of the Syrian MB), Sayyid Qutb, and Fathi Yakan (Al Wahidi, 2012). After returning to Qatar, Bin Sultan played a major role in establishing the MB movement in the country. Lastly, Abdel Baky Sakr was also an important figure in the MB's rise in Qatar. Following his arrival in Qatar in 1954, Sakr served as the head of Qatar's education bureau and director of Qatar's National Library (Freer, 2018). His major contribution to the MB in Qatar was his efforts to help bring scores of members from Egypt to Qatar. Teachers, students, clerics, and civil society activists resettled in Qatar thanks to the efforts of Sakr (Roberts, 2014). Abdel Muaz al-Sattar, who was a close aide of Hasan al-Banna, also came to Qatar in the 1950s and played a major role in the establishment of the Qatari education system (Akkaya and Al Rantisi, 2015). Hence, Qatar was a newly established country with an undeveloped education system, particularly in higher education. These experienced Muslim Brotherhood members were quite effective in establishing the higher education system in Qatar as well as contributing to the other sectors of state building, such as public administration.

### **Crisis in the Muslim Brotherhood and the UAE Relations: Post-1994 Era**

One of the turning points in the relations between the MB and the UAE was Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's visit to the Gulf region in 1994. During his visit, President Mubarak warned the Gulf States about the increasing power and impact of the MB and called on the UAE administration to get the growing influence of the movement under control. After his visit, the UAE government became more concerned about the security of its regime and took steps to prevent the MB organization from having more influence in the Emirati political structure. In line with this policy, the UAE government dismissed the board of directors of the Islah Movement in 1994. The UAE administration also closed the head office of the movement in Dubai and ordered it to be moved to the Ras al Khaimah Emirate. The Ministry of Social Services was given authority over all branches of the Islah Movement. The Sheikh of Ras Al Khaimah, Sakr al-Qasimi was displeased with the decisions as he had sympathy for the movement (Freer, 2018). The Abu Dhabi leadership attempted to arrest the Chairman of the Islah Movement, Muhammad al-Mansouri, in 1996. This move was criticized by the Ras Al Khaimah leadership and created tension between the two emirates. In the following period, the decision to arrest al-Mansouri was cancelled, and the movement continued its limited activities in the Ras Al Khaimah Emirate from 1996 to 2006 (Alnogaiddan, 2011).

The strict attitude toward the MB continued in the 2000s, and as of 2003, more than 100

people working for the Ministry of Education had been transferred to other ministries and positions. After 2003, the MB movement tried to continue its engagements in the country by holding negotiations with the Abu Dhabi leadership. These efforts, however, were unsuccessful, not producing any positive results for the organization, and the pressure further intensified until 2006. The UAE government continued to dismiss teachers, lecturers, and other education professionals who were MB members. The organization criticized these moves through international news outlets as well as protests inside the country (Alnogaidan, 2011). This opposition led the UAE leadership to toughen its stance against the movement. Abu Dhabi no longer considered the MB as a civil organization but rather as a serious threat to the regime. Actions of the MB were perceived as an intervention to the domestic affairs of the UAE, and the movement was accused of threatening the stability of the regime. The UAE even claimed that the movement had an armed branch (Hakala, 2012).

In the early 2000s, the UAE government started to claim that the MB movement was an extremist organization which would bring radicalization to the country. Abu Dhabi also began supporting other religious and social groups that could be considered as alternatives to the MB. These movements included Sufi groups known to have a moderate understanding of Islam. A leading figure in this regard was Hisham Kabbani, a Sufi Sheikh of Lebanese origin. Emirati leadership continuously promoted such figures and tried to establish a network of political Sufism. Another Sufi figure in this regard was Yemeni Ali al-Jifri, who founded the “Tabah Foundation” with the financial support of Abu Dhabi. In addition to its domestic activities, the Tabah Foundation also worked to promote political Sufism in cooperation with international organizations under a liberal and secular Islamic agenda (Amir, 2017).

Despite the claims of the Emirati government, the Islah Movement continued to present itself as a civil society organization that aimed to provide educational and religious services in the country. However, this did not prevent Abu Dhabi from increasing the pressure on the organization in the following years, particularly with the start of the Arab revolutions in 2010 in Tunisia (Milton-Edwards, 2016). This policy led to the arrest of the Islah Movement’s leader, Sultan bin Kayed al-Qasimi, who is also the cousin of the Emir of the Ras al-Khaimah Emirate, on 20 April 2012. It was later announced that al-Qasimi was put under house arrest without any charges against him (Kerr, 2012).

### **A New Period for the Muslim Brotherhood in Qatar: Post-1999 Era**

In 1999, the Qatari branch of the MB organization decided to terminate its activities in the country. The decision was announced by the leading figure of the movement in the country, Jassim Bin Sultan. In his statement, Bin Sultan stated that the Qatari administration had neither requested nor created pressure for the closure of the organization and that the decision to suspend activity was taken by the organization itself (Freer, 2018). One of the key figures in this decision was Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who served as a bridge between the movement and the Qatari state (Commins, 2012).

It can be argued that with the establishment of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, Qatari support for the movement became institutional and there was no longer a need for an umbrella organization to represent the MB. As the head of the International

Union of Muslim Scholars, al-Qaradawi would promote the interest of the MB at the government level. The organization continued to serve as an important venue for MB members operating in Qatar. Due to Qaradawi's close relationship with the Qatari ruling class, the MB movement could carry out any Islamic and scientific activity both inside and outside the country. The Qatari government provided financial and logistic support to the MB organization to expand the reach of the movement to wider geographies (Kamrava, 2013; Roberts, 2014; Warren, 2017).

Another possible factor behind the MB's termination of its activities in Qatar is related to regional politics. Several Gulf countries, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain had a hostile attitude toward the MB organization due to disagreements between the governments of these countries and the MB movement. Therefore, they considered Qatar's close relationship with the movement as a threat to their regional policies. Given the UAE's harsh stance against the movement and the ideological differences between Saudi Arabia and the MB, Qatar was forced to reconsider its policies toward the movement. Finally, by terminating the activities of the MB, Qatar aimed to avoid potential tension with other Gulf neighbors.

Although the activities of the movement in Qatar were restricted, the government maintained its positive attitude toward the MB. The MB movement never conflicted ideologically with the leadership in Qatar (Warren, 2017). In return, members of the organization received support from the Doha government for their activities both at home and abroad (Khlebnikov, 2015). In 1999, it was decided to shut the official branch of the MB in Qatar following the meetings between the MB and the Qatari leadership. Even though this decision was a highly critical development, there are no clear reasons as to why.<sup>4</sup> It can be argued that both parties refrained from harming each other by publicly declaring their relationship as they feared the aggressive policies of the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Doha continued to open its gates to the members of the movement repressed by other countries. It was argued that the partial presence of the MB in Qatar was now slightly on the same page with the political authority in Qatar. Also, David B. Roberts stated that one of the main reasons why the MB is not a threat to Qatari leadership is that because there is a "strong ruler-ruled political bargain" in Qatar. Qatari rulers took joint action through dialogue with MB members in their country, and the MB in turn did not harshly criticize Qatari policies publicly. That means, there is an unwritten rule in the nature of their relationship, which requires both parties to refrain from causing harm to each other's image as well as positions in regional politics (Roberts, 2014; Esad, 2017; Trager, 2017).

### **The Diverging Position of Qatar and the UAE toward the Muslim Brotherhood**

The turning point in Qatar and the UAE's policies toward the MB was the Arab revolutions that started in late 2010 in Tunisia. In the aftermath of the revolutionary uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, it became clear that the MB would become the leading political power in the regional political landscape. While the rise of the MB was perceived as a direct threat by the Emirati leadership, the Qatari

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4 Despite number of interviews with the MB members, the authors could not verify the exact motivation of this decision.

administration would support this process as Doha had close cooperation with the MB movement. This scenario would contribute to Qatar's regional influence. In this context, Qatar had supported the revolutionary process in the Arab world in the hope that the MB would come to governmental positions. On the other hand, the UAE administration took a counter-revolutionary position because it believed that these revolutionary uprisings would strengthen the MB (Roberts, 2017). The MB's ties with Hamas and its good relations with Turkey and Iran are also considered as the dynamics that determine the UAE's position toward the organization.

This was observed in the case of Egypt. Following the removal of Hosni Mubarak from power on February 18, 2011, the MB started to become a central actor in the revolution. The most influential figure of the organization, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, led the Friday prayer in Tahrir Square as a symbol of the revolutionary victory by the masses, including hundreds of thousands of MB members. In his speech, Qaradawi emphasized that he supported the Arab revolutions and called for the termination of oppressive regimes across the region. Al Jazeera Channel had an important impact in delivering the news from squares to the whole world and supporting the Arab spring in each country (Cherribi, 2017). In the following period, Qatar's political and financial support to the MB movement in Egypt continued. This support further increased following the election of Mohammed Morsi, a member of the MB member, as president (Khatib, 2013).

On the other hand, during this process, the UAE followed a completely contrasting policy with Qatar. The Emirati leadership was cautious toward Egypt and careful in its steps. The UAE toughened its stance against the MB both in its domestic and foreign policies (Almezaini K., 2018). Following a letter signed by 133 UAE citizens on March 6, 2011 calling for political reforms in the country, the Emirati leadership intensified the pressure on the MB. Although only a small number of the signatories to the letter were members of the MB, the UAE government interpreted the act as an attempt to overthrow the regime. The Emirati government started to target members of the Islah movement and ordered the arrest of 60 people in 2012 and 64 in 2013 (Freer, 2015). The investigations were conducted by the Dubai Chief of Police, Dahi Bin Khalfan, who said that the MB was the biggest threat to the security of the region (Kerr & Khalaf, 2012).

In 2013, the Emirati leadership also provided the biggest support to the military coup in Egypt that toppled President Mohammad Morsi, who was a member of the MB organization. In the process leading to the coup, the UAE supported the media channels providing coverage against the Morsi administration. The UAE also provided financial support for disinformation campaigns to damage Morsi's credibility in the eyes of the Egyptians. The UAE encouraged activists from all opposition groups, especially from Seculars and Salafis to form a political group, to start a movement against Morsi. That is how the Tamarod was established, which led the protests aimed at toppling Morsi. The protests eventually led the military to take over the democratically elected regime in the country. The UAE leadership was among the first countries that celebrated Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the leader of the military coup (Telci, 2017).

Following the coup, the UAE continued to put pressure on the MB organization at the regional level. Abu Dhabi's main aim was to keep the organization away from political life not only in Egypt but also in all countries in the wider Middle East. The UAE

administration provided economic and political support to the Sisi regime in exchange for Cairo’s heavy-handed policies toward the MB. The UAE administration, which declared the movement as a terrorist organization, also put pressure on other countries to follow suit. The commission established under the instruction of the UAE leadership banned all activities of the movement inside and outside the country and declared the Islah Movement a terrorist organization (Cavusoglu, 2020). Meanwhile, Qatar opened its doors to members of the MB who were subjected to pressure in Egypt. In this regard, many prominent members of the MB, who were initially given positions of power under the Morsi government, came to Qatar. This exodus was similar to the one that occurred six decades ago, when members of the MB left Egypt due to political pressure.

A final blow to the Qatari-Emirati relationship came in the summer of 2017, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain inflicted a political and economic blockade against Qatar. These countries criticized Qatar’s support for the MB and its close relationship with Iran and Turkey. These countries even published a list for Qatar to comply with, which included the termination of Qatar’s support to the MB, the closing down of the Al Jazeera channel, and the freezing of its relationship with Iran (Wintour, 2017; Telci and Horoz, 2018). It is argued that with its hostile attitude toward the MB, the UAE risked its relations with the Qatari administration. This clearly shows how important the MB was for both Qatar and the UAE. Today, even in the face of the UAE’s vigilant preemptive measures against the organization internally and externally, the Brotherhood in the UAE has not been wholly eradicated, and it continues to influence narrow circles in the UAE society (Freer, 2018).

Table 3  
*Comparison of the Muslim Brotherhood Policies of the UAE and Qatar*

The MB Policy of Qatar		The MB Policy of the UAE	
Domestic Policy	Foreign Policy	Domestic Policy	Foreign Policy
Members of the MB were welcomed since the 1950s.	The Arab revolution process that allowed the MB to gain influence in regional politics was strongly supported.	Members of the MB were welcome from the 1950s until the 1990s.	The UAE did not support the process of Arab revolutions. In particular, Abu Dhabi tried to prevent the MB’s rise to power.
The leading figure of the MB, Youssef al-Qaradawi was granted Qatari citizenship. The Qatari government supported his activities. Qaradawi contributed to the positive image of the MB in the Middle East.	In the case of Egypt, the Qatari administration provided diplomatic and finance support to President Mohammad Morsi, a leading figure of the MB (Roberts, 2014).	The UAE government even supported the establishment of a local branch of the MB organization in the country. The Islah Movement was established in 1974. This support continued until 1979.	In the case of Egypt, the UAE took the lead in toppling the MB government led by Morsi. Abu Dhabi also supported military coup of July 3, 2013.
The government allowed the establishment of the MB local branch. This organization continued its activities until 1999.	In the case of Tunisia, Qatar supported the Al-Nahda Movement, which is affiliated with the MB.	In 1979, the UAE started to consider MB as a strong social and political actor in the country. Abu Dhabi initiated some steps against the movement.	The UAE leadership initiated an international campaign to globally designate the MB as a terrorist organization.

Dissolution of the Qatar branch of the MB in 1999.	Following the designation of the MB as a terrorist organization by the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Qatar opened its doors to members of the organization.	The UAE administration toughened its stance against the MB movement in 1989.	The UAE initiated the 2017 blockade on Qatar by accusing it of supporting the MB.
The Qatari government continued to support the MB through different mechanisms and instruments such as Al Jazeera.	The UAE and Saudi Arabia requested Qatar to expel Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Doha rejected.	The Arab revolutions were a turning point in the UAE's relationship with the MB. Some members were detained in the UAE.	The UAE initiated a regional campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated groups that have some level of activity in Middle Eastern countries. Muslim Brotherhood affiliate groups in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Jordan were subjected to UAE-led pressure.
	In 2017, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt inflicted a political blockade on Qatar and asked Doha to suspend all support to the organization. Qatar rejected and continued its support.	The military coup on July 3, 2013, against Mohammad Morsi was supported by the UAE. Following the coup, Abu Dhabi declared MB as a terrorist organization.	The UAE also tried to put pressure on the governments, like Turkey, that have positive relations with the Muslim Brotherhood or its affiliates.

### Conclusion

The history of the MB organization in the Gulf region has been increasingly discussed in academic circles, especially the role and the influence of the movement in the region. As the largest civil society organization, with millions of sympathizers, throughout the Middle East, the MB became a source of concern for countries that aim to sustain the regional status quo. These countries feared that the movement could trigger a region-wide transformation that would eventually bring the MB into the political leadership in many countries. While this argument was supported by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, countries like Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait largely ignored it. This diverging understanding of the MB has become even more rigid in the post-Arab revolutions period.

Gulf countries followed almost identical policies toward the movement throughout the 1950s and 60s as the movement made significant contributions to social, religious, and educational activities in these countries. Both the UAE and Qatar welcomed scores of MB members who left Egypt for asylum. The first reason for this was the need for professionals in different sectors who could contribute to the establishment of an education system in both countries. As the two countries gained independence in 1971, their need for professionals further increased, and they wanted to benefit from the experiences of the Muslim Brotherhood members from Egypt. Therefore, members of the movement played a major role in the establishment of the education system and related institutions in these two countries. The second reason for Egyptian MB members to move to the Gulf was the

social and cultural similarities, such as religion and language.

This, however, started to change in the 1980s and continued throughout the 90s. Since then, there have been diverging approaches by Gulf countries toward the Muslim Brotherhood. Qatar considered the MB movement as an important instrument for exerting influence in the wider Middle East region. Therefore, the Doha administration's approach toward the MB can be considered as a long-term investment. This investment had the potential to bring serious gains in regional politics. The short-lived Morsi administration in Egypt was a good example of such gains although Qatar could not benefit from the situation due to the counter-revolutionary initiative led by the United Arab Emirates. However, Qatar continues to consider the Muslim Brotherhood movement as part of its multi-faceted policy in the region.

Another reason for Qatar's positive attitude toward the Muslim Brotherhood movement is that the movement made positive contributions to Qatar's post-independence state formation process. Qatar gained its independence in 1971, and in many fields ranging from education to public administration and from healthcare to religious activities, the members of the Muslim Brotherhood movement who migrated to the country from Egypt made certain contributions. These interactions helped maintain the positive perception of the movement in Qatar and the continued support of the Qatari administration to the Muslim Brotherhood movement. This situation continued during the Arab revolutions in 2011, and Qatar continued to support the movement in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, where the Muslim Brotherhood movement was effective, so much so that the situation caused serious crises in the relations between Qatar and the two countries against the Muslim Brotherhood movement, namely Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

On the other hand, the United Arab Emirates strives against the MB movement, which it considers as the most vital threat to its domestic and foreign policy because of the movement's wide popular base. This has not always been the case historically. Having gained independence, the UAE also hosted many Muslim Brotherhood members and allowed members of the movement to serve in the country's public institutions. While the situation remained the same until the 1990s, the UAE's Muslim Brotherhood policy began to change particularly after 1994. The MB movement's gradual increase of effectiveness in the social sphere and its widening popular base in the region, particularly in Egypt, played a role in this change. The UAE administrations assessed that the Muslim Brotherhood movement could turn from a civilian movement into a political power and thus into a threat to the regime. This situation turned out to be a *de facto* aspect of the period following the 2011 Arab revolutions. The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood movement to ruling positions after the revolution in Egypt forced the UAE into an open war against the movement. The UAE provided political and financial support to the coup aiming to remove Mohammed Morsi from power and also carried out diplomatic initiatives in the following period to facilitate the designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization throughout the region.

Different Muslim Brotherhood policies caused serious deteriorations in UAE-Qatar relations. Under the leadership of the UAE, countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Egypt launched a political and economic blockade against Qatar in 2017, in which Qatar's support to the Muslim Brotherhood movement was cited as one of the main reasons. In

the following period, Qatar maintained its support for the Muslim Brotherhood while the UAE also continued to oppose the movement. Although the blockade came to an end as a result of other regional and global developments at the beginning of 2021, the diverging policies of Qatar and the UAE against the Muslim Brotherhood have continued.

Finally, as this study reveals, although the UAE and Qatar have similar power projections, capacities, and common cultural values, their policies toward the Muslim Brotherhood differ significantly. The most important reason for this divergence is that while the UAE considers the MB as a threat, the movement constitutes an important foreign policy instrument for Qatar. Moreover, while the Qatari leadership has been loyal to the historical contributions of the Muslim Brotherhood in the construction of the Qatari state, the Emirati leadership pursued political interests at the expense of its once friendly relations with the MB.

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