



# The UAE Lobby: Subverting British democracy?

Alex Delmar-Morgan

David Miller

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Further information:

Website: [www.spinwatch.org](http://www.spinwatch.org)

Email: [info@spinwatch.org](mailto:info@spinwatch.org)

Mail: Spaceworks, Easton Business Centre, Felix Road, Easton, Bristol, England, BS5 0HE

## AUTHORS

### Alex Delmar-Morgan

is a freelance journalist in London and has written for a range of national titles including *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Independent*. He is the former Qatar and Bahrain correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal* and *Dow Jones*.



**David Miller** is a director of Public Interest Investigations, of which Spinwatch.org and Powerbase.info are projects. He is also Professor of Sociology at the University of Bath in England. From 2013-2016



he was RCUK Global Uncertainties Leadership Fellow leading a project on Understanding and explaining terrorism expertise in practice.

Recent publications include:

- *The Quilliam Foundation: How 'counter-extremism' works*, (co-author, Public interest Investigations, 2018);
- *Islamophobia in Europe: counter-extremism policies and the counterjihad movement*, (co-author, Public interest Investigations, 2018);
- *Impact of market forces on addictive substances and behaviours: The web of influence of addictive industries*. (co-author, OUP, 2018);
- *What is Islamophobia? Racism, social movements and the State*. (co-editor, Pluto Press, 2017);
- *The Israel Lobby and the European Union* (co-author, Public Interest Investigations, 2016);
- *The Henry Jackson Society and the Degeneration of British Neoconservatism*. (co-author, Public Interest Investigations, 2015, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 2018);
- *How Israel attempts to mislead the United Nations: Deconstructing Israel's campaign against the Palestinian Return Centre*. (Co-author, Public Interest Investigations, 2015);
- *The Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre. Giving peace a chance?* (co-author, Public Interest Investigations, 2013).

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**UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs**  
**Quiller Consultants' client**

**MBZ**

De facto leader of the UAE.

**Anwar Gargash**

Architect of reputational management campaign. Lobbied ministers and influenced journalists.

**Lana Nusseibeh**

Gargash's number two. Responsible for updating her seniors on progress of the lobbying strategy.

**David Cameron**

Former Tory prime minister.

**George Bridges**

Etonian, school pal of Cameron's. Influential lobbyist. Ran Quiller Consultants. Close to Dean Godson.

**Dean Godson**

Friend of Cameron. Key architect of Tories' counter extremism strategy. Informal adviser to Cameron on Islam.

**Quiller Consultants**

UAE's ex-lobbying company in London with strong links to Cameron.

**Gerard Russell**

Quiller lobbyist. Briefed 'reliable' journalists to attack Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood.

**Alistair Burt**

FCO minister, seen by the UAE as a crucial ally in parliament.

**Arminka Helic**

Former foreign secretary William Hague's special adviser. Regular contact with Nusseibeh.

**Andrew Gilligan**

Met with Russell in 2014. Printed a stream of anti-Qatar stories that year.

**Con Coughlin**

Wrote critically about Qatar after two briefings.

**Fraser Nelson**

Influential editor of The Spectator magazine. Praised one of the Gargash briefings.

**Melanie Phillips**

Pro-Israel Times columnist briefed by Gargash.

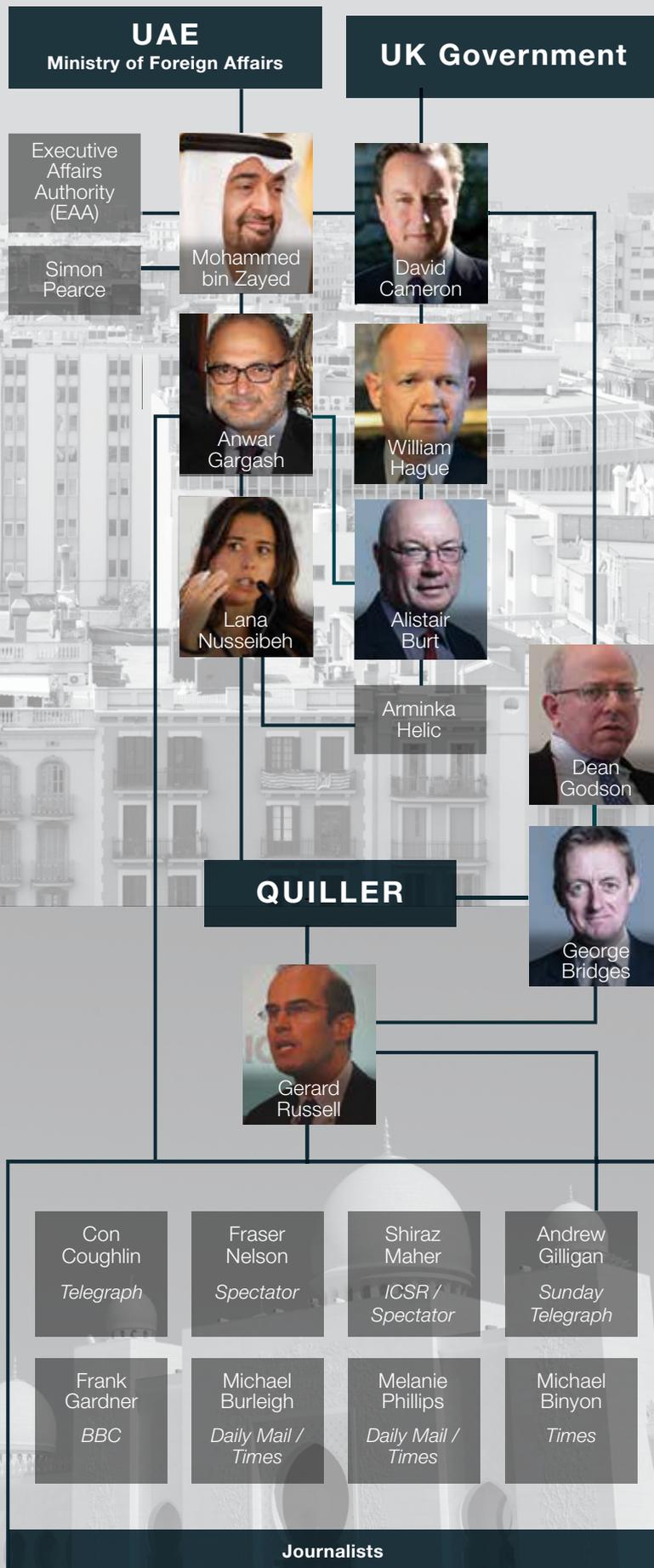


Figure 1 The UAE/UK lobby nexus

# PART I: What is the UAE lobby?

## How does it work?

### 1:1 Introduction

Since the Arab Spring, a highly sophisticated, aggressive and clandestine UAE political lobby has emerged to head off the threat of democracy in the Middle East. This report will, for the first time, chart the history of the lobby, explain what it consists of and how it works. We'll examine the domestic and regional factors which saw the lobby evolve, its impact in the UK and US and how it's used to undermine, vilify and smear groups and individuals that pose a perceived ideological and political threat to that country.

This report will also see how the UAE's lobbying has served to advance its dispute with Qatar. We'll look at the origins of the spat and the subsequent spin wars that have erupted between the two states.

As we shall discover, the UAE's intense lobbying campaign over the last few years has helped shape UK government policy towards Muslims at home, and UK and US foreign policy in the Middle East. It has also polluted the narrative on Islam in the West, whipping up Islamophobia and hardening media coverage and public opinion against Muslims.

Spinwatch has obtained leaked emails that exposes in granular detail how the UAE went about this lobbying strategy in the UK, and shows the massive effort by the Emiratis to influence the British press and court influential MPs.

One leak details a frenzy of briefings that were arranged by the UAE's former lobbying company Quiller Consultants for top journalists with the UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash. Gargash gave 11 briefings to well-known journalists, policymakers, academics, businessmen, civil servants and MPs between 2011 and 2013. The leaked documents specify the dates and locations of each unpublicised briefing and lists all attendees. We name the journalists who attended these meetings and discuss what they wrote in subsequent stories.

Another email sent by the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Gargash in 2012 gives us a fascinating insight about how they thought this strategy was going. It boasted of winning over journalists, courting sympathetic senior MPs on select committees, academics, – and getting the ear of ministers. It confirms that lobbying was directly responsible for a number of pro-UAE pieces in broadsheet newspapers. More troublingly, this email laid out UAE plans to try and sway the outcome of the Parliament's 2013 report on the UK's relations with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

Spinwatch has also been handed an unseen pamphlet written by Leo Docherty when he was director of the Conservative Middle East Council (CMEC) and before he became a Tory MP. It was distributed in late 2012 to MPs in a bid to build support in the Tory party for a state visit by the UAE President, Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan in 2013. It reflects the highly favourable environment created for the UAE by David Cameron's government and reads like a sycophantic marketing brochure for the Gulf state.

We can also reveal that Quiller Consultants, a lobbying company in London employed by the UAE until 2015, was asked to draw up names of Emirati dissidents in London who had claimed asylum and research BBC journalists who were deemed unsympathetic to the UAE for their alleged links to the Muslim Brotherhood. The UAE lobbied the government directly about the media coverage they were unhappy about.

Quiller also compiled research for its Arab Gulf bosses on well-known academics in the UK whose political stance the UAE objected to. One academic that was monitored by Quiller no longer works at the think tank and another didn't have his associate fellowship renewed.

We approached the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Embassy of the UAE in London and Embassy of the UAE in Washington for comment, but they did not respond.

## 1:2 How does the lobby work? A brief overview

In the 2000s, lobbying between the UK and the UAE was almost entirely conducted on a government-to-government and monarchy-to-monarchy level. Foreign policy was mostly commercially focused, aimed at securing trade and investment. The UAE was reticent about being seen as pushing its own political narrative, especially in public. However, the events of the Arab Spring in 2010 and 2011 were to change all this. They created a highly politicised environment – and the UAE quickly developed its lobby machine to counter democratic changes sweeping the region.

Lobbying methods used by the UAE have varied enormously over the last few years. At its most effective and direct, there has been strong government-to-government lobbying. A lot of this is done through the UAE's embassies in London and Washington. This is supplemented by official visits from UAE royal family members and ministers, as well as undisclosed trips. Other times it's been through closed-door, political briefings to journalists and MPs, especially when David Cameron was prime minister. We'll document how Cameron developed a friendship with the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and de facto ruler of the UAE Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, or MbZ, as he is known, with the prince flying over to see him on unofficial, private visits that were never made public.

At a lower level, the UAE worked to build support among MPs, often facilitated by paid lobbying companies, but also through parliamentary visits to the UAE and private forums like the UK-UAE All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG).

The media is another important avenue that's exploited. Journalists are briefed by London-based lobbying firms paid by the UAE government. Senior journalists are also targeted, including both those sympathetic to the UAE's politics and those who aren't, but that lobbyists feel might be persuadable. High profile Emirati ministers and cultural ambassadors were groomed to brief journalists behind closed-doors.

The UAE is by no means the only Gulf country which meets journalists or lobbies western governments. Ministers from Qatar and Saudi

have held many journalist briefings in London over the last few years.

On a more subtle level, the UAE has long infiltrated the public debate through the funding of academic institutions, policy centres and think tanks, as we shall see.

Mysterious, bogus organisations have also been set up in the UK to discredit Qatar, since the imposition of the blockade against its arch foe in summer 2017. These are another arm of the lobby and are called GONGOS (a government-organised non-governmental organisation, or fake NGOs) that are set up to further the political interests abroad of those who fund them. These shall be examined more closely in part IV.

UAE lobbying efforts also exist on a monarchy-to-monarchy level and through the military.

We will now examine these elements of the lobby in more detail.

## 1:3 Paid firms

### 1:3:1 UK

One of the most obvious ways any lobby operates is through paid firms. These are entirely legal. Prolific under Cameron's Tory government was Quiller Consultants, which had close links to the former prime minister himself.<sup>1</sup> Quiller worked for the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs between 2010 and August 2015, according to the lobbying industry body, the Association of Professional Political Consultants (APPC).<sup>2</sup>

In 2006, Quiller became part of the Huntsworth Group, which was owned by Tory peer and David Cameron's constituency chairman Lord Chadlington, a confidante of the former prime minister and still a shareholder. Quiller was co-founded in 1998 by John Eisenhammer and Jonathan Hill, and in September 2014, Hill was chosen by Cameron to be Britain's next European Commissioner in charge of financial services regulation.<sup>3</sup>

Between 2010 and 2013 Quiller was run by George Bridges, another friend of Cameron's from his school days at Eton. Bridges was former campaigns director at Conservative Party headquarters.<sup>4</sup>

Quiller led a carefully orchestrated lobbying campaign, holding a number of closed-door



Gerard Russell (right) (Credit: New America, CC-BY-2.0)

briefings with journalists, MPs, academics and ministers<sup>5</sup>, documents handed to Spinwatch reveal. Attacks on Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood were alleged to have been written by journalists who were briefed by the company.<sup>6,7</sup>

Gerard Russell, an accomplished former Foreign Office Arabist, was a key Quiller lieutenant who has now set up his own lobbying company called Pall Mall Communications.

Russell's Pall Mall Communications lists the UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a client in January to March 2018 and worked for the ministry after its contract with Quiller ceased, at least from July 2015 through June 2016, according to the Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists.<sup>8</sup> The UAE isn't listed as a client in the second half of 2016 until October 2017, but that does not mean that the firm ceased working for Abu Dhabi – lobbyists only have to declare themselves and their clients to the register when they are explicitly lobbying ministers on behalf of that client. Lobbying anyone else in government is exempt.<sup>9</sup>

Two more London-based firms, identified by Spinwatch, perform lobbying services for the UAE: Etoile Partners, which describes itself as a 'geopolitical consultancy, specialising in strategic positioning advice and communications management',<sup>10</sup> and Project Associates, which reports to the UAE National Media Council.<sup>11</sup>

In October, it was reported that Project Associates two-month contract with Abu Dhabi was worth \$250,000, with a brief 'to raise awareness about state-sponsored terrorism in the Middle East and to create and promote counter-narratives that discourage young people from taking up Islamist extremist causes'.<sup>12</sup>

Project Associates has held small, pro-UAE briefings in London and Brussels for influential journalists, senior politicians, and former diplomats.<sup>13</sup> Peter Hain, former Northern Ireland Secretary, Stuart Lang, former British ambassador to Kuwait and deputy ambassador to Saudi, now master of Corpus Christi Cambridge and broadsheet journalists attended one meeting in early 2018 in London, according to an attendee.<sup>14</sup> An Egyptian embassy official in London was present together with a official from the UAE Embassy in London, this attendee said.<sup>15</sup> The importance of supporting the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince's regional policies was a key message, according to this person, who said:

Project Associates see themselves as leading the pack in attacking Iran and the Shia, and supporting Emirati actions in Yemen. They are keen to involve knowledgeable observers who can project the Emirati line on regional politics, so that these views can be picked up in the press and then more widely disseminated.<sup>16</sup>

Neither Etoile nor Project Associates responded to requests for comment.

### 1:3:2 US

Likewise, in the US, the UAE has spent millions with lobbying companies over the last few years. In 2013, it spent \$14m, the most out of any country in the world trying to influence US policy, according to an analysis of Department of Justice files by transparency group the Sunlight Foundation.<sup>17</sup>

Abu Dhabi extended its contract with The Harbour Group (THG) in January for another two years, a deal worth \$10m, 'making it one of the richest US PR campaigns bankrolled by a foreign government', according to PR industry news site *O'Dwyers*.<sup>18</sup> Harbour works with the UAE Embassy in Washington 'to sustain and enhance public awareness and understanding of the UAE among US policymakers and opinion leaders.'<sup>19</sup>

The Harbour Group has been the UAE's main lobbying firm in Washington throughout the Arab Spring and its war on Qatar, with its managing director Richard Mintz playing a key role as an adviser to the UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and MbZ's office, the Executive Affairs Authority.<sup>20</sup> With a broad mandate, the EAA controls policy and communications for the UAE's political and commercial interests internationally, including Manchester City Football Club.

Another company, the Camstoll Group, has been paid millions of dollars by the UAE since it was established in 2012. It has targeted right-wing as well as liberal journalists in the US to pen anti-Qatar stories<sup>21</sup> and employs a number of former US Treasury Department officials.

Its founder and CEO Matthew Epstein has long-standing ties to the Emirates. He was the US Treasury's Financial Attaché to Saudi and UAE Treasury, but more interestingly, he's a former neoconservative activist and wrote articles for Steve Emerson – a well-known US anti Muslim activist – and his Investigative Project on Terrorism in the early 2000s.<sup>22</sup>

As the journalist Glenn Greenwald writes:

In other words, a senior Treasury official responsible for U.S. policy toward the Emirates leaves the U.S. government and forms a new lobbying company, which is then

instantly paid millions of dollars by the very same country for which he was responsible, all to use his influence, access and contacts for its advantage.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to its own roster of lobbyists, the UAE has picked up the bill for regional ally Egypt's lobbying efforts in Washington. Emails obtained by US news site *The Intercept* show that in 2015 the UAE paid \$2.7m to Cairo for its work with the Glover Park Group, a top consultancy founded by former Democrat White House officials.<sup>24</sup>

Camstoll did not respond to a request for comment.

## 1:4 Universities, think tanks, and policy centres

### 1:4:1 UK

Think tanks and policy centres, which are supposed to be independent institutions, have received large donations from the UAE over the past few years, raising questions about whether they are more lobbyists than researchers.

Chatham House is one of the UK's oldest and most respected international affairs think tanks, an essential cog in the Britain's foreign policymaking process. Its experts and senior staff brief diplomats, parliamentary committees, MPs and journalists behind closed doors. It received between £50,000 and £99,000 from MbZ, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi in 2015/16, in addition to funding from the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs of £10,000 to £24,999 in the same period.<sup>25</sup> A further sum of up to £9,999 was given to Chatham House by the UAE's Embassy in London in 2016-17.<sup>26</sup>

Of course there is nothing improper about donations to think tanks; on the contrary these centres rely heavily on money they're given from governments and groups around the world to do their work. However, a problem arises if that donor tries to wield influence on the organisation, which claims it is independent.

Spinwatch has learnt that Quiller, the London lobbying company which aggressively pushed the UAE's agenda from 2011-15, compiled research on two prominent Chatham House academics in the UK whose output the UAE didn't like.<sup>27</sup> Both no longer hold positions with the London think tank.

The first was Maha Azzam, formerly an associate fellow of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Chatham House before she left in 2015. Quiller alleged she was a Muslim Brotherhood sympathiser. Her political activism, attending events in London protesting against the current Egyptian regime of Abdel Fatah Sisi<sup>28</sup> and her position as head of the Egyptian Revolutionary Council,<sup>29</sup> a group which campaigns against Sisi's rule, alarmed the UAE.<sup>30</sup> Azzam declined to comment.

Quiller also singled out Omar Ashour.<sup>31</sup> He has criticised the UAE-backed 2013 coup in Egypt<sup>32</sup> and the UAE's intervention in Yemen<sup>33</sup>, both sensitive topics in Abu Dhabi. In 2017 Ashour didn't have his associate fellowship at Chatham House renewed. His views were even more sensitive because he is also a senior lecturer in security studies in the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter which<sup>34</sup>, over the last two decades, has received over £8m from the ruler of Sharjah, Sheikh Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qasimi.<sup>35</sup> Sharjah is one of the seven emirates that make up the UAE.

There is no suggestion that the UAE applied pressure to remove these individuals, or that Chatham House terminated their employment because of lobbying from the UAE. But it is striking that research was conducted on them and they both no longer are with the think tank.

Lina Khatib holds the coveted position in British think tank land as head of its Middle East and North Africa Programme. She has written critically about Qatar's foreign policy before in the respected *International Affairs* academic journal. It recycled old claims about Qatar's alleged links to radical Islamic activists and its policies being a destabilising influence on the region.<sup>36</sup>

Chatham House said: 'Lina Khatib's peer reviewed article critiqued and, was indeed critical of, Qatar's foreign policy but that does not mean she holds very hostile views towards Qatar. Lina maintains professional and productive relations with Qatar as she does with other governments and institutions in the Gulf and does not take hostile positions to any country in the region.'

The guest list at Chatham House's annual London Conference held in October 2017 was made up of high-profile speakers and guests from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, but not from Qatar. Lana Nusseibeh, the UAE's ambassador to the United Nations attended<sup>37</sup>, who as we'll see later is an essential cog of the Emirati lobbying campaign – as well as Adel al-Jubeir, Saudi Arabia's minister of foreign Affairs.<sup>38</sup> However, it is true that Qatar's foreign minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani gave a public lecture at the think tank a few days after the blockade of Doha began in June 2017.



Adel al-Jubeir, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Foreign Affairs. (Credit: Chatham House, © Suzanne Plunkett 2017, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)



*The Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI), Whitehall.*

*(Credit: RUSI, CC BY-ND 2.0)*

'Senior officials from the UAE are known to scrutinise Chatham House output closely. If they objected to elements of its work, they would make their views known to senior management there', said a former fellow at Chatham House, 'While any government can complain to a think tank, the UAE benefitted from privileged access to senior directors, who would then feel obliged to investigate whether the analysis by staff was fair. No one would be told not to criticise the UAE, but the scrutiny and sensitivity could make analysts tread carefully – or shy away from writing about them at all', this person said.<sup>39</sup>

Chatham House vigorously denied that it was open to influence from any government for financial or any other gain.

It said that the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Court and the UAE Ministry for Foreign Affairs were partners from 2011–16 and income from both departments was between £80,000-£150,000 per year 'depending on the level of agreed activity each year'. 'The funding went towards research activities and conferences untied to the work of the Middle East and North Africa Programme, which takes no money from MENA governments.'

Asked if the UAE had spoken to the centre about any academics' work they didn't like, Chatham House said: 'No. Chatham House would not respond positively to any sponsor who thought this may be a right and would not respond to lobbying of this kind.'

'The embassies of UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia are all members of Chatham House and we engage with them equitably and objectively,' it added.

Another of the UK's most prominent think tanks has received money from the UAE. The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) is a key talking shop and policy shaper for Britain's defence and security industries and counts a number of former spy chiefs as staff members and regularly hosts private lectures and sessions with the cream of the UK's security establishment.

In 2015-16, the UAE Embassy paid £50,000 -£99,999 to RUSI.<sup>40</sup> By comparison, Qatar, which set up an office in Doha in 2007, paid much more to RUSI. In 2016/17 the Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave between £200,000 to £499,999 and the Qatar Ministry of Defence paid up to £199,999.<sup>41</sup> RUSI said these sums funded training courses and were not 'donations'.

A paper published by RUSI in 2013 warrants special mention. It was written by Gareth Stansfield, who in addition to being a senior associate fellow at RUSI, also serves as Al-Qasimi chair of Arab Gulf Studies at the University of Exeter, named after the ruler of Sharjah, which funds two endowed professorships there.

Stansfield advocated for British forces to return to the territory 'East of Suez', deploying a phrase first coined by Rudyard Kipling, to suggest the benefits of a more aggressive UK military

presence in the Gulf to defend the UAE and other allies while sending ‘a message of resolve’ to Iran.<sup>42</sup> The paper advocates sending troops to Dubai’s Minhad airbase in the UAE. It takes the UAE and Saudi line that the idea that the UK is dropping its commitment to democracy by bolstering Gulf dictatorships is a ‘falsely framed debate’. It goes on to regurgitate more Emirati lines that British backing for the Arab Spring protests was ‘an attractive, but naïve, reading of the Arab upheavals which have facilitated the growing triumph of Muslim conservatism’.

At the time, as we shall see, paranoia about the Muslim Brotherhood’s supposedly ubiquitous presence in the Middle East dominated UAE policymaking, and the UAE was looking to extract maximum support from its longstanding ally, the UK, in return for UAE buying £3bn worth of Eurofighter Typhoon jets from BAe Systems – a deal that ultimately collapsed but sat at the heart of David Cameron’s Gulf policy.

Stansfield didn’t respond to a request for comment.

RUSI briefing papers typically help to provide context for the views of policymakers – and the media. Stansfield’s paper attracted an article by the BBC security correspondent Frank Gardner,<sup>43</sup> himself an important target of the UAE’s lobbying campaign. Emails handed to Spinwatch show that Gardner attended two private briefings given by Anwar Gargash, the UAE’s Minister of State for Foreign Affairs to fellow journalists, think tankers and Foreign Office staff, the first at Chatham House in May 2011 and the second in October 2012. This will be discussed more fully in section 3:4.

RUSI said: ‘We do not receive any donations from the UAE, or from any other state in the region. Nor is our coverage of events, or any of the activities we undertake restricted by work with that country, or any other Gulf States. The same applies to our publications. And, while it is very possible that we have not covered certain events and it is equally possible that, with the benefit of hindsight we should have covered such events, the decision of what topics we undertake for research and analysis is based on editorial criteria alone.’

A more subtle use of soft power and lobbying emerges in the relationship between the UAE

and famous universities. The UAE, and other Gulf states, have bankrolled Middle East departments of British universities over the last few years to the tune of tens of millions of pounds through large donations and endowed professorships.<sup>44</sup>

As of the middle of 2014 the Abu Dhabi-funded Emirates Foundation for Philanthropy had given £6.073m to the LSE and a further \$3 million to name the main lecture theatre in LSE’s New Academic Building after Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, the founder of the UAE.<sup>45</sup> The total amount pledged by the Emirates Foundation is over £9m. Since 2007, the government-backed Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences has been funding a £5.8m, 10-year research programme at the LSE.<sup>46</sup> In spite of this, LSE’s output appears to show signs of independence. Courtney Freer’s paper on Rentier Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, was critical of the UAE.<sup>47</sup>

## 1:4:2 US

Donations given to UK think tanks pale compared to what the UAE has splashed to buy influence among well-known conservative policy centres in the US, staffed by former and prospective government officials. As we shall see later in part II, the UAE, helped by its influential ambassador, Yousef Al Otaiba, has infiltrated many of Washington’s top think tanks whose output it attempts to massage to reflect its foreign policy.

Typically, these policy centres might produce policy papers commissioned by the donor, host events and brief governments, often reflecting the policy of the sponsor.<sup>48</sup>

Donations from the UAE include over \$1.5m for the DC based hawkish Center for Strategic and International Studies<sup>49</sup>, \$20m for the Philadelphia based Middle East Institute<sup>50</sup> and money to the Center for American Progress, (which gave detailed guidance to the UAE on how to lobby the White House about Egypt), the Aspen Institute and the East West Institute.<sup>51</sup>

The Center for New American Security (CNAS) is a supposedly independent blue chip Washington think tank developing policy on national security and defence. In 2016, the UAE paid CNAS \$250,000 for a private paper pushing the case for how the UAE could buy US-made attack

drones that export restrictions currently prohibit, hacked emails show.<sup>52</sup> CNAS followed up in 2017 by issuing a public paper on the same subject, arguing that US interests were hurt by its strict drone export policy. Between the start of October 2016 and the end of September 2017 CNAS says it received up to \$249,000 from UAE government.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to funding and influencing policy centres, the UAE has also set up its own think tanks, which are wholly, or nearly wholly, funded by the UAE. Backed also by Saudi, the Arab Gulf States Institute pumps out biased articles, including one entitled, *Why America turned off Al Jazeera* in 2016, highlighting UAE distaste for its neighbour Qatar.<sup>54</sup>

We will explore later, too, how the UAE is cooperating with neoconservative, pro-Israel organisations. Israel and the Gulf states have been covertly normalising diplomatic and military relations for years, something that has accelerated since the Arab Spring as they unite against common enemies – Iran and Hezbollah on the one hand, and Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood on the other.

In the US, the UAE has used prominent Israeli-linked organisations as vessels to push its foreign policy interests. These include the Washington Institute for Near East Peace Policy (WINEP), a think tank set up by the American Israel Policy Affairs Committee (AIPAC).<sup>55</sup> AIPAC is one of America's most successful pro-Israel lobbying outfits.

The UAE has close ties to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), a think-tank at the heart of Washington's pro-Israel lobby and aligned with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party. It shot to prominence by devoting much of its energy trying to derail Barack Obama's Iran deal<sup>56</sup> and enjoys significant clout: its experts have testified in Congress<sup>57</sup> and FDD places regular opinion pieces about the Middle East in major US news outlets making it a key shaper of American opinion in the region. Its chief executive, Mark Dubowitz, was one of the key architects of American sanctions against Iran during the Obama era.



*Leo Docherty, currently MP for Aldershot and the former director of the Conservative Middle East Council. (Credit: Chris McAndrew, CC BY 3.0)*

## 1:5 Private and Business Forums

Away from the world of policy centres and paid lobbying firms, private forums are an important – and effective – tool of the lobby. In the UK, a group of broadly pro-UAE MPs make up the UAE All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), which serves to 'promote good relations' between the two countries.<sup>58</sup> MPs enjoy expenses paid for trips to the UAE, with the group existing not to hold the UAE to account for its poor human rights records, but to lavish praise on the hosts with oft-rolled-out lines of defence and security cooperation between old allies.

An APPG delegation of MPs visited the UAE in February 2018.<sup>59</sup> Leo Docherty, the Tory MP for Aldershot who is vice chair of the group, said that the group 'has been really pleased to see the stability and prosperity of the UAE, a country which we regard as a critically important partner in pursuing peace and prosperity in the region.'<sup>60</sup> Naturally, there was no public mention of the UAE and Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, which has destabilised the region, sparked a humanitarian catastrophe, put 8.4 million people on the brink of famine<sup>61</sup> and been widely criticised for human rights abuses.

Britain has been accused of complicity in this war as it continues to sell arms to Saudi Arabia. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has called for a halt to these weapon sales.<sup>62</sup> Campaigners in April launched an attempt to overturn a high court ruling that permits the government to export weapons to Riyadh for use in Yemen.<sup>63</sup>

We'll examine Docherty's role in the lobby more closely in section 3.9. Before he was an MP, he

was a director of the Conservative Middle East Council (CMEC), which was founded in 1980 as a pro-Palestinian group to voice concerns about Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. Yet there is evidence that it now lobbies on behalf of Gulf states, notably, Saudi, Bahrain and the UAE, while also receiving funds and cooperation from those close to these governments.<sup>64</sup>

Property developer David Rowland is a generous donor to CMEC and has given £465,000 to the group over the last few years.<sup>65</sup> Docherty received £10,000 from Rowland to help with his election in 2017 to parliament.<sup>66</sup>

Rowland, who owns a private Luxembourg-based bank, Banque Havilland, is reported to be associated with a banking initiative with Abu Dhabi's state-owned investment behemoth Mubadala<sup>67</sup>, and is reported to be close to the Abu Dhabi crown prince MbZ.<sup>68</sup>

There are also private business forums like the UAE-UK Business Council, established in 2011, to foster commercial ties between London and Abu Dhabi. BP, BAe Systems and Rolls Royce are all members of the council.<sup>69</sup>

Unsurprisingly, these three companies are reliant on the UAE for the flow of tens of billions of pounds of commercial contracts. BP has a 10% stake in Abu Dhabi's national oil company, ADNOC, and the emirate has a £2bn investment in BP.<sup>70</sup> Rolls Royce signed a \$9.2bn contract with Dubai's Emirates airline in 2015 to supply engines for its fleet of A380s.<sup>71</sup>

BAe Systems has a large office in Abu Dhabi and early in 2018 won a contract from US defence contractor Lockheed Martin to modernise fighter jets for the UAE military.<sup>72</sup> Former Foreign Office permanent secretary Baron [Peter] Ricketts is a strategic adviser to Lockheed who declared a trip to the UAE in October 2017 paid for by UAE Ministry of Defence.<sup>73</sup> A month later the Lockheed deal was announced. Ricketts said:

My visit to the UAE in October 2017 was exactly as set out in the Lords Register. I was invited by King's College London (where I am a Visiting Professor) to make a presentation on Britain's national security at a conference they organised as part of a leadership training programme for the UAE Ministry of Defence. Lobbying is not part of my role at Lockheed

Martin UK, and I did not undertake any lobbying for Lockheed Martin or any other company while in the UAE. (Statement to authors, 11 July 2018)

We shall see in Section 3 how BAe and BP were used as political pawns in the UAE's high stakes lobbying campaign in Britain.

A joint UK-UAE Taskforce, which is now into its eighth year, was set up in July 2010 when Cameron was prime minister aimed at increasing cooperation on matters like defence and trade.<sup>74</sup> Separately, the UK and UAE launched another task force to prevent violent extremism in 2016, where the British government pledged funds for Hedayah, the Abu Dhabi-based International Centre of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism, to the tune of \$1.4m in 2016-17 and similar amounts up to 2020.<sup>75</sup>

Hedayah was created in response to the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF), an international consortium set up in 2011 by 29 countries broadly aligned to fighting the so-called 'war on terror'.<sup>76</sup> To name a few, founding members include the UK, US, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Qatar – and the UAE, which seems to have an active voice in the organisation. Until late 2017, not only was the GCTF's countering violent extremism working group co-chaired by the UK and the UAE, but the forum established one of its three centres of excellence in Abu Dhabi at Hedayah.<sup>77</sup>

## 1:6 Monarchy and Military

The UK enjoys colonial-era ties to the UAE. Known as the Trucial States, the emirates that now make up the UAE were protectorates of Britain before they won independence in 1971. The Queen made a state visit in 1979 to Abu Dhabi and again in 2010.<sup>78</sup>

Prince Andrew has been key facilitator of the monarchy-to-monarchy lobbying channel. As the UK's former special representative for Trade and Investment from 2001-2011, his job was to travel the world and tout for British business. Prince Andrew has been on numerous visits to the UAE in his role as trade envoy – and since he stood down. His long, friendly association has been a boon to the Emirates, though his close relationship with the Abu Dhabi crown prince,

MbZ, has attracted controversy. The two are school friends from their days at Gordonstoun in Scotland, and they have been on hunting holidays to Morocco.<sup>79</sup> In 2010, questions were raised about whether Andrew helped Masdar, a renewable energy company in Abu Dhabi and a member of the UAE-UK Business Council, clinch an investment deal in a massive British wind farm project.<sup>80</sup>

To understand how lobbying is conducted between the two royal families, it's important to note the military-to-military angle, too. Few things underscore the cozy relationship between the UK and the UAE better than Sandhurst military academy, which has educated more than 200 Emiratis in the last 50 years, including MbZ, who overlapped there with Prince Andrew.<sup>81</sup>

Britain's military still works closely with the UAE's armed forces, providing training and expertise. As of the October 2017, there were 229 UK military personnel in the UAE, 145 from the Royal Air Force, 27 from the army and 50 from the Royal Navy.<sup>82</sup>

Gulf countries have also historically been some of the most significant buyers of UK-made arms. Around two thirds of UK arms exports went to the Middle East in 2015/16, with the UAE purchasing £265 million worth of defence equipment in that period, data from the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) shows.<sup>83</sup>

## 1:7 Tony Blair

Tony Blair has courted a storm of controversy for the work that he's pursued after leaving Downing Street in 2007. His questionable roster of former clients, either through his charity, the Tony Blair Africa Governance Initiative or his ex-consultancy Tony Blair Associates have included oil companies as well as Rwanda, Colombia, Peru and the Kazakh government.<sup>84</sup> But he has also been highly involved with the UAE.

Controversially, Blair's London office was being paid millions by the UAE when he was UN Middle East envoy, *The Daily Telegraph* reported.<sup>85</sup> The envoy position was a privileged role he took up soon after stepping down as prime minister that gave him access to governments all around the world, leading to accusations that he used public office for private gain, a claim he strongly denies.



Tony Blair (Credit: Chatham House, CC BY 2.0 consultancy fees)

For example, Nick Banner, a top Foreign Office official who was Blair's chief of staff as Quartet envoy, allegedly undertook commercial work connected to the former Labour leader's, consultancy business, the *Telegraph* reported. Banner met with Mubadala CEO Khaldoon Al Mubarak in the UAE a year after Blair left Number 10. The former prime minister began paid advisory work for Mubadala, the UAE state-owned investment firm a year later.<sup>86</sup> Blair is also known to be close to MbZ, also the chairman of Mubadala.

Banner also arranged talks between a Korean oil company UI Energy that Blair was being paid to advise and another Abu Dhabi based investment company.<sup>87</sup> There is no suggestion that Blair acted unlawfully or improperly in any of these dealings.

Blair also lobbied the UK government in a bid to secure lucrative investment deals for his firm's UAE paymasters. Britain appeared so desperate for the UAE's investment in 2013 that ministers set up a secret Whitehall unit that gave Abu Dhabi access to big business deals and opportunities to donate to a top NHS institution. Overseen by Paul Deighton, former commercial secretary to the Treasury, this 10-person team of senior officials, was called Project Falcon.<sup>88</sup>

In July 2013 Blair met with Deighton.<sup>89</sup> Abu Dhabi United Group, which owns Manchester City Football Club, inked a £1 billion property deal in Manchester after the meeting.<sup>90</sup> Mubadala, Blair's client at time, said in December 2014 that it would develop a £175 million student village in Manchester, though it has since pulled out of the deal due to spiralling costs.<sup>91</sup> Blair's office did not respond to a request for comment.

## PART II– How did the lobby evolve? Domestic and regional factors

### 2:1 Soft Power

Over the last 15 years, Gulf countries have used myriad ways to project themselves on the world stage and enhance their image and reputation in West. In the 1960s, when the colonial British exited the Gulf, they left poor, under-developed countries.<sup>92</sup> Thanks to the post-2000 oil boom; a shift towards more reputation conscious; outward-looking leadership in Gulf states in the late 1990s and early 2000s; and the decline of traditional regional powers like Syria, Iraq and Egypt,<sup>93</sup> the desert sheikhdoms of the Arabian Peninsula began to wield considerably more power in their quest for recognition. So-called ‘soft power’, or influence, came in the form of investment in overseas assets in financial institutions, real estate and, lately, football clubs, the hosting of business conferences, arts and film festivals, bidding for marquee sporting events, generous aid policies, funding of international museums and European and US academic institutions and universities.<sup>94</sup> The purchase of Manchester City Football Club by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan in 2008 defined the UAE’s soft power push. Up until around 2010, Arab Gulf states were content with using this strategy to gain status.

### 2:2 Arab Spring

The pro-democracy revolts of 2010/11 led to a change of tack in how the UAE won influence in the West. The rise of Islamic political activism in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood across the region shook the foundations of the centuries-old established order in the Middle East of totalitarian, unelected ruling families. Gulf states watched in horror as popular revolts unseated dictators in Tunisia and Egypt and mass anti-government protests rocked its old ally Bahrain – and even spread to the Shia-dominated oil-producing region of eastern Saudi Arabia. They feared these protests might spread to the UAE, threatening their iron-grip on power.

Revolutions sweeping the region emboldened the UAE militarily. The Peninsula Shield Force, the army of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC),

which was partly made up of Emirati troops, helped put down the large Shia-led anti-regime protests in Bahrain.<sup>95</sup> Days later in March 2011 the UAE and Qatar participated in NATO airstrikes in Libya against Muammar Gaddafi’s regime.<sup>96</sup>

‘The Arab Spring was the sum of all evil as far as Mohammed bin Zayed was concerned. It’s proof that if you give Islamists an inch they’ll take a mile,’ said a London-based Gulf analyst, who didn’t wish to be named.<sup>97</sup>

This goes to the core of the dispute between Qatar and its neighbours. In the eyes of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the Muslim Brotherhood and its brand of political Islam represents an existential threat to their regional hegemony. By contrast, Qatar sees the Muslim Brotherhood as the best bet for democracy in the Middle East. Its support for the popular uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia and calls for social justice stood at odds with prevailing sentiment in the Gulf and put it on a collision course with the UAE and Saudi, as we shall see.

### 2:3 Emergence of a lobby; collaboration with the Israel lobby

What soon emerged was an ideologically driven political lobby centred on undermining, and disparaging the strongest force agitating for democracy in the Middle East; Islamic political activist movements. Hostility towards the UAE’s arch foe Iran, the regional Shia powerhouse, also increased. United against these two enemies, the UAE has found itself increasingly aligned with Israel, a historic Arab enemy.

Relations remain sensitive, as there are no formal diplomatic relations between the UAE and Israel, nor with any Gulf state. Despite this there has been a significant rapprochement between the two countries in the last decade via public, as well as secret channels. In fact there were secret meetings between Israel and the UAE dating back to the 1990s when MbZ wanted to buy US fighter jets, but feared Israeli objections.<sup>98</sup>

More recently the UAE's relationships with the Israeli government, intelligence services and Israeli businesses abroad have strengthened over the last ten years.

In 2006, MbZ's brother Sheikh Hazza bin Zayed, who controls the UAE's intelligence agencies, began cultivating a relationship with Fatah strongman Mohammad Dahlan as a UAE ally in Palestine and a counterweight to Hamas.<sup>99</sup>

In 2011, Dahlan was expelled from the Palestinian Fatah movement, where he was infamous for leading violent crackdowns on Hamas members in Gaza<sup>100</sup> and went on to become MbZ's most prominent regional security adviser, taking up residence in Abu Dhabi.<sup>101</sup> He has been given both Serbian and Montenegrin citizenship.<sup>102</sup> As well as being the UAE's point man for the Balkans, Dahlan reportedly maintains close relations with Israeli intelligence services.<sup>103</sup> While serving MbZ, he has been a major facilitator of the UAE's gradual normalisation of ties with Israel, it has been reported. Similarly, one of the UAE's most high profile security officials over the last decade, former chief of the powerful Dubai police, Dhahi Khalfan, came out against a Palestinian state in 2016 and suggested an Israeli-Arab alliance against Iran.<sup>104</sup>

Israel's influence over UAE security doesn't end there. In 2008, MbZ approved an \$816m contract with former Israeli intelligence agent Mati Kochavi to design a surveillance programme capable of monitoring Abu Dhabi residents and securing major infrastructure in the emirate.<sup>105</sup>

Just as in Abu Dhabi and Riyadh, the Arab Spring was seen by Israeli ex-spy chiefs Meir Dagan of Mossad and Amos Yadlin of Aman, the Israeli Military Intelligence Directorate, as a threat.<sup>106</sup>

In 2010 the assassination of a Hamas military commander in Dubai bore the hallmarks of Israeli intelligence service Mossad's work. In 2014, Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum even advocated normalising diplomatic ties with Israel if they engaged in a peace process with Palestinians.<sup>107</sup> A year later Israel opened its first diplomatic mission in the UAE despite the absence of formal ties.<sup>108</sup>

Analysts and one former British diplomat to the Gulf say Israeli diplomats, military personnel

and businessmen secretly fly into Abu Dhabi on privately chartered flights.<sup>109</sup> No Gulf countries operate commercial flights to Israel.

By 2015 Israel was going behind the back of its number one ally, the US, and was focused on persuading Donald Trump's campaign team to forge a new anti-Iran alliance with Gulf states in the Middle East.<sup>110</sup> Netanyahu and UAE officials secretly met in Cyprus to discuss the Iran nuclear deal just before Trump became president, a measure of how close the Israel-UAE alliance had become.<sup>111</sup>

This alliance is crucial for understanding how the UAE lobby has modelled itself on Israel's, as both parties share two common enemies: the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran.

Indeed, the similarities between the two lobbies are striking. Parts of the pro-Israel movement stir up Islamophobia suggesting that Muslims are a cultural, political and existential threat to the West.<sup>112</sup> The UAE has sought to portray Islamic political activism and Qatar, a supporter of such movements, in a similar fashion.

'The similarities [between the UAE and Israel lobby] are that they are both conservative in their world-view – their world is framed through a lens of fear and phobia. There's a fear-mongering and a reduction of Islam as a religion that wants to kills us', said Andreas Krieg, assistant professor in Defence Studies at King's College London.<sup>113</sup>

Like the Israel lobby, the UAE has also sought to label Iran as expansionist and evil. By exploiting these two issues, the UAE cleverly taps into the conservative narrative over fears of Iran and Islamic political activity. It has used this to great effect in the US and UK, as we shall discover later.

## 2:4 Gargash and MbZ

With Dubai's party scene and free flowing alcohol alongside its world-class financial hub, the UAE has built a reputation for economic and social liberalism. It was in this spirit that Anwar Gargash, a mild-mannered and well-educated businessman of Iranian heritage, was appointed as Minister of State for Federal National Council Affairs in 2006 to spearhead a modest and gradual long-term move to democratising the UAE with a Federal National Council and elections.<sup>114</sup>

But how did this Cambridge PhD holder<sup>115</sup>, beating a path to a more inclusive, democratic politics, become by 2011 the face of the UAE's war on the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran, and eventually Qatar? The answer lies in a shift in power behind the Abu Dhabi throne.

Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince, MbZ, grew gradually into de facto leadership of the UAE government following the death of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan in 2004, having already commanded the loyalty of the UAE's military. Despite being officially second in command to his half-brother and UAE president Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, MbZ had been the man in charge long before Khalifa's stroke in 2014.<sup>116</sup> He has transformed the way the UAE is governed, dispensing with advisers appointed for their tribal or personal ties and stuffing ministries with western technocrats, one well-placed source said.<sup>117</sup> But in the process, he has turned the UAE into a politically aggressive actor in the Gulf.

In 2008, Gargash was handed an expanded role as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs by MbZ,<sup>118</sup> a position from which he ran the UAE's new international reputation management campaign.

Up until then the UAE's foreign policy had been commercially aggressive. By 2011, Gargash had become the spokesman and face for the UAE's new, muscular foreign policy, overtly political in nature and ideologically driven.

## 2:5 Al Islah and the UAE's domestic crackdown

At home, Abu Dhabi's first task was to crush its domestic political opposition. Before we document this, it's important to understand a little about the history of Al Islah, the Islamic political group in the UAE, which is affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood.

The group had been prominent in the some of the poorer northern emirates of the UAE in the 1970s and by the 1990s some of its members wielded influence on Emirati society through their positions in the educational and judicial systems.<sup>119</sup> However, by the mid-1990s the UAE moved to restrict Islah's political activity, banning members from holding public office, after a probe by Egyptian intelligence reportedly found that Islah had given money to Egyptian Islamic Jihad,

an officially designated 'terrorist' group.<sup>120</sup> From then, the Brotherhood was viewed as deeply suspicious by the UAE authorities.

The 9/11 attacks hardened the Emiratis' position against the group further, as they were keen to show the West they took a tough line against religious extremism. Islah, which in English means 'reform', remained a loosely organised movement within the UAE and became more politically active during the Arab Spring, calling for democratic reform. The government failed to deliver on this,<sup>121</sup> through its limp democratisation plan. Various attempts were made by the authorities to quell internal dissent by hiking public sector wages and welfare payments.

By the end of 2012, 94 alleged members of Al Islah had been arrested and imprisoned. Rights groups say many suffered ill treatment and torture in jail, sometimes to extract false confessions. In March 2013 the so-called 'UAE94' were tried on charges of trying to overthrow the government, which Islah denied. Some 69 were convicted with sentences ranging from 7 to 15 years, while 25 were acquitted. They weren't allowed to appeal.<sup>122</sup>

Analysts say the case made against Islah was trumped up and that there is little evidence that they were a serious threat to the regime, a view western governments shared. As Courtney Freer, research officer at the LSE Kuwait Programme, writes: 'The government appears to have greatly exaggerated Islah's popularity and political aspirations to justify such a complete and rapid crackdown.'<sup>123</sup>

## 2:6 The rise of the counter-revolution

Once the domestic threat had been crushed, Abu Dhabi turned its attention to regional developments. Two matters required urgent attention – and action. The first was that Mohamed Morsi, had become president of Egypt, its first democratically elected leader. That the Muslim Brotherhood could be governing a country that was one of the UAE's oldest allies in region, one with which they had shared close security, economic and political ties for decades, was anathema to Abu Dhabi. It set to work to foment demonstrations against Morsi, closely coordinating with the Egyptian military, while



*Yousef Al Otaiba, the UAE's ambassador to the United States and John Kerry. Otaiba has been successful in pushing the UAE's agenda by influencing US foreign policy circles.*

*(Credit: U.S. Department of State, CC-BY- U.S. Government Works)*

helping fund a protest movement called Tamarod against the president, leaked recordings show.<sup>124</sup>

In Tunisia, there have been reports that the UAE tried to topple the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated Ennahda party, which held the balance of power after the 2011 elections, with promises of financial aid to its backers. Sofian Ben Farhat, a journalist close to Tunisian president Beji Caid Essebsi, claimed the UAE tried to persuade Essebsi to overthrow Ennahda, it was reported.<sup>125</sup>

## 2:7 Otaiba and the UAE lobby in the US

The 9/11 attacks tore up the political landscape of the Middle East and successfully pitted the West versus Islam, one of the ultimate aims of Al Qaeda. It's a conflict that rages today across the world. Muslims are viewed with increased hostility, prejudice and suspicion. Worse for the Gulf states, fifteen of the nineteen 9/11 hijackers were Saudi and two were from the UAE. Relations with the West plunged to an all-time low.

In 2006, state-owned Dubai Ports World was forced to pull out of a deal to buy the British company P&O, which ran a number of North

American ports, due to a US backlash over security fears. Viewed as a state sponsor of terrorism in the wake of 9/11, the UAE withdrew, humiliated.<sup>126</sup> A trusted lieutenant of MbZ's, Yousef Al Otaiba was handed the job of overturning the UAE's image in the Washington and was installed as US ambassador. It's a role he has excelled in.

Thanks to a cache of emails from the personal email account of Otaiba leaked to US news sites in summer 2017, it's possible to understand the extraordinary web of influence the ambassador has spun in his decade in Washington. He has close enough ties with US officials, such as Dina Powell, Trump's former national security adviser, that in 2017 he contacted her directly about an exchange he had with a Politico journalist who had written a critical article about Egypt's president Sisi that he objected to.<sup>127</sup> Otaiba is well-known for challenging journalists' output he disagrees with.

He has also fostered close relationships with think tanks that the UAE funds and then complained about their output,<sup>128</sup> like when he disagreed with an Atlantic Council paper on Iran he was given to review because it didn't take a tough enough line.

He's also thrown lavish hospitality events<sup>129</sup> all in an effort to try and shape US government policy that's favourable to the UAE.<sup>130</sup> Otaiba is a close friend of Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.<sup>131</sup>

How has he done this?

He has positioned the UAE as sympathetic to Washington's security concerns – a liberal, secular Muslim country. Trumpeting his own liberal values, Otaiba was an easy sell to Capitol Hill.

'Otaiba is a great socialiser and he was hanging out with the right people from both sides, Democrats and Republican. I have Republican friends in DC who've been to his dinner parties and they say he's a great guy, he has a lot of charisma, he drinks alcohol and speaks with an American accent – he's not seen as a Muslim,' said Krieg at King's College London.<sup>132</sup>

Personal charisma aside, his goal was more strategic. He pitched the UAE as having a clear division between religion and state, an image that was out of kilter with the rest of the conservative Gulf region.

'For a neoconservative to deal with someone who says that religion is great but it shouldn't part of politics... that is something that is very appealing to neoconservatives and this has been very strategically done by Otaiba,' said Krieg.<sup>133</sup>

Otaiba was able to exploit the deeply polarised views towards Muslims that thrive in America's entrenched two-party system, opinions that have widened post 9/11. Some 66% of Clinton supporters had a favourable view towards Islam, compared to only 16% of Trump supporters, a 2016 survey conducted the Brookings Institution found.<sup>134</sup>

For example, Hamas is a proscribed terrorist organisation in the US, but only the military wing is listed in the UK.<sup>135</sup> Few in Washington would even entertain the notion that the political arm of the group engages in activism.

Otaiba knew that Republicans, particularly neoconservatives, were susceptible to the narrative that 'Islamism' was on the rise and represented a threat, fears that have been planted by the Israel lobby (amongst others) for years in the US.<sup>136</sup> He exploited this to maximum effect and invested in the same network of neoconservative policymakers as the Israel lobby.

It was back in 2008, a month into Otaiba's new role, when the UAE first had contact with a Washington think tank. A consultant contacted the Emirati ambassador on behalf of the Middle East Institute, saying he wanted to raise \$50m from the UAE.<sup>137</sup> (We learnt in Part I that Abu Dhabi gave MEI \$20m in 2016 and 2017). This marked the start of the UAE's cultivation of influential policy centres in the American capital. We don't have space in this piece to list all the think tanks and policy centres in the US that the UAE has funded and built alliances with in the last decade.

It's the extent of collaboration between the UAE and the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a pro-Israel neoconservative think tank, that is most relevant to this research. Otaiba was in regular touch with John Hannah, senior counselor at FDD, who also served as Dick Cheney's former deputy national security adviser.<sup>138</sup> In emails they traded criticisms of Qatar and Otaiba joked that he wanted the US army base in Doha moved, the *Intercept* reported. Hannah and Otaiba share similar views about Qatar. In 2017 Hannah said that Doha was a 'key backer – politically, financially, militarily, and ideologically via Al Jazeera, the Doha-based state-funded broadcaster – of some of the region's most radical, destabilizing, and dangerous forces.'<sup>139</sup>



*David Cameron, the former UAE ambassador to the UK, Abdul Rahman Al Mutaiwee, and the Vice President, Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of the Emirate of Dubai, Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum.*

*(Credit: Conservatives, CC BY-NC-ND)*

## PART III – Impact on the UK

As we saw in the previous chapter, the UAE looked to model itself on the highly successful Israeli lobby and between 2011-2014 it pursued this with great effect in the UK.

We'll document in this chapter how the UAE mobilised a narrative against the Muslim Brotherhood in Britain in the highest echelons of the government. Exploiting improved ties in Britain with the incoming Coalition government, the UAE took drastic measures to effectively bully the UK to investigate the Brotherhood, using big business as a tool of diplomacy. The review of the group led to a spike in negative media reports about the Brotherhood, helping to poison the narrative against Muslims in the UK.

We'll document how a surge of anti-Qatar and Brotherhood stories by influential journalists was fed by the UAE through its lobbying firm Quiller. In emails leaked to Spinwatch, we'll expose a huge pipeline of briefings given to the cream of Fleet Street by a senior UAE minister between 2011 and 2013, the detailed plan by the Emiratis to win over the British press and get them to write favourable stories – and the articles that may have flowed from those briefings.

Also, we'll examine the effects on those civil society groups and charities that were designated by the UAE as terrorist entities and how this

sparked difficulties with their banks and financial crime databases like World-Check.

### 3:1 Commercial alliances build, Cameron and MbZ

As a key strategic ally of the UK's, Britain's interests are heavily tied with the UAE. Currently some 120,000 British expatriates work and live in the Emirates and about one million British tourists visit every year.<sup>140</sup> Around 6000 British companies operate in the UAE, making the UK the largest foreign direct investor in the country.<sup>141</sup>

In the Labour years under Gordon Brown, relations between the UAE and UK had been frosty, but a marked thawing of ties from 2010 occurred when Cameron took office. He presided over a shift in British foreign policy to one that was commercially orientated – a break from Labour where there had been a greater emphasis on human rights. Cameron said when he became leader that boosting trade would be one of his main foreign policy objectives.<sup>142</sup>

Nine months after becoming prime minister, Cameron undertook a tour of Gulf states with eight of Britain's biggest defence manufacturers,<sup>143</sup> keen to push the Eurofighter Typhoon sale to the Emiratis – one of the highest priority British foreign policy objectives at the time.



*Alistair Burt acted as a vocal advocate for the UAE and chair of the UAE All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) since 2017. (Credit: FCO, CC BY 2.0)*

He visited the UAE again in 2012 and 2013, both in November, when the Dubai Air Show is held, where many of the world's big arms companies, including the UK's, tout their wares.

'British foreign policy was shamelessly prostituted [during the Cameron era] – it has been outsourced and stripped of any value in favour of getting a business deal', said a US-based Gulf analyst, who didn't wish to be named.<sup>144</sup>

'The FCO acted like a PR agency to win as many deals in the Gulf region, as the role of British foreign policy shifted to a commercial orientation', this analyst said.<sup>145</sup>

In October 2010, MbZ visited Cameron in Downing Street.<sup>146</sup> This was the start of close and genuine friendship between the two men. 'They used to SMS each other, they had a hotline to each other. He was consulting MbZ and they were in touch a lot about regional affairs', says a former British ambassador to the UAE.<sup>147</sup> 'MbZ was posing as the West's best friend in the region.'

UAE ministers had direct lines to their counterparts in the Cameron government. Officially, MbZ met Cameron in London in October 2011<sup>148</sup>, July 2013<sup>149</sup> and October 2014<sup>150</sup> and again in July 2015.<sup>151</sup> However, several meetings between MbZ and Cameron were not made public between 2012 and 2015, a person familiar

with the matter said.<sup>152</sup> A prime minister is entitled to have undeclared meetings, but such regular contact is indicative of the level of lobbying that was taking place then.

Lana Nusseibeh, Gargash's number two, and Arminka Helic, Hague's special adviser (now Baroness Helic), were in regular contact, and this relationship was seen as a key pressure point through which the UAE could influence the UK government.<sup>153</sup>

The shift in UK foreign policy was a boon to Abu Dhabi. Good relations under Cameron gave the UAE the confidence and legitimacy to pursue the unprecedented lobby campaign between 2011-2015, which had far-reaching consequences on UK government policy that will be examined more closely in this chapter.

### 3:2 BP and the BBC

Internationally, it is an Australian-based spin supremo called Simon Pearce who has played a vital role in shaping Abu Dhabi's overseas image over the last few years. He oversees the UAE's roster of western lobbying firms and PR agencies. Officially, his title is special advisor to the chairman of the Executive Affairs Authority of Abu Dhabi<sup>154</sup> and he's also a board member of Manchester City Football Club<sup>155</sup>, which Abu Dhabi bought in 2008. He answers to fellow Man City board

member Khaldoon Al Mubarak, and ultimately, to MbZ.

In June 2012, he reportedly wrote a set of briefing notes ahead of the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince's meeting with Cameron in Downing Street,<sup>156</sup> one of the undeclared meetings which took place. MbZ was to threaten to scupper the multi billion pound BAe Systems Eurofighter Typhoon deal, halt inward investment and slash intelligence sharing, unless the UK acted against the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>157</sup>

The plan hatched by Pearce was to offer the UK a series of commercial incentives – arms and oil deals involving BAe Systems and BP.<sup>158</sup>

Whatever was said between MbZ and Cameron in that meeting, the Emiratis felt as though their message hadn't got through. Over the next couple of years considerable pressure was exerted by the UAE on the UK to get it to take seriously its view that Islah and the Brotherhood were a threat. London had broadly been sympathetic to the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011<sup>159</sup>, speaking out in support of the demonstrators numerous times.<sup>160</sup> This enraged Abu Dhabi.

By July 2012, the UAE's domestic crackdown on Islah dissidents was cranking up, with yet more reports of arrests emerging from human rights organisations<sup>161</sup> and increased British press coverage. The same month BP was unexpectedly excluded from bidding in an onshore UAE oil concession.<sup>162</sup> The British oil giant had had a presence in Abu Dhabi's oil industry since 1939. What could the reason be?

This had nothing to do with oil and everything to do with politics. The Emiratis were furious at the UK government's friendly stance towards Islah – some members had been granted asylum in the UK in 2012 as they fled the crackdown – and the BBC's critical coverage of the UAE's domestic clampdown.<sup>163</sup>

In 2012 a secret, high-level Emirati entourage flew to the UK to lobby the government, a person familiar with the matter said.<sup>164</sup> The BBC's coverage of the UAE's crackdown on political opponents and the UK's overly favourable view towards the Muslim Brotherhood were two matters which were of huge concern to the UAE.<sup>165</sup>

One mildly critical op-ed by a UAE dissident called Said Nasser Al Teniji in London<sup>166</sup> in October 2012 also infuriated Abu Dhabi. Teniji was also interviewed by BBC Arabic to discuss the Islah arrests and torture allegations, all of which prompted a major UAE social media campaign against the UK, under the Twitter hashtag #UK\_supports\_traitors.<sup>167</sup> This then led to the FCO explaining to Abu Dhabi that they couldn't control the media,<sup>168</sup> despite protestations from Abu Dhabi that the UK had allowed a media climate for Islamic political activism to flourish. 'They [the UAE] went ballistic at the coverage that was given to the dissidents,' said the US-based Gulf analyst.<sup>169</sup>

Anwar Gargash, the influential UAE minister, who we've previously discussed, raised the issue of BBC coverage with Alistair Burt, who was Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office from 2010-13, a second person familiar with the matter said.<sup>170</sup>

We know that the UAE was very concerned about negative BBC coverage. An email obtained by Spinwatch sent by Lana Nusseibeh, an official at the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2012 to Gargash and Quiller executives details how the UAE embassy in London complained to the BBC about an interview that rights activist Rori Donaghy gave.<sup>171</sup> It said: 'the purpose of this is to alert the BBC that we follow what they broadcast and that we understand how to hold them to account against their own criteria and standards'.<sup>172</sup> We shall examine this email more closely in section 3:4:1. In a statement the BBC said:

The BBC reports impartially, without fear or favour and free from political influence, so any suggestion that our coverage had been influenced by political pressure would be incorrect.<sup>173</sup>

Abu Dhabi then went to the extraordinary lengths of using Quiller's resources to compile information on journalists at the BBC deemed too sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>174</sup> It's not known if any individuals were moved on a result. It raises more questions about possible interference by the UAE in the BBC's independence.

Quiller's work on BBC staff formed part of regular updates that the lobbying firm provided

for Gargash on Muslim organisations and communities in the UK with suspected links to Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Council of Britain was included as part of this research.

One former senior executive at BBC World Service said that BBC Arabic's coverage of the Islah round-up in the UAE was minimal and that self-censorship was common in the corporation because many journalists on the Arabic channel had pro-UAE and Saudi leanings.<sup>175</sup> On his visit to the UK in March 2018, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman met with Sam Farah, the head of BBC Arabic, something that has so far gone unreported.<sup>176</sup>

We also know that Abu Dhabi asked for Quiller's help in drawing up research on Emirati dissidents who had been granted asylum in the UK, Spinwatch can exclusively reveal.

The former British ambassador to the UAE, quoted earlier in the chapter, said that for over two decades the UAE and other Gulf countries have complained to London about Arab dissidents in the UK who criticised them in the media. The issue became more problematic for the UAE under the Cameron government.<sup>177</sup> According to the ambassador:

I never received from my time in the [diplomatic] service a specific request to hand over x or y person but I'm aware this has happened more recently since the Arab Spring. It's got a lot more serious and they've been asking, specifically, for people to be kicked out of the United Kingdom, so they could have them handed over.<sup>178</sup>

London-based activist Rori Donaghy had written critically about the UAE and ran the UK-based Emirates Centre for Human Rights, a group which reported abuses against dissidents. He noticed a softening of BBC Arabic's tone on the UAE, as he'd been interviewed a few times by the service in 2012 and 2013 and then abruptly was not asked back as a guest after around the middle of 2013.<sup>179</sup> Other BBC platforms continued to have him on as a guest.

Literally all of a sudden contact with the channel just stopped. It was BBC Arabic that they [UAE] were angry with more than anything else – anything in English was more reputational damage that could harm relations,

but BBC Arabic they felt was more influential and damaging to their own [UAE] population, he said.

Donaghy experienced two 'scary' incidents when he went to document alleged human rights violations in the UAE in April 2012. In Ras Al Khaimah he came back to find his hotel room had been searched and a group of plain-clothed security loitering outside. Days later he was closely tracked by security with ear-pieces in a Dubai shopping mall, before fleeing that evening to the airport and jumping on a plane back to London.

He was also the target of sophisticated spyware campaign by an operator linked to the UAE government, an investigation by Canadian cyber research centre The Citizen Lab found.<sup>180</sup> Donaghy was sent an email containing spyware in November 2015, claiming to offer him a position on a human rights panel.<sup>181</sup> When the user clicks on the email, 'the site profiles the software on a user's computer, perhaps for future exploitation', The Citizen Lab said.<sup>182</sup>

Meanwhile, the Emiratis were doing what they could regionally to suppress coverage of their crackdown on Muslim Brotherhood affiliates on home soil. The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), which has an office in Qatar, avoided in-depth coverage of Islamist dissidents, so as not to upset the authorities in Abu Dhabi, a third person familiar with the matter said.<sup>183</sup> LSE, which receives funding from Abu Dhabi, was forced to cancel a conference in early 2013 on the Arab Spring in the UAE, after one of its then Middle East specialists, Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, was refused entry to the country.<sup>184</sup>

By the autumn of 2012, UAE fury prompted Cameron to go on a low-key, apology tour of Dubai in November, part of a wider visit to the region to mend relations with Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia.<sup>185</sup> BP was still hoping to be admitted back into contention and the UK was desperate to push the £3bn Typhoon fighter jet deal. Media coverage of his trip was limited, with only two journalists accompanying him, the plan being to give Cameron breathing space to do some closed-door charm offensive work.<sup>186</sup>

It seemed to have worked. Later that month, Abu Dhabi said it would buy a number of BP's assets



Lana Nusseibeh, the UAE's ambassador to the United Nations. (Credit via [www.weforum.org/](http://www.weforum.org/)Norbert Schiller)

in the North Sea in a deal worth well over \$1 billion – a sign relations between Britain and the Gulf emirate were improving.<sup>187</sup>

### 3:3 Egypt U-turn, Typhoon

The election of Mohammed Morsi as Egyptian president was a watershed moment in the Middle East; Egypt's first democratically elected leader, for one – yet it also proved to be decisive for the UAE's lobby strategy. The toppling of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia had been bad, but a Muslim Brotherhood government of Egypt was the worst possible scenario for Abu Dhabi.

In the first half of 2013, the UAE worked to destabilise the presidency of Morsi. This involved funding an anti-Morsi protest movement and then helping fund the lobbying activities of the Egyptian army leader Abdel Fatah El Sisi in Washington, as we've mentioned.

It was also working hard to win over the British. The UK's failure to condemn – and even provide its tacit support for – Egypt's military overthrow of Morsi in July 2013, where hundreds of Brotherhood supporters were killed, is one of the UAE's most stunning foreign policy successes.

'The big striking example [of the UAE lobby] of the last few years is Britain's immediate

endorsement of the Egyptian coup regime,' said Chris Davidson, reader in Middle East politics at Durham University. 'While massacres were taking place in two parts of the capital city, they got instant, full British diplomatic support.'

Cameron had been the first world leader to visit Egypt in early 2011, 10 days after Hosni Mubarak was toppled by a popular revolt.<sup>188</sup> He toured the cradle of the uprising Tahrir Square and met with protesters calling them 'inspiring'.<sup>189</sup> A few months after Morsi became president in 2012, foreign secretary William Hague met him in Cairo and invited him to come to London.<sup>190</sup> Britain was very much behind Egypt's new leader.

But come the summer of 2013 and the overthrow of Morsi by Sisi's army, there was a change in tack. Hague gave his tacit blessing to Sisi and refused to 'take sides'. Repeatedly asked if Egypt's new government was legitimate, he said it was 'a grey area'.<sup>191</sup> Why the shift in UK policy?

Britain has fostered close ties with Egypt ever since this u-turn. Sisi even made a controversial visit to Britain in November 2015, which was condemned by rights groups.<sup>192</sup>

The Emiratis may have felt that despite their policy success in Egypt, the message about the Brotherhood needed reinforcing. If they didn't have London's ear, they might have by late 2013

when the UAE pulled out of a £3bn deal to buy 60 Eurofighter Typhoons from BAe Systems, a major setback to British business abroad and a personal one to Cameron who had been pushing the deal hard with Abu Dhabi.<sup>193</sup>

This, it appears, had the desired effect. With pressure building on Downing Street, a few months later the Emiratis pulled off their second spectacular lobbying success in less than a year. In March 2014, Cameron, out of almost nowhere, announced a review into the Muslim Brotherhood led controversially by John Jenkins, the UK ambassador to Saudi Arabia, a country which lists the Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation. Given his position, could he be impartial?

The UAE might have scored with its lobbying on the Brotherhood, but it was still angry that the UK was giving asylum to activists fleeing the UAE after its punishing crackdown on Al Islah dissidents.<sup>194</sup> In May 2014, the UAE stopped using a group of retired British army officers to train its military by not renewing their contracts.<sup>195</sup> One officer told *The Financial Times* they were 'political scapegoats'.<sup>196</sup>

## 3:4 The Quiller email leaks

### 3:4:1 Journalists

Lobbying firm Quiller Consultants, mentioned in Part I, was locked into a six year £60,000 a month plus expenses contract with the UAE government which started in 2009. Part of its brief was to generate anti-Qatar and Brotherhood messaging and feed it to the British press.<sup>197</sup>

We know that when Gerard Russell, who ran Quiller's UAE lobbying operation in London, met with the journalist Andrew Gilligan then at the *Telegraph* in March 2014, he denied he was representing the UAE, the *Mail on Sunday* reported.<sup>198</sup> Gilligan confirmed this. 'I did meet Gerard Russell from Quiller in March 2014. As he says in the emails, he told me he wasn't doing the meeting on behalf of the UAE, but I took that with a pinch of salt: Quiller's affiliation with the UAE was a matter of public record,' he said.<sup>199</sup>

So although Russell denied he was representing the UAE, there was a tacit understanding by Gilligan that he probably was. Official Association of Professional Political Consultants (APPC) lobbying rules state that lobbyists must 'always

be clear and precise about your identity and any organisation you represent, either directly or on an advisory basis'.<sup>200</sup>

Straight after the meeting, Russell emailed the foreign minister Gargash, the political officer at the UAE Embassy in London, Mohamed Alharbi, and Quiller's co-founder John Eisenhammer.<sup>201</sup> Russell reportedly wrote: 'We explained we were not acting for the UAE in seeing him, and that indeed the UAE had no knowledge of the meeting.'<sup>202</sup>

He added: 'I expect we will see something published as a result of this meeting in due course... we propose we continue to develop the relationship with Gilligan and pass him material on a regular basis.'<sup>203</sup>

In fact, Spinwatch is able to disclose much more about the in-depth lobbying strategy drawn up by Quiller for their bosses in Abu Dhabi, thanks to an explosive leak of new emails.

In one, dated October 2013, Russell outlines a list of briefings given in the UK by Gargash, the UAE's influential Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. No less than eleven briefings are listed which Gargash gave to businessmen, politicians and journalists starting in February 2011. To begin with, the meetings are focused on more mundane matters like defence and shared ties, but they get progressively political in nature in 2012 and 2013, when Gargash met carefully-selected journalists from the *Daily Telegraph*, the *BBC* and *The Times* who the UAE hoped they could rely on to disseminate their message.<sup>204</sup> Gerard Russell did not respond to a request for comment.

Senior business figures like former BAe Systems chairman Richard Oliver and former chief executive of British engineering giant Amec, Samir Brikho, attended early briefings in 2011. However, in 2012 and 2013, businessmen weren't invited. The UAE was more interested in just talking to 'influencers' like trusted journalists, pro-UAE MPs and academics that might agree with the lines that were being pushed.

What's revealed is the extraordinary access that Quiller was able to get for their Emirati paymasters to the cream of Fleet Street. When tensions were running high in the UAE during its crackdown on political activists and members of Al Islah in 2012 and 2013, Gargash met with

Frank Gardner, the *BBC's* security correspondent, Fraser Nelson from the *Spectator* and other right-wing commentators like Melanie Phillips, Michael Burleigh and Michael Binyon.

In another email in November 2012, Lana Nusseibeh, an official at the UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Gargash's deputy, emailed her boss saying that Cristina Odone 'was impressed by the arguments you made on religious freedom and has written on this subsequently'.<sup>205</sup>

A month after he was briefed by Gargash in October 2012, Michael Binyon, the *Times* commentator, poured skepticism on the Brotherhood's campaign against Jordan's monarchy, calling it 'hardline'.<sup>206</sup> By the summer of 2013 he was airing grievances held by the UAE against Qatar:

Qatar has made itself unpopular in its own region, with alarm growing in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates at Doha's commitments to the Muslim Brotherhood and quiet disapproval in Saudi Arabia of Qatar's links with Iran and its brash diplomacy.<sup>207</sup>

Binyon said: 'I am very little influenced by lobbying. If I took a more critical line towards Qatar, it is because my own assessment was that it had followed policies that have brought it into conflict with its neighbours. That said, I find the UAE campaign childish and dishonest. Proper journalists are not influenced by PR – they make judgements according to the situation, which itself often changes.'

In January 2013, Anwar Gargash paid a private visit to *The Daily Telegraph* newsroom, driving home an off-the-record message to four hand-picked senior journalists – Con Coughlin, the *Telegraph's* then defence editor, the then foreign editor David Munk, ex deputy editor Benedict Brogan and David Blair, now Boris Johnson's speechwriter – that they should perceive the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation and Iran as a threat.<sup>208</sup>

Coughlin may have been a target for the UAE lobby because of his anti-Iran views and stance on Qatar which became hostile in 2014. Now executive foreign editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, he is reportedly known for receiving stories directly from MI6.<sup>209</sup> Coughlin routinely writes articles on the subject of Iran and he has been criticised for

using unknown and untraceable sources, some of which have turned out to be false.<sup>210</sup>

An article by Coughlin about Iran's nuclear capabilities cited the International Atomic Energy Agency as a source in a story. The article prompted Melissa Fleming from the IAEA to write a press release describing the story as 'fictitious'.<sup>211</sup>

Coughlin has a berth as a columnist for the UAE's state-owned English language newspaper, *The National*, which has been accused of enforcing a 'meticulous censorship process'.<sup>212</sup> Operating in a country with no free press, its editorial stance has become increasingly political since the Arab Spring and it is now effectively a mouthpiece for the UAE government.<sup>213</sup>

Weeks later, in March 2013, Coughlin attended a second Gargash talk with other trusted right-wing journalists, entitled 'briefing at Connaught Hotel for conservative commentators'.<sup>214</sup> Coughlin went on to write – and more regularly since the Qatar blockade – pieces echoing the UAE's accusations that Qatar supports terrorists – and criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood.

In August 2013, covering political events in Egypt, he said that 'thanks to the Muslim Brotherhood, all they [the Egyptian people] got was Sharia law, religious persecution in the form of a number of well-organised attacks on Christian churches'.

By 2014 his attacks on Qatar flowed. One in October that year was entitled 'Whose side is Qatar really on in the war against Islamic State'<sup>215</sup>.

A month earlier he wrote a profile of the Qatari Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, for *Standpoint* magazine, with the title: 'Overrated: The Emir of Qatar'. In the opening line of the piece, he states that Qatar funds 'hardline Islamist factions'.<sup>216</sup> There is no suggestion that these journalists, or any of the ones we go onto name, in any way misconducted themselves or compromised their journalistic integrity. We're not saying that the briefings they received were the only reason behind any change in tone. It is striking, though, that they published these stories after lobbying approaches by the UAE.

Out of Coughlin's many pieces attacking Qatar since the blockade, the most startling was one he penned for the UAE newspaper *The National*, in July 2017 which made the claim that because of

its alleged links to terrorism, including the 2017 Manchester bombings which killed 22 people, Qatar ‘poses a direct threat to the security and safety of the British people’.<sup>217</sup>

We don’t just know who the UAE lobby was targeting, we also have a unique insight into the highly organised nature of its campaign. In November 2012, Nusseibeh emailed her boss Gargash, Quiller executives and other Emirati officials, detailing an extensive outline of what they called ‘UK Public Diplomacy’, an anodyne term for their aggressive lobbying push. This leaked email states:

the UAE’s voice has been heard clearly for the first time – thanks to articles in the Guardian and the Times and a noticeable increased engagement by the UAE with opinion formers in the UK as well as very successful high-level visits both ways. Journalists and commentators have been brought on side. We are in better shape than we were 3 months ago. But the effort must continue and be sustained at a consistent level in order to build on these gains and develop a coherent image of the UAE in the UK.<sup>218</sup>

It went on:

Quiller has identified the contacts that the programme should target – drawn from politics, media, and the broader political elite in Britain and including both those who are natural allies and others who need to be won over. We have agreed our core script and key messages and these are being used more widely across the board.<sup>219</sup>

Discussing the October 2012 journalist briefing mentioned earlier with the *BBC*’s Frank Gardner, Nusseibeh boasted that journalists ‘have had their views changed by their briefing’ and that they had helped get an op-ed into *The Times*. Others present at the briefing included *The Spectator*’s Fraser Nelson, the commentator Michael Burleigh, *The Times* columnist Michael Binyon, James Blitz from *The Financial Times* and Cristina Odone from *the Daily Telegraph*. The campaign, Nusseibeh went on, has ‘influenced the *Financial Times*’ reporting which has now taken into account that the UAE’s issues were not only with the UK media but also more broadly with the attitude of the UK government to developments in the region’.

A day after the Gargash briefing in 2012, James Blitz from the *Financial Times* co-published a story blaming the decision to bar BP from tendering on an oil field in Abu Dhabi on UK-UAE tensions<sup>220</sup> – and it appears to reflect what Nusseibeh says in her email about influencing the reporting of that newspaper. Blitz quotes an unnamed UAE official – with the key Emirati line that – ‘western government officials had failed to appreciate the dangers of Islamist groups such as the UAE’s al-Islah, which has had dozens of alleged members detained in the past few months on charges of plotting against the state.’<sup>221</sup>

He continues, quoting another source ‘familiar with UAE thinking’:

The UAE has a very good relationship with top UK figures like Cameron and Hague. But they are frustrated that in the opinion-forming community, among MPs and some government officials, there is a view that the Muslim Brotherhood are not a bad bunch of people. They want a much harder line taken.<sup>222</sup>

Nusseibeh goes on to say that ‘relationships have also been built for the future’ and that this was a ‘long term project’.

The UAE’s charm offensive continued in 2013. On the heels of the previously discussed *Daily Telegraph* visit in January 2013 came a meeting with think-tankers a day later attended by Leo Docherty and Dean Godson of Policy Exchange, both key targets of the UAE lobby who we cover in detail in section 3:9.

Then, in March, Gargash met a group of six figures regarded as reliably hawkish. Perhaps most surprising, the fiercely pro-Israel commentator Melanie Phillips was among them.

It is possible that Nelson was targeted by the UAE because he was already skeptical about the Muslim Brotherhood and officials thought he would be receptive. In January 2011, he wrote in *The Spectator* ‘The citizens of the Arab world all too often have a choice between a Bad Guy and a Worse Guy. Egypt looks like its choice is between the status quo, the Muslim Brotherhood or a military coup’.<sup>223</sup>

His criticism for the Brotherhood adopted a harsher tone by the end of the year. In December 2011, he wrote that the Arab Spring uprisings in

Egypt and Tunisia have ‘unleashed the demon’ and power has gone to ‘hardline Salafis, who follow the same mutant strain of Sunni Islam as al-Qaeda.’<sup>224</sup> ‘The Muslim Brotherhood is well on its way to a new constitution which looks terrifyingly similar to that of Iran,’ he wrote in the same *Spectator* article.<sup>225</sup> Both these articles were written before Nelson attended the two Gargash briefings.

Nelson is now a syndicated columnist to the UAE’s *Gulf News*, a government mouthpiece that like all other newspapers in the Emirates almost never criticises the authorities.<sup>226</sup> Nelson said: ‘Journalists never comment on off-the-record conversations: just to say that, if invited for a chat with a visiting minister of a foreign government, it’s a strange sort of journalist who’d say “no”. If journalists only spoke to people that they agreed with, they would not be journalists. I had no idea, however, that my Telegraph column is syndicated.’

It may be the case that Nelson is not paid personally as part of the syndication arrangement with *Gulf News*, whereby his *Daily Telegraph* columns are picked up and run by the paper. He may not be paid personally by *Gulf News* for this.

Melanie Phillips, the pro-Israel commentator, had strong views about the Brotherhood before she was briefed by Gargash at the Connaught Hotel in March 2013, describing it – in January of that year – as a ‘deadly threat to freedom everywhere’.<sup>227</sup> She voiced further criticism in 2014 and 2015 writing for *The Times*, with pieces entitled ‘Britain is in denial over creeping Islamisation’,<sup>228</sup> and ‘It’s time we banned the Muslim Brotherhood’.<sup>229</sup> In another column in 2014 she revealed her views on Qatar, saying: ‘Britain’s ties with Islamic State’s backers, Qatar?’<sup>230</sup>

Michael Burleigh, the historian and a commentator went to two briefings hosted by Gargash in 2012 and 2013. In late 2011, he wrote for *the Daily Mail* about Arab Spring clashes in Egypt and he was noticeably restrained in his criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood,<sup>231</sup> compared to a 2013 piece for *The Times*, where he slates Mohammed Morsi’s presidency and takes the Abu Dhabi line that the Brotherhood is a threat in the UAE,<sup>232</sup> a view that few western governments shared.

He said the Brotherhood was the ‘mother ship for closely affiliated operations in some 80 countries, from Great Britain to the United Arab Emirates, where they operate “false-flag” operations while pursuing the nation-destroying goal of a universal Caliphate.’ Burleigh also bizarrely refers to Egyptian President Sisi, who has launched an unprecedented crackdown on dissent since he overthrew Morsi in a coup in 2013, as a ‘pious fellow’.<sup>233</sup>

Journalists are of course free to meet whoever they want and get information from any source they wish (provided they check what they are being told is true). Likewise, the UAE is entitled to hold any briefing it likes. We are not implying any misconduct on behalf of any journalists, nor the UAE in the act of briefing the media.

The point here is that if the journalists knew they were targets of a lobbying campaign by Quiller and changed their coverage as a result, should they have disclosed it?

What is significant here is the apparent ease with which the UAE was able to garner support for a campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood and Qatar among large sections of the British press – and how this was used as a weapon to advance the UAE agenda.

The following journalists did not respond to request for comment: James Blitz, Michael Burleigh, Con Coughlin, Frank Gardner, Melanie Phillips.

### 3:4:2 Politicians

The Nusseibeh email also detailed how the UAE planned to target politicians: ‘Relationships have been created with two useful MPs – Frank Roy, who sits on the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Kwasi Kwarteng, who is an influential and up-and-coming Conservative MP.’<sup>234</sup>

In January 2013, Gargash met with UAE ‘friendly’ MPs over dinner, including the then chairman of the UK-UAE All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Michael Howard, the former leader of the Tory party and the now disgraced former minister, Priti Patel. Pro-Saudi MP Daniel Kawczynski, and CMEC president Nicholas Soames were also present.

On grooming politicians, her email is explicit. It says that an APPG visit by MPs to the UAE was ‘very effective’. It noted that:

Its chairman Lord Howard [the former Tory leader] is in regular contact with Alistair Burt and the FCO, so is able to pass messages informally. As you know from your meetings with him, he is a very useful ally for the UAE, being a highly respected former leader of the Conservative Party.<sup>235</sup>

It even boasts of a UAE plan to interfere with British parliamentary proceedings in making sure that the Foreign Affairs Select Committee's report into the UK's relations with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, 'is reasonable in its approach'. 'We think that informal meetings with individual members of the Committee are the best way to do this', the email says.<sup>236</sup> Ann Clywd, an MP, who sat on the committee, was unhappy how the final report pulled punches on human rights.<sup>237</sup> We highlight again there is no suggestion of improper conduct on the part of any of the MPs mentioned.

### 3:4:3 Qatar Terrorist Campaign

The UAE was running a campaign through its lobbying companies in the US and UK to link senior Qataris, preferably royal family members, to terrorism.<sup>238</sup> UAE-hired American lobbying company Camstoll Group, which was set up by Matthew Epstein, the former US Treasury official, both mentioned in Part 1, was allegedly feeding material to US journalists on supposed Qatari support for terrorism.<sup>239</sup> The aim of this research was that it could be passed to the US government with the objective of having prominent Qataris designated as terrorists.<sup>240</sup>

Like Camstoll, Quiller was asked by the UAE to build profiles of suspected Qatari dissidents and saw itself very much in competition with its US counterpart. Around the time this was going on a number of designations were taking place on Qataris. We are not suggesting individuals were designated as terrorists solely on the basis of information provided by Camstoll, Quiller and the UAE.<sup>241</sup> One was particularly sensitive for Doha. In December 2013, Abd al-Rahman bin Umayr al-Nuaimi was accused of providing financial support to Al Qaeda by the US State Department<sup>242</sup> and banned from doing business in Britain. Al Nuaimi is a notable family in Qatar.

The Attiyah family is better known and in November 2014 the journalist Andrew Gilligan

wrote a long piece documenting a cousin of Qatar's foreign minister, Abdulaziz bin Khalifa al-Attiyah, alleged ties to terrorism.<sup>243</sup> Al Attiyah isn't designated by the US but was convicted in absentia by a Lebanese court in June 2014, of financing terrorist groups and being a member of one.<sup>244</sup> Two more US Treasury designations on Qataris followed in August 2015.<sup>245, 246, 247</sup>

What's so far unknown is that Camstoll's work had extensive influence over the UAE's campaign to influence British journalists too, Spinwatch has learnt.<sup>248</sup> We've seen how Quiller Consultants allegedly created a pipeline for negative stories about Qatar and 'Islamism' in *The Daily Telegraph*. Camstoll's research was passed to Quiller and then onto British journalists such as Andrew Gilligan who was considered sympathetic to the Israeli and MbZ view of Islamic political organisations.<sup>249</sup>

Quiller also discussed targeting John Ware, whose BBC documentaries on alleged British Muslim extremism have seen him described by the Muslim Council of Britain as an 'agenda-driven pro-Israel polemicist',<sup>250 251</sup> It's not known if, like Gilligan, he was handed one of Quiller's briefings.

Shiraz Maher, now Director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), a King's College London research centre linked to Israel's Inter Disciplinary Center at Herzliya, was also targeted by Quiller.<sup>252</sup> He was considered a safe pair of hands, as a self-styled 'former extremist' he had known negative views about political Islam.

Maher was approached by Gerard Russell of Quiller to provide the research linking Qatar to terrorism that would be handed to UAE's trusted journalists, as Epstein had already been doing in the US through Camstoll.<sup>253</sup>

Quiller discussed a £20,000 a month arrangement with the ICSR for it to focus its research energy on originating connections between Qatar and terrorism.

Any discussions that Quiller had with Maher are controversial because it means that an agenda-driven foreign power was trying to smear an enemy by looking to collaborate with an academic of King's College London, one of the UK's most respected universities.



Dean Godson, friend and informal advisor to Cameron on Islam? (Credit: Policy Exchange, CC BY 2.0)

Maher has long aired sceptical views about the Brotherhood.<sup>254</sup> In a piece for the neoconservative *Standpoint* magazine in March 2011, for example, he said the Brotherhood was ‘as reactionary and extreme as it always has been.’<sup>255</sup> In 2013, another article, entitled ‘The Muslim Brotherhood’s fight for existence’,<sup>256</sup> criticised the movement in similar terms to the UAE argument that a moderate Muslim Brotherhood is an illusion and western governments are being naïve if they support it.<sup>257</sup> He wrote:

Western governments have traditionally indulged themselves with the fantasy of a stratified Brotherhood consisting of ‘extreme’ and ‘moderate’ elements. This view confuses strategic pragmatism with ideology. Focus on the group’s core beliefs and what you’re left with is a unified movement striving for the same Islamist endgame.

Quiller’s plan to use Epstein and Maher’s work to influence British journalists was extremely sensitive, as the UAE wanted to avoid at all costs any connection being made between them and Israel.<sup>258</sup>

Maher said: ‘Neither I nor ICSR have ever conducted any work, or provided any research for any party (the UAE, Quiller, journalists etc), looking at Qatar and any links to terrorism. As a result, no journalist or anyone else ever received

any research or briefing from me or ICSR. At no time have I, or ICSR, ever taken any money from Quiller or the UAE (whether directly or indirectly) to focus on Qatar and/or the Muslim Brotherhood.’ He said he’s long held critical views of the Brotherhood.

### 3:5 Quiller and the Telegraph’s Qatar campaign

The *Daily Telegraph* embarked on a two-month campaign against Qatar between September and November 2014, in which they published 34 articles, including eight front-page headline stories, that accused Doha of financing terrorism.<sup>259</sup> At the same time the newspaper’s billionaire owners, the Barclay brothers, were engaged in a fierce dispute with Qatar over the ownership of three five-star London hotels.<sup>260</sup>

Gilligan was the author of many of the anti-Qatar articles, as was the *Sunday Telegraph*’s Robert Mendick.<sup>261</sup> In September and November, Gilligan wrote two pieces for the *Telegraph* accusing Qatar or individuals in the Gulf state of funding of terrorists, though he denied they were linked to his meeting with Gerard Russell, the lobbyist at Quiller.<sup>262</sup>

In the first, entitled ‘The “Club Med for terrorists”’<sup>263</sup> – a quote that is attributed to Israel’s former ambassador to the UN, Ron Prosor, in the article – he accused Qatar of funding Isis.<sup>264</sup> The second article levelled similar claims and said cars in Qatar bore Islamic State’s logo and Hamas officials directed operations from luxury hotel suites in Doha.<sup>265</sup>

### 3:6 Quiller, Dean Godson and George Bridges

The three figures in the UK which were the most important for pushing UAE policy in the Cameron years are in fact the least well known. Two we have already mentioned – Gerard Russell, the lobbyist at Quiller and George Bridges, his boss, who ran the company. But there is there is another individual who is crucial. This is Dean Godson, a mysterious figure but a key policy adviser, especially on Muslims, to the Conservative party when Cameron was in power.

A former journalist at the *Daily Telegraph*, Godson joined the highly influential neoconservative Policy

Exchange think tank in 2005 and became a director in 2013<sup>266</sup> where he famously influenced the Cameron government's counter extremism policy on Islam. A 2009 Policy Exchange paper commissioned by Godson and co-authored by Shiraz Maher<sup>267</sup> helped persuade Cameron that his government should crack down on non-violent extremism because of its links to violent extremism. This so-called conveyor belt theory asserts that religious conservatism leads to radicalisation and then to violence, an ideology closely aligned with the UAE's thinking. The *Evening Standard* placed Godson in its list of London's most influential people in 2016 even after Cameron had resigned.<sup>268</sup>

Godson informally occupied the role of chief adviser to the former prime minister on Islam, maintaining a close personal friendship with him, which meant that his contact could be regarded as social, and his influence hidden from public view or scrutiny, Spinwatch has learnt.<sup>269</sup>

Quiller was aware of Godson's importance and had been trying to arrange a meeting between him and Anwar Gargash. This materialised on 25 January 2013, when the UAE minister met a small group of academics and think-tankers to push anti Brotherhood and Iran lines. Joining Godson was, among others, CMEC's Leo Docherty and the former UK ambassador to Kuwait, Richard Muir.

Godson was viewed as crucial, so Quiller prepared a briefing note for Gargash ahead of the meeting. This note has been obtained by Spinwatch and reveals that Quiller celebrated Godson as the architect of the government's counter-extremism policy towards Muslims and describes him as 'highly influential' and Policy Exchange as David Cameron's 'favourite think tank'.<sup>270</sup>

'Dean is coming to the briefing for foreign and security policy experts on Friday morning. He merits attention because of his work on exposing radical Islamic organisations in the UK', the note said.<sup>271</sup>

What's previously been unknown is the role Godson played in helping Quiller's UAE messaging resonate with Cameron. Spinwatch has also learnt that George Bridges, who was running Quiller at this time, was friends with Godson. Instead of Bridges picking up the

phone to his old friend Cameron, which would have looked a bit blunt since he was a lobbyist, Godson could chat to him instead, informally sharing his views on Islam. This helped the UAE to air its fears about 'Islamists' to Cameron via Godson, and lent these opinions legitimacy in the former prime minister's eyes.

Dean Godson and George Bridges did not respond to requests for comment. None of the team who worked on the UAE account at Quiller from 2011-2015 are still at the company. We approached Quiller for comment and Jon Chandler, the CEO said: 'I'm afraid I'm not familiar with the matter, I joined in Jan 2017 and became CEO in October last year.'

### 3:7 UAE designations and effect on civil society groups, charities

Come the summer of 2014, four months after the announcement of the government's Muslim Brotherhood review, prominent Muslims in Britain and other Muslim organisations who had connections to the movement began to feel the pinch. Anas al Tikriti, the founder of the think tank the Cordoba Foundation, his wife and their two children received a letter from HSBC out of the blue cancelling their bank accounts.<sup>272</sup> Even his wife's business account was closed.<sup>273</sup> Tikriti, who has long been accused of having links to the Brotherhood, a charge he denies, had banked with HSBC since 1985.<sup>274</sup>

At the time, Al Tikriti said that that the move may have been linked to 'my activity regarding what is happening with Gaza and my opposition to the coup in Egypt. This may have irked regimes in the UAE or in Saudi Arabia'.<sup>275</sup>

Azzam Tamimi, the well-known Muslim academic and a Muslim Brotherhood member in the UK, received the same treatment from the bank, as did the Finsbury Park Mosque.<sup>276</sup> In July 2014, HSBC dispatched a letter informing them of the closure.<sup>277</sup> At the time, Tamimi said that those who had their accounts shut by HSBC had one thing in common: 'We participate in pro Palestine or pro-democracy rallies. That's what we do and that's common amongst all of us'.<sup>278</sup>

Spinwatch can reveal that HSBC was a client of Quiller at this time, the official APPC lobbying register confirms.<sup>279</sup>

A BBC investigation in 2015 into the closure of Muslim bank accounts quoted an unnamed senior official as saying 'There is a definite connection between the bank account closures and the review of the Brotherhood'.<sup>280</sup> Attitudes in the UK towards the Muslim Brotherhood, and Muslims more generally, hardened after the 2013 Egypt coup, Tamimi said.<sup>281</sup> 'Until the coup, the UK didn't have hostility towards Muslims,' he said. 'The Morsi overthrow changed everything'.<sup>282</sup>

Tamimi is founder of the Arabic television channel *Al Hiwar* which was broadcasting almost 24 hours a day in the weeks after the coup in Egypt, covering the violence against the Brotherhood's supporters. It is deeply unpopular with the UAE. His channel has been jammed on numerous occasions over the past few years, causing disruption for viewers who have to tune to a new frequency. He has no evidence, but he suspects the UAE and Syria may be responsible for this.<sup>283</sup> Tamimi used to give an annual lecture at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom in Shrivenham to senior army officers and NATO officials, but has not been asked back in the last few years.

In November 2014 the UAE arbitrarily designated dozens of civil society groups and charities in the Middle East, US, UK and Europe as terrorist organisations<sup>284</sup>, a move which had profound consequences for those listed and how they raise money and operate. These included the UAE Muslim Brotherhood group Al Islah. More bizarrely, the Muslim Association of Britain and Islamic Relief, the UK's largest Muslim charity, were listed alongside Al Qaeda and ISIS.

With global income of £170m in 2016, Islamic Relief is a vast operation, delivering aid to 32 countries around the world. Highly respected, the charity receives funding from the British and US governments, UN agencies and the European Commission, among others.<sup>285</sup> Already banned by Israel from operating in the West Bank, the charity has found its operations significantly impacted by the UAE designation. 'The UAE's allegation of terrorist links is baseless but it has been damaging and disruptive for us,' said Martin Cottingham, External Relations and Advocacy Director at Islamic Relief.<sup>286</sup>

As well as undermining our good name, it has contributed to a substantial dip in income from

the Middle East and to delays in distributing vital aid in conflict zones because of additional scrutiny and sanctions by some financial institutions, he said.<sup>287</sup>

Cottingham said the charity wants an 'opportunity to put our case to the UAE authorities that has so far been denied both at diplomatic level and in the courts.'<sup>288</sup>

Unfortunately, the mass terrorist designations were to have some far-reaching knock-on effects.

A BBC investigation in 2015<sup>289</sup> found that a shadowy, confidential financial crime database owned by Thomson Reuters called World-Check was behind these Muslim bank account closures. Nearly all the biggest banks in world use the database to screen clients.<sup>290</sup> More alarming, though, was that it sourced claims that organisations like the Cordoba Foundation were linked to terrorism to the UAE designation.<sup>291</sup> Type the name of an organisation politically designated by the UAE and it's likely that the words 'terrorism' will come up alongside its name on the database.

Those affected reacted in dismay. Chairman of the Finsbury Park Mosque Mohammed Kozbar said he was 'shocked'<sup>292</sup> by the listing. It was particularly sensitive given the mosque's well-documented past links with Abu Hamza, a cleric with proven ties to Al- Qaeda.<sup>293</sup> Kozbar was part of the new management committee that came in a decade ago with the tacit blessing of the Metropolitan Police.<sup>294</sup>

The mosque won damages from Thomson Reuters in early 2017 for being wrongly linked to terrorism. Reuters admitted creating a profile based on old reports on its database, which led to banks refusing the mosque as a customer.<sup>295</sup>

A media storm about World-Check has ensued, with critics denouncing the software as a witchhunt.<sup>296</sup> A number of Muslims who aren't designated by the UAE have gone on to sue World-Check for wrongly naming them in its database. London-based ITN solicitors has sued Thomson Reuters on behalf of a range of clients, some of them Muslims. ITN's Ravi Naik declined to say how many cases his firm had won for clients.



The former UAE ambassador to the UK, Abdul Rahman Al Mutaiwee,, the UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, and Alistair Burt. (Credit: FCO, OGL v1.0)

### 3:8 Islamophobia and empowering government witch-hunts

The announcement of the Muslim Brotherhood review in early 2014 created a climate of fear around Muslims, stirred up by the right-wing media. Some attacks by the press had profound consequences. A good example is the case of the Muslim Charities Forum which, thanks to an article by *The Daily Telegraph* in September 2014 linking the group to the Brotherhood and its 'alleged role in violent extremism',<sup>297</sup> lost a £250,000 government grant from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG).<sup>298</sup>

This story, however, was not initiated by the *Daily Telegraph*. It appears to have been based on work carried out by a little known pro-Israel group called Stand for Peace, which has launched a stream of attacks on Muslims. The day before the *Daily Telegraph* published its story, Stand for Peace ran a similar account on its website containing some of the same allegations against the Muslim Charities Forum.<sup>299</sup> an umbrella group for some of the UK's largest Islamic charities.

Stand for Peace had no evidence against the MCF itself. It was relying on allegations made against five members of this organisation – claims

which were denied.<sup>300</sup> There is a troubling feel to this – allegations made by an obscure website linked to the Israel lobby portraying itself as an 'interfaith' organisation, have been recycled by a broadsheet newspaper which hooks the article to the government's review of the Brotherhood. This was then used to smear prominent Muslim charities.<sup>301</sup>

### 3:9 Cultivation of a lobby inside government: Burt, Patel, Docherty, APPG

The UAE has also been able to rely on a number of sympathetic figures inside Parliament. Among these is Alistair Burt who had already been a vocal advocate for UAE positions in the government when he served as a Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office from 2010-13.

Addressing the Abu Dhabi Investment Forum in 2010, he refers to Anwar Gargash as his 'opposite number' and that he is committed to taking the UK-UAE relationship to the 'next level'.<sup>302</sup>

I am excited by the partnership that the UK enjoys with the UAE; proud of what we have achieved so far. His Excellency the Ambassador of the UAE and I have already

established an excellent relationship, so you can be confident that the UK-UAE relationship will forge ahead. I am committed to taking this relationship to the next level.<sup>303</sup>

But when he lost his ministerial post in the 2013 autumn reshuffle, Burt continued his strong support for the UAE from the backbenches.<sup>304</sup>

In a Commons debate in 2014 when he was a backbench MP he referred to Anwar Gargash as 'my very good friend' and then moved into all-out praise for the UAE:

The UAE belies some of the easy and rather lazy descriptions that the uninformed make about the Gulf. This is a state where women hold very senior positions; for example, the ambassador to the UN and the Minister in charge of the extraordinary Dubai 2020 Expo are women. It is also a state where people can go to church; I went to church on my last visit to Abu Dhabi.<sup>305</sup>

The UAE is arguably more progressive than some Gulf states (eg Saudi Arabia) when it comes to attitudes to women and tolerance of Christianity. Burt, however is all too keen to focus on this and not the country's intolerance of democracy campaigners, including Islamic political actors, media criticism and its patchy human rights record. He may make these points in private.

In September 2014, as chair of the British Group Inter-Parliamentary Union (BGIPU) which promotes UK foreign relations, Burt led a delegation to the UAE where they met with a number of Emirati ministers and officials and had meetings in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>306</sup>

In 2017, Burt became chair of the United Arab Emirates All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) and led a group of MPs to Abu Dhabi in April that year, a trip he claimed £3500 in travel and accommodation.<sup>307</sup> In an op-ed in *The National*, the country's highly censored state newspaper, he lavished praise on the UAE and said relations with the UK should be 'fostered'.<sup>308</sup>

Burt visited the UAE again in November 2017 – five months after he was appointed Minister of State for the Middle East – and received £10,000 worth of hospitality and accommodation expenses for himself and his wife. It is certainly odd for a sitting minister to have their expenses paid by a foreign government for an official visit.

However, he didn't breach the ministerial code in accepting this hospitality. On the trip, Burt spoke at the Sir Bani Yas Forum<sup>309</sup> – a private summit funded by the UAE government that addresses regional issues. Former foreign secretary David Miliband was controversially paid £25,000 to lecture at the Sir Bani Yas in 2010.<sup>310</sup>

A spokesman for the Foreign Office said: 'Mr Burt was Minister for the Middle East between May 2010 and October 2013, and resumed the role again in June 2017. It is his job to build effective relationships across the region in order to deliver for the British national interest. Meeting his counterparts, here and overseas, is critical to that.'

Burt is not alone among Conservatives in being regarded as a reliable voice for the UAE. Priti Patel, herself, a former lobbyist at Weber Shandwick, was an energetic member of the UAE's APPG before taking on the mantle of Secretary of State for International Development, a position from which she was forced to resign when it was discovered she was conducting private meetings without government approval with Israeli government officials while on holiday in Israel. As treasurer of the APPG, she praised the country saying Britain's ties with the UAE 'will go from strength to strength as the British government seeks to elevate links with the Gulf and boost relations that have not been maximized in recent years'<sup>311</sup>. She travelled to the UAE in 2012 as part of a delegation of MPs and received £3,500 in travel and accommodation costs from her hosts.<sup>312</sup>

Tom Tugendhat first met Anwar Gargash in 2011, one of the emails obtained by Spinwatch shows.<sup>313</sup> He is now Chair of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee and has publicly declared his interest in leading the Conservative Party.

Another noticeable pro-UAE figure in Parliament is Leo Docherty who was elected as an MP in 2017. A former soldier, he spent many years as a Tory activist chairing the Conservative Middle East Council (CMEC), which we mentioned in Part I, before he became a member of Parliament.

CMEC helps Tory MPs understand the Middle East better. Yet it has become the most forceful lobby group for the Gulf states in Parliament and lobbies for the UAE. Its current chair, Charlotte

Leslie, strongly endorsed the Saudi Crown Prince's Mohammad bin Salman's visit to UK earlier in the year by writing very favourable articles about the conservative kingdom<sup>314</sup> during Mohammad bin Salman's visit in 2018. One piece she wrote for the *Daily Telegraph* in 2017 was entitled: 'I've met Saudi Arabia's new Crown Prince. He's a revolutionary'.<sup>315</sup>

While Docherty was running CMEC's operations in years before being made an MP, there is evidence he was courted as an ally by the UAE. In December 2012, Docherty visited the UAE and wrote a sycophantic brochure about the country for CMEC which would likely have been distributed to Tory MPs the following month. A copy of the document, which until now has never been public, has been handed to Spinwatch.<sup>316</sup>

Dated January 2013 and entitled: 'CMEC Director's Note: The United Arab Emirates', it casts suspicion on Qatar's 'provision of safe haven to Islamist leaders' and celebrates the UAE as 'foremost among the UK's allies in the region'. Docherty warns of tensions in the UK-UAE relationship in 2012, telling Tory MPs: 'The view of the UAE (is) that the UK is too relaxed about the threat posed to the stability of the region by the Muslim Brotherhood generally and Islamist groups such as Al Islah in the UAE specifically'.<sup>317</sup>

In fawning praise for the UAE, Docherty wrote: 'The forthcoming trial of seven jailed Al Islah members (charged with threatening the security

of the state) will likely be an opportunity not only for the transparency and due process of UAE judiciary to be tested'. Rights groups condemned the trials of Islah members for not being free and fair. It is widely accepted that political prisoners do not get fair trials in the Gulf, let alone in the UAE.<sup>318</sup>

He also offers up a reason for BP's exclusion in the bidding rights for the major oil field in Abu Dhabi in 2012 that we mentioned earlier in this section. He suggests it was down to a BBC article written by an Emirati Al Islah dissident in London, in May 2012.

Explaining two matters that have created tensions in the UAE-UK relationship, he wrote of:

Media Commentary hostile to UAE from UK media, generated by Emiratis living in London published by the BBC and The Guardian. The first incidence, published in May 2012 had grave strategic impact; BP was, for several months, excluded from the most recent auction of hydrocarbon production rights.<sup>319</sup>

Docherty said: 'I am proud of my long-standing association with the UAE, which is a critically important ally for the UK and a model of good governance, dynamism and innovation. It's absurd to suggest this remarkable country has a poor record of human rights, the opposite is true and the way all faiths live in harmony, Muslims, Christians and Hindus, is a testament to that.'

## PART IV: UAE-Qatar spin wars

### 4:1 Introduction

As we've seen, a major rift opened between the UAE and Qatar in the aftermath of the Arab Spring due to Doha's support for democratic reforms. In this section we'll explore the origins of resentment against Qatar from the UAE and its key ally Saudi Arabia, and how this reached boiling point in summer 2017 when a blockade was imposed on Doha by these allied Gulf countries. This sparked a fierce spin war between Doha and Abu Dhabi, a tit for tat smear campaign and media spat involving hacking and the bizarre emergence of bogus organisations used to discredit the other side. There has also been an explosion of western

communication firms advising both Qatar and the UAE since the blockade.

### 4:2 History: Qatar's Gulf relations

To understand the current spat between Qatar and its neighbours, it's important to document the background to Qatar's position as a regional power broker, its support for democratising trends and important role in opening up media reporting of the region, not least via the creation of Al Jazeera, and how this set it on a collision course with other Gulf countries.

Qatar has long adopted an outsized foreign policy. It has played a diplomatic juggling

game, acting as an intermediary across the region throughout the 2000s where it brokered peace deals in disputes in countries such as Sudan (Darfur), Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen. In the early part of this decade, it pressed on with more ambitious negotiation projects, inking an agreement in Doha in 2012 between Fatah and Hamas, in defiance of the US – and hosting talks between the US, Afghanistan and the Taliban, which opened an office in Qatar in 2013.<sup>320</sup>

The tiny, but very wealthy Gulf state's attempt to gain recognition by pitching itself as a progressive leader of Arab nations and a western-friendly impartial interlocutor,<sup>321</sup> deploying an often contradictory foreign policy between rival factions, has angered many Gulf countries, jealous perhaps, of the influence it wielded and ruffled at the company it kept.

Contradictory because until 2009 Qatar was the only Gulf country to have any sort of formalised relations with Israel. That year Israel's trade office shut in Doha because of Arab anger over the offensive in Gaza.<sup>322</sup> It has solid commercial relations with Iran, the Gulf's biggest foe, with which it shares the world's largest gas field. At the same time, Qatar has poured millions of dollars into regenerating Gaza, shelters Hamas and Taliban officials as well as the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood Yuseuf Al Qaradawi. It also hosts US Central Command at the Al Udeid air base, home to around 10,000 US troops.

Qatar's current dispute with its neighbours can also be traced back to when the former emir, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani deposed his father in 1995 in a bloodless coup. Hamad's father had been an obedient disciple of the Saudi royal family, but his son was revolutionary by comparison and was loathed by Riyadh. A year after Hamad succeeded to the throne Doha accused Bahrain, UAE and Saudi of backing a failed coup to remove its new leader.<sup>323</sup> An *Al Jazeera* documentary in 2017 alleged that the three countries were behind the plot.<sup>324</sup>

Undeterred, Hamad in 1996 started *Al Jazeera*, which gave a platform for free speech across the region. For the first time, a news channel criticised fellow Gulf countries and projected Qatar's political leanings to the Arab world. Relations between Saudi and Bahrain and the UAE have been up and down ever since, exacerbated by border disputes.

It seems that 2011-2014 marked a cold war between Qatar and the UAE. An uneasy truce prevailed in 2015 and 2016, as tensions still simmered. The Arab Spring in 2011 hardened hostility against Qatar, and from 2011-2014 the UAE mounted a campaign to discredit Doha in the international media, as we've seen. Tensions reached fever pitch when Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar for eight months in 2014 over Doha's alleged support of Islamic political groups,<sup>325</sup> though diplomatic relations were reinstated in November 2014.

For all the talk of 'terrorism' and 'extremism' it seems clear that these issues are being used as a veil to mask demands less flattering to the UAE and its allies. These are the attempt in the battle with Qatar to censor media that might report critically on abuses committed in the blockading states and to combat the very forces in those countries that are pushing for democratic reforms. We know this since the list of 13 demands issued to Qatar has been reported widely.<sup>326</sup>

The demands included closing down Al Jazeera (and all its affiliates), shutting down all other news outlets funded directly and indirectly by Qatar (including Arabi21, Al Araby Al Jadeed and Middle East Eye), scale down diplomatic ties with Iran, comply with the US sanctions on Iran, sever ties to 'terrorist' groups (in which the Muslim Brotherhood was, unsurprisingly, explicitly included), stop funding and contact with democracy movements in Saudi, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain (all of which are dictatorships).

### 4:3 The 2017 Blockade

Gulf states acted,<sup>327</sup> when in April 2017 Qatar reportedly paid a ransom of as much as \$1bn (£790m)<sup>328</sup> to a former al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria and to Iranian security officials in a deal that saw the release of 26 royal family members kidnapped by Tehran-backed Iraqi Shia militiamen and of dozens of Shia fighters captured in Syria.<sup>329</sup>

<sup>330</sup> In many ways, this deal went to the heart of everything that Qatar's critics have accused it of: a deal with arch foe Iran, with whom it maintains good relations, money allegedly going to jihadists and evidence that Doha meddles, interferes and punches above its weight.

On June 5 2017 the UAE, Saudi, Bahrain and Egypt cut diplomatic relations with Qatar and imposed a land, sea and air blockade, accusing it of supporting extremist factions. Qatari citizens living in countries which opposed Doha were expelled and nationals of the blockading countries, except Egypt, were ordered to leave the Gulf state.<sup>331</sup>

Days later the blockading quartet issued a list of demands on Qatar to reduce diplomatic relations with Iran, cut all links to terrorist groups and stop funding them, to close *Al Jazeera*, cease meddling in other countries' sovereign affairs and realign itself with other Gulf states.<sup>332</sup> Qatar rejected all the demands as an attack on its sovereignty.

Politically, the events in the Gulf had worldwide significance. Days after the blockade was announced Donald Trump sided with Saudi and UAE against Qatar, and accused it of sponsoring terrorism. This was an odd position for a US president to take, especially given the close military ties that Doha and Washington had enjoyed for many years.

Trump's position could have been bolstered by his trip to Saudi, a staunch ally of the UAE, the previous month and says a lot about the UAE's successful lobbying efforts in US through the recently exposed activities of George Nader and Elliott Brody, that we'll deal with in the next section. The president's leanings exposed a rift in US policy, with his backing of the blockade contrasting to the former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's support for Qatar – and more the measured reaction generally of the State Department<sup>333</sup>, mindful of the US's strong military ties to Doha.<sup>334</sup>

The White House's failure to support Qatar was crucial, though. What might have led to such a view? It has now emerged that Jared Kushner's family real estate company failed to raise money from the Qataris in a deal to prop up a struggling asset months before the blockade was imposed, the *Intercept* said in March.<sup>335</sup> Kushner has denied any involvement in his family business since entering into the White House last year.<sup>336</sup>

In the months that followed, the Qatari blockade sparked a furious war of words between Doha and the UAE and Saudi. Both sides engaged in a high-stakes game of cyber warfare to discredit

one another. Emails were hacked, fake news was planted and disinformation was spread.

Set up in June 2017, in the days after the blockade, *The Qatar Insider*, is a website that appears only to have been set up to attack Doha.<sup>337</sup> A few days after Trump had toured Saudi in late May 2017, senior members of the UAE government hatched a plan to hack the Qatari state-run news agency, US officials said, according to *the Washington Post*.<sup>338</sup> Incendiary comments attributed to the Emir praising Hamas and calling Iran an 'Islamic power' appeared on the site, aimed at inflaming tensions ahead of the blockade in early June.

Qatar was livid. Days later, emails hacked from the Hotmail account of Otaiba, the UAE's man in Washington, by an unknown group calling itself GlobalLeaks, were leaked to a series of news outlets, mentioned in Part 2. They show the UAE's frenzied push to cozy up to policymakers in Washington and its relationship with neoconservative groups such as the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, with strong links to Israel.

## 4:4 Effect in the UK

UAE-Qatar spin wars were also playing out in the UK in farcical fashion. A bizarre Qatari opposition conference took place in September in London organised by a dissident called Khalid Al Hail who claims he fled Doha after being tortured.<sup>339</sup> It criticised the Al Thani royal family and the panelists included Daniel Kawczynski, once dubbed the 'honourable member for Riyadh Central' for his pro-Saudi leanings, and Iain Duncan Smith.<sup>340</sup> Kawczynski was paid £15,000 through Al Hail's wife's company to help organise the conference<sup>341</sup>, which he declared in the MPs' register of interests. Duncan Smith also declared the £4,000 he was paid for appearing.<sup>342</sup> One attendee described the conference to Spinwatch as 'lacking credibility'.<sup>343</sup> There is no suggestion that any of the politicians who attended the event broke parliamentary rules. Neither Kawczynski nor Duncan Smith responded to requests for comment.

The event was then attacked by a seemingly bogus London PR firm called the London Centre for Public Affairs. It complained to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee about the conference and urged MPs not to attend.<sup>344</sup>

A press release for the London conference<sup>345</sup> listed Jason Nisse, a former journalist and director of PR firm Newgate Communications and Steve Rabinowitz, a senior member of Bill Clinton's administration. Newgate has an office in Abu Dhabi and provides 'sound advice on corporate positioning' and its clients include Abu Dhabi Racing, Abu Dhabi Finance and Sotheby's.<sup>346</sup> Nisse said: 'I worked with Khalid Al Hail on a project last year [2017] and no longer work with him.'

Rabinowitz's name is significant because of his links to the pro-Israel lobby in the US. He is a US spin doctor who recently set up *Bluelight Strategies*<sup>347</sup>, a top-flight lobbying firm in America, which works for pro-Israel groups including the powerful Conference of Presidents, and the Israel on Campus Coalition.<sup>348</sup> Rabinowitz founded Jews for Progress, a pro-Israel fundraising organisation, which helped Hillary Clinton's recent presidential campaign.<sup>349</sup> Rabinowitz confirmed to Spinwatch that Al Hail was a former client.

In 2017 he told *Haaretz*, the Israeli newspaper, in reference to Doha's own lobbying activities in Washington: 'Qatar has its own billion dollar world-wide whitewash, I mean PR effort, that includes its own television network. Half-a-million-dollars a year to court American Jews is chump change – and we Jews are the chumps if we buy any of it.' He accused Qatar of funding Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra Front in Syria.<sup>350</sup>

Another conference, organised by a little-known group called the Foundation For Sports Integrity (FFSI), took place on May 31 2018 at the grand Four Seasons hotel in Trinity Square in London and featured an 'extravagant banquet', according to one attendee.<sup>351</sup> The FFSI's remit is 'to fund research into sports corruption', and 'highlight wrongdoings by the custodians of sports'. It attracted some big names.<sup>352</sup>

The FFSI suggests on its website that its only director is Jaimie Fuller, an Australian businessman known for his ownership of the sportswear company SKINS.<sup>353</sup> Fuller hosted the conference and suggested in promotional videos in the week leading up to the event that the FFSI was his initiative. But at the conference, he refused to tell panellists who was funding the FFSI, and has also refused to tell journalists

since, saying the funding is conditional upon the anonymity of the donor.

Although the organisation had only existed for a few weeks, the FFSI managed to attract as speakers the ex-BBC director-general Greg Dyke, former Manchester United striker Louis Saha and former US women's footballer Hope Solo. Dyke and the current chief executive of the pro-Israel Jewish Leadership Council, Simon Johnson, were invited due to their relationship with the Football Association, where Dyke had been chief executive and Johnson had led England's 2018 World Cup bid. Standing out among the panels of ex-football administrators and players was Alan Mendoza, executive director of the pro-Israel Henry Jackson Society, who had also been at Al Hail's previous 'Qatari opposition' conference. At the FFSI conference, Mendoza was spotted texting Fuller to arrange a private meeting and was seen on a WhatsApp group with Al Hail.<sup>354</sup>

Indeed Al Hail may play a more extensive role as an anti-Qatar ambassador than previously thought. A document handed to Spinwatch reveals a planned national video campaign aimed at derailing the Qatar 2022 World Cup, with which Al Hail is understood to be involved. The document proposes launching a national petition on the legality of Qatar's 2022 World Cup, a country-wide marketing campaign on London buses and the Tube – and a national poll to gauge public opinion about the tournament.<sup>355</sup> The document outlines a strategy to release daily videos 'with the aim to build momentum (on social media & print media) and expose the controversies surrounding the Qatar 2022 World Cup bid'.<sup>356</sup> Qatar's 2022 bid is mired in long-running corruption and bribery allegations. Lawyers for Al Hail said: 'Our client has not made any such commission so you appear to be ill informed. We note you have withheld 'the document', whatever it may be.'

The strategy document suggests using 'vox pops outside football matches' to manipulate fans of English clubs into saying the Qatar World Cup 2022 should be held in England instead. In keeping with this strategy, the FFSI released videos ahead of its conference of unsuspecting Londoners being asked a series of questions on camera which eventually pushed some towards issuing condemnations of the Qatar World Cup. Al

Hail's plan to build momentum to move the Qatar World Cup to England may also explain why Greg Dyke and Simon Johnson were targeted to be lobbied. Fuller, the FFSI's frontman, lobbied some of his panellists against the Qatar World Cup the evening prior to the all-day conference and invited them to stay on for a similar session over drinks afterwards.

Rabinowitz, who also booked guests for and publicised the FFSI conference, told *The Guardian*: 'It is ironic that they're all about transparency in sport and yet they've not been so transparent in their finances. A couple of speakers spoke pro bono but most got paid. If they got flown in, they got flown business class. Fancy hotels. First-rate production. Not a bazillion pounds, but you know, they did it right, they did it nice. It cost money'.<sup>357</sup>

It appears that events that criticise the UAE in the UK are closely monitored.

A conference arranged by the Arab Organisation for Human Rights (AOHR) in May 2018 at University College London (UCL), the sponsor of this report, on the UAE's use of Interpol for political means, was cancelled at the last minute. After a disagreement between AOHR and the university's security, activists intercepted a notebook from someone who was noticed filming. Spinwatch is aware of the identity of this person, an employee of the UAE embassy in London. A line in his notebook read: 'get the details about journalists and speeches'. A spokeswoman for UCL denied the event was cancelled over UAE sensitivities. 'The UCL room booking process was not followed correctly on this occasion. It was not to do with content of the event,' she said.<sup>358</sup> In response AOHR in the UK stated that they had 'followed the same procedure' for room bookings at UCL on three previous occasions in 2018 in meetings on the Gulf, Syria and Palestine. On each occasion the meeting went ahead with no problem.

## PART V: The US: Has the UAE lobby overreached?

As we've seen, the US threw its weight behind the UAE and Saudi in the diplomatic spat with Qatar in summer 2017. The emergence of two key figures, a Trump fundraiser called Elliott Broidy and Lebanese-American businessman George Nader, an adviser to the Abu Dhabi crown prince, sheds more light on why the White House and the State Department may have been divided on the blockade and what might have contributed to Rex Tillerson's sacking.

These two figures also show the extraordinary lengths the UAE went to push Emirati interests in the White House – and with Trump himself. But at what cost? There are signs now that the lobby could have over-extended as US authorities investigate how Emirati money may have funded the Trump's 2016 presidential campaign illegally.<sup>359</sup>

Nader cut a peripheral figure in Washington up until now. His first reported link with the UAE is a private summit he convened for Middle East leaders on a yacht in the Red Sea in 2015. He proposed that they establish a US-friendly five nation Arab alliance

that could form a bulwark against Iran and Turkey, *Middle East Eye* reported.<sup>360</sup>

On the boat was Mohammed bin Salman, then deputy crown prince of Saudi Arabia; Mohammed bin Zayed, crown prince of Abu Dhabi; Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, president of Egypt; Prince Salman, crown prince of Bahrain; and King Abdullah of Jordan.<sup>361</sup> Nader promised to lobby for any agreement of the plan in Washington.<sup>362</sup>

Then, the *New York Times* reported in March 2018 that special counsel Robert Mueller, who is leading the FBI's investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election, is now looking at the possibility that Nader helped direct illicit Emirati money to the Trump campaign.<sup>363</sup>

Of particular interest to investigators is a January 2017 meeting in Seychelles, days before Trump's inauguration, organised and attended by MbZ, Nader, the founder of private security company Blackwater Erik Prince, a former informal adviser to Trump's team and a Russian fund manager Kirill Dmitriev with reported close links to Vladimir Putin.<sup>364</sup>

The UAE set up the meeting in an apparent effort to develop an informal line of communication between Trump and the Russian president, to persuade Moscow to curb relations with arch foe Iran<sup>365</sup>. Mohammed bin Zayed even met twice with Putin in 2016 and urged him to work more closely with the UAE and Saudi against Iran, *the Washington Post* reported.<sup>366</sup>

Discussions between members of Trump's inner circle and the UAE preceded the Seychelles gathering. A few weeks after the 2016 presidential race, in December, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi visited New York where he met with Michael Flynn, the president's former national security adviser, Kushner, and Steve Bannon, the ex-White House chief strategist. He breached protocol as he failed to inform the Obama government of his trip.<sup>367</sup>

Around the time of the Seychelles meeting, Nader struck up an important friendship with Broidy, deputy fundraiser for the Trump campaign. A cache of emails obtained by *the New York Times* show how the pair sought to pressurise the White House to sack Tillerson as Secretary of State, get Trump to meet MbZ, and back UAE policies critical of Qatar and Iran.<sup>368</sup>

In exchange, Nader is alleged to have offered Broidy lucrative deals for his private security company Circinus, which finalised around \$200m of contracts with the UAE.<sup>369</sup>

## PART VI – Conclusion

This report has described the aggressive nature of the UAE lobby and how it's operated in the UK and US in an effort to bend those countries' home and foreign policy to promote its interests and further its agenda.

If the UAE's efforts are understood in the context of its loathing of Islamic political activism, it has exaggerated the threat that the Muslim Brotherhood poses to its security, sovereignty and political stability. In the US, after early successes, its relentless campaign to cozy up to policy formers and decision makers is backfiring. A trove of hacked emails has exposed the grubby nature of UAE lobbying tactics and the billions of dollars allegedly promised to get influence.

In the UK, the UAE has run out of steam. Abu Dhabi's clout has diminished significantly under

Broidy's lobbying at the behest of Abu Dhabi was effective. In October 2017, Broidy met with Trump and told him to remove Tillerson because of his support of Qatar over the blockade. The beleaguered Secretary of State was sacked in March.<sup>370</sup> In the same meeting, Broidy repeatedly pressed Trump to meet MbZ in a 'quiet' setting away from the White House.<sup>371</sup>

Broidy sued Qatar in early 2018 for allegedly hacking his emails, also accusing the lawyer Nicolas Muzin, who runs a lobbying firm employed by Doha to burnish its credentials in Washington, of being behind the leaks.<sup>372</sup> Qatar hired Stonington Strategies in summer 2017 for a reported sum of \$50,000 a month.<sup>373</sup>

Since the blockade, Doha has worked hard to overturn its image as an alleged supporter terrorism. One product of its outreach saw prominent pro-Israel New York attorney Alan Dershowitz write a wide-ranging, favourable, op-ed about Qatar, defending it against commonly levelled claims that it promotes extremism and is in bed with Iran.<sup>374</sup>

Diplomatically, there are signs that Doha's drive is paying off. Trump met the Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim Al Thani in April this year, barely a year after he branded the country a 'funder of terror', and praised it for fighting terrorism financing and calling the Emir a 'great gentleman'.

the Theresa May government, and the former British ambassador to the UAE says opposition is growing against the UAE-Saudi war in Yemen. He said: 'I'd be amazed if anything like that [warm UAE-UK ties under Cameron] still exists. Those days are past – there is a very edgy relationship.'

It used to be a very warm relationship and spread across a huge range of activities, some quite delicate, [like] military cooperation. It's all a bit edgy now. It's not that the UAE distrusts Britain, it's the other way around. It's difficult to keep up with Abu Dhabi's ferocity in the region.'

How might the UAE regard May's potential successors? 'They regard Boris Johnson as a waste of space in the sense he's not interested in doing his job as foreign secretary, he's more

interested in being prime minister,' the ex-ambassador said, before Johnson's resignation from the Foreign Office.

Lobbying is a legal activity and is an important element of democracy – everyone has the right to make their voice heard. But there have to be limits. Promising billions in return for influence in the US, infiltrating the British media to smear rivals, threatening to interfere in British parliamentary select committee reports, buying politicians' loyalty with lavish trips, donating to think tanks and trying to influence them, targeting political opponents, trying to influence media coverage and protesting against press freedom – something that the UAE does not itself recognise – some would see as a step too far.

Moreover, does the UAE have the right to lecture western countries on terrorism and regional stability when it locks up and tortures dissidents, shuts down free speech and continues to engage in a largescale military campaign in Yemen, contributing to an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe where over 10,000 have died?

In its campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood, the UAE has copied some of the clandestine tactics of the Israel lobby, stirring up fear and phobia against Islam. Ultimately this is counter-productive because it sours the narrative against Muslims in the West and cements Islamophobia, which ultimately works to erode

broader relations between the West and the Muslim world.

Although there has been outsized media focus on allegations of Qatar's links to extremism, an examination of the ideological motivations for these allegations has been missing in much of the coverage of the UAE-led blockade of its neighbour. Even less examined is the extent to which the UAE has succeeded, along with allied lobbies, to dominate and manipulate media and political discourse on: democracy in the Middle East; Islam; and the bounds of acceptable political beliefs and speech for Muslims.

One source familiar with the UAE's lobbying work said UAE policymakers had become 'paranoid' about the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran.<sup>375</sup>

The Brotherhood is many things, but it is not set to take over power in the UAE or launch a coup. That is the narrative coming out of MbZ's office, pushed out to British and American journalists and politicians via the foreign ministry and the UAE's lobbyists over the last 7 years. It's absurd – and harms the UAE's credibility to spin this story. Ministers and ambassadors who regurgitate these lines seem to have no means to push back against the paranoia that has gripped the UAE since 2010, because its diplomatic system is so dependent on enforcing and indulging the will of one man – MbZ.<sup>376</sup>

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