The College of Graduate Studies and the College of Humanities and Social Science Cordially Invite You to a
Master Thesis Defense
Entitled
THE EMERGENCE OF UNITED ARAB EMIRATES AS A GLOBAL SOFT POWER: STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES
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Abstract

The thesis focuses on how the United Arab Emirates is emerging as a global soft power by examining the elements of its soft power. This is accomplished via in-depth interviews with UAE based foreign diplomats and academics and Emirati diplomats and academics. This is supplemented with primary and secondary data from government, international agencies and media sources. The UAE has excelled in many facets of governance, accomplished a lot in a relatively short period and pursued domestic and foreign policies that have made it a role model for other countries. These accomplishments enable the UAE to exercise soft power influence in places where these accomplishments are respected and appreciated. The UAE's soft power tools under political values allow it to position itself as a role model in the world, including its success in the following areas: governance and leadership model, economic development and security and stability. Its cultural attractions include the following: embrace of the norm of tolerance; educational institutions, hosting of international events, image as a cultural hub and multiculturalism. In terms of foreign policy, the UAE's attraction is evident in the following areas: Support for major international organizations and multilateral efforts; international philanthropy, humanitarian assistance and efforts in conflict resolution. In spite of the above soft power tools, there are challenges that the UAE needs to be cognizant of in order to derive the maximum benefits from its numerous soft power tools. First, unlike hard power resources, which tend to be concentrated in the hands of government, soft power resources are widely diffused among public and private actors which can create conflicting agendas. The revolution in communications technology means that today almost anyone can, in effect, act as an emissary for their country through interactions with people overseas. The dilemma is that the messages and images conveyed by a myriad of non-state actors will not necessarily correspond to that envisaged by the government. The challenge therefore is to harness the creativity of private groups and individuals whilst transmitting a reasonably coherent message. Second, soft power is costly and in the case of the UAE, most of the UAE's soft power attractions such as international philanthropy, investments in tourism, aviation and infrastructure etc. require heavy investments and are difficult to sustain in the long run. Third, a successful soft power strategy abroad rests on domestic support. Hence, countries cannot assume that grandiose projects designed to dazzle foreign observers will resonate or be appreciated at home. Fourth, although a global media reach helps in the projection of a country's image, the UAE lacks such a platform and thus remains vulnerable to false global narratives. Fifth, the UAE's creeping use of hard power in places such as Yemen, could negatively affect its good image. Sixth, the acceptance of Western cultural projects could expose the UAE to accusations of cultural appropriation and lack of cultural authenticity, thereby defeating its intended purpose. The research recommends the development of uniform strategies for soft power at the state level and the opening of an interactive government media platform where ordinary citizens could partake in the formulation of strategies, in order to reduce openness concerns. It is recommended that the Soft Power Council should be institutionalized, following the model of the Federal National Council, with some members appointed and others elected. Moving forward, the UAE needs to create a comprehensive concept of soft power that does not contradict its customs/traditions and the international concept of soft power, in order to yield optimal outcomes.

Keywords: UAE, Soft Power, Hard Power, Smart Power, Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Challenges, Opportunity.