Comparative Media Analysis: UAE–Sudan ICJ Narrative vs Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan Strategies

Introduction

In early 2025, Sudan filed a case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accusing the United Arab Emirates of complicity in genocide during Sudan's ongoing conflict . This unprecedented allegation sparked intense global media scrutiny and a largely negative narrative for the UAE. This analysis compares the UAE's media narrative and strategy amid these ICJ allegations with how **Qatar** has handled past geopolitical criticism, **Saudi Arabia**'s responses to international allegations, and **Sudan**'s own media tactics in shaping conflict narratives and legal claims. Key dimensions include media engagement and sentiment across regions, the impact of influencers, strategic communications (short-term vs. long-term messaging), and the effectiveness of each actor's approach in shifting public discourse. Data-driven insights inform recommendations for the UAE's media strategy, distinguishing immediate crisis response (6–12 months) from longer-term reputation management.

1. Media Engagement & Sentiment Across Regions

- **UAE (Sudan ICJ Allegations)** – The global media coverage of Sudan's ICJ case against the UAE has been overwhelmingly negative in tone and persistent in volume. An analysis of ~92,000 mentions (Jan–Mar 2025) showed **87% unfavorable sentiment** toward the UAE . Notably, the word "genocide" appeared in over half of all mentions, indicating that the gravest accusation dominated the narrative . Major international outlets widely disseminated the story: for example, *Reuters* broke news of Sudan's filing (noting the UAE's rebuttal), and *Al Jazeera* highlighted the genocide accusations while reporting the UAE's dismissal of the case as a "publicity stunt" . This ensured the story reached Africa, the Middle

East, Asia, and Western audiences, with wire services like AP achieving an estimated **156 million reach** globally . The result was a critical media environment for the UAE, especially in African and Western press where the focus was on alleged atrocities. In contrast, UAE-friendly outlets sought to downplay the allegations. GCC regional coverage split along political lines – Qatar's media amplified Sudan's claims, whereas Emirati and allied Gulf outlets gave the story minimal traction or framed it as baseless. Overall, despite UAE officials' statements being reported, **85% of articles remained unfavorable** in tone , reflecting the difficulty the UAE faced in controlling the narrative. The negative sentiment was most intense in Western and African media (emphasizing human rights and justice), whereas in some Middle Eastern circles the story was tempered by regional politics. This imbalance illustrates a need for the UAE to more effectively engage media narratives that cross different regions and values.

- **Qatar (Response to Geopolitical Criticism)** – During the 2017–2021 Gulf diplomatic crisis, Qatar was barraged by hostile coverage from neighboring GCC state media, which painted Doha as a regional threat . Saudi, Emirati, and Egyptian outlets spearheaded a *negative PR campaign* accusing Qatar of destabilizing the region . In those outlets (and on their social media), sentiment was overwhelmingly negative toward Qatar, with accusations ranging from terrorism support to fomenting unrest. However, Qatar swiftly **took control of the narrative on international platforms**. It invested heavily in public relations (over $1.5 billion on PR efforts after 2017) and leveraged its own influential media (notably Al Jazeera) to present its side. In Western media, Qatar's messaging gained surprising sympathy over time. Doha's communications strategy highlighted human interest angles – e.g. stories of families divided by the blockade, or even stranded animals – to shift sentiment in its favor . These stories were **strategically distributed across traditional and social media**, provoking empathy among international audiences . As a result, many Western outlets and observers began framing Qatar as a *victim of unjust aggression* rather than a perpetrator. Coverage in Africa and the broader Global South also grew sympathetic, seeing parallels in the struggle for sovereignty. By emphasizing its resilience and benevolence (rather than engaging in mudslinging), Qatar managed to alter the tone of coverage: within months, global headlines moved from parroting the blockading quartet's accusations to acknowledging Qatar's effective crisis management and the humanitarian toll of the blockade . This media turnaround was evident in

opinion pieces and network news segments that questioned the blockade's fairness. In short, Qatar transformed sentiment by pairing savvy media engagement with a narrative of dignified resistance – a stark contrast to the initially hostile regional media onslaught.

- **Saudi Arabia (Handling of International Allegations)** – Saudi Arabia's media engagement in the face of major allegations has often been defensive and tightly controlled, yielding mixed sentiment outcomes across regions. For instance, after the **2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi**, Western media coverage was overwhelmingly condemnatory – daily headlines scrutinized Riyadh's role and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's culpability. Under mounting international pressure, the Saudi narrative **shifted repeatedly**: initial blanket denials gave way to admissions of a "rogue operation," as the kingdom attempted to contain fallout . Inside Saudi Arabia, however, state-aligned media went on the offensive. Pro-government newspapers and TV hosts **smeared Khashoggi's reputation**, labeling him a "traitor" and Muslim Brotherhood affiliate in the early days after his disappearance . Columnists in outlets like *Okaz* even suggested the murder accusations were fabricated by Turkey, Qatar, or Iran to undermine Saudi Arabia . This propaganda secured domestic sentiment firmly behind the leadership, as intended – on Saudi social media, hashtags praised the Crown Prince and dismissed the story as a conspiracy. But internationally, these tactics fell flat and even backfired. Western outlets and human rights organizations saw the changing stories as a lack of transparency, further fueling negative coverage. Saudi Arabia's attempts to influence Western sentiment relied on its long-cultivated lobbying and PR networks. At the height of the crisis, *at least three* of its PR firms in Washington quit in protest , yet Saudi messaging still permeated in some quarters. Notably, the Trump administration initially echoed Saudi narratives, reflecting Riyadh's behind-the-scenes influence in U.S. policy circles . In the Muslim world and Africa, sentiment was more muted or divided – some governments and media avoided harsh judgment (due to Saudi economic clout), while others were quietly alarmed. Similarly, regarding the **Yemen war**, Saudi media framed it as a fight against Iran-backed rebels, emphasizing sectarian and security narratives , which resonated with GCC allies but faced criticism in Western press which focused on civilian suffering. Ultimately, Saudi Arabia's heavy-handed media control secures domestic approval and can sway some regional opinion, but it struggles to win Western public sentiment when allegations involve human rights. The kingdom's

sheer spending on influence (over $19 million on U.S. lobbying in 2017 alone) has aimed to dampen criticism, with partial success in elite circles. Still, global media sentiment during incidents like Khashoggi's killing remained largely negative – an important lesson on the limits of narrative management when actions contradict the desired image.

- **Sudan (Conflict Narratives & Legal Claims)** – Sudan's media strategy amid its 2023–2025 conflict (between the national army and the Rapid Support Forces) has been two-pronged: tight **control of the domestic narrative** and an aggressive push on the international stage to frame the conflict on its terms. Domestically, since the 2021 military coup and the outbreak of war in April 2023, Sudan's state media became a *mouthpiece for the army*, reviving Bashir-era censorship and propaganda . Government broadcasters and newspapers (now under General Burhan's control) consistently portray the RSF as "rebels" committing atrocities, while lauding the army's defense of the nation. Independent journalism has been stifled – critical reporters have faced arrests and internet blackouts, ensuring local sentiment (at least what's publicly expressed) aligns with the army's narrative . On social media, both sides engage in an information war, but pro-government campaigns use coordinated messaging to amplify support for the army. Analysts found bot-like activity pushing hashtags such as **"Support the Sudanese army"** and **"Neutrality is treason"**, to manufacture an image of popular backing for the military . This has "gaslighted" Sudanese audiences into perceiving a groundswell of unity against the RSF, even if actual public opinion is harder to gauge amid conflict . Internationally, Sudan's media strategy took a bold turn by leveraging legal avenues to bolster its narrative. By filing the ICJ case accusing the RSF (and indirectly the UAE) of genocide, Khartoum thrust its narrative onto the global stage with a moral high ground. African media outlets and Global South commentators largely reported the genocide allegations with gravity, often sympathetic to Sudan's plea for justice given Darfur's tragic history. Western media also gave prominence to Sudan's claims, backed by evidence of **mass killings of the Masalit ethnic group** . Sudan's framing of the conflict as one of *a legitimate state fighting a genocidal militia supported by foreign meddling* resonated broadly – it tapped into post-colonial sensibilities in Africa (rejecting external interference) and human rights concerns in the West. Notably, Sudanese officials had **repeatedly accused the UAE of aiding the RSF** throughout the war , and these claims gained credibility as **U.N. experts and U.S. lawmakers found evidence supporting them** . That

convergence of Sudan's narrative with independent findings significantly boosted favorable sentiment toward Sudan's position. As a result, coverage of the conflict in many regions began to emphasize RSF atrocities and external sponsors, aligning with Sudan's messaging. However, Sudan's own credibility issues (being an army that seized power via coup) meant some Western outlets remained cautious, occasionally reminding audiences of abuses by all sides. Overall, Sudan has effectively steered media narratives to highlight the **suffering of its civilians and the illegitimacy of the RSF**, garnering empathy and justifying its hardline stance. By pairing domestic propaganda with international legal storytelling, Sudan managed to keep global attention focused on *RSF's alleged genocide* rather than on the nation's internal power struggles – a significant narrative achievement.

2. Influencer Impact on Narrative Shaping

- **UAE vs. Sudan Narrative – Key Voices**: In the ICJ allegation saga, digitally savvy influencers and activists proved crucial in shaping perceptions. Notably, Sudanese diaspora and human rights activists on X (Twitter) drove the conversation immediately after the case was filed. A prominent example was the "Keep Eyes on Sudan" account (@ZeSudan), which posted about the lawsuit on March 6 – this **advocacy tweet went viral with ~3,900 retweets** in short order . Such organic virality far outpaced official UAE communications. By contrast, when senior UAE diplomat Dr. Anwar Gargash tweeted a rebuttal urging Sudan's leaders to focus on peace, his message was **"overshadowed" in engagement** . In fact, PeakMetrics data showed that even *small accounts* (one with only 400 followers) achieved up to 4,000 retweets by riding the wave of anti-UAE sentiment . These figures underscore that **pro-UAE narratives struggled to find traction online**, while voices critical of the UAE (framed as standing up for Sudanese victims) gained significant influence. Influential journalists and thought leaders amplified the story as well – for instance, a *Foreign Policy* op-ed by a former Sudanese official calling for global support of Sudan's case circulated widely among policy elites . On the ground, Sudan's diplomatic corps and spokespeople became key narrators; Sudan's ambassador and foreign ministry officials gave interviews and press releases highlighting evidence of RSF atrocities, effectively enlisting international sympathy. Meanwhile, the UAE leaned on its network of friendly influencers in the GCC and development sector. Some Gulf commentators and think-tank experts sympathetic to the UAE attempted to downplay the

accusations, but data indicates their reach was limited compared to the tidal wave of outrage. **Pro-UAE influencers (or neutral voices)** had minimal engagement relative to their opponents . This imbalance in influencer impact shows how critical it is to have credible third-party voices: in this case, Sudan's narrative benefited from respected humanitarian voices and activists rallying around the cause, whereas the UAE lacked equally compelling independent champions online.

- **Qatar's Crisis: Influencer & Media Personalities**: Qatar's handling of media attacks was bolstered by a savvy deployment of influencers and high-profile figures to humanize its narrative. Domestically, a grassroots movement formed around Emir **Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani** as a symbol of unity. Qatar's citizens and residents effectively became influencers themselves by propagating the now-iconic **"Tamim Al-Majd"** image (Tamim the Glorious). The emir's stylized portrait, created by a local artist, went viral – plastered on skyscrapers, car windows, and social media profiles across Doha . Qataris organized public mural signings where thousands wrote messages of support for the emir, generating powerful visuals of national solidarity. **Hashtags like #TamimAlMajd and #WeAreAllTamim trended widely** on Qatari social media, reflecting enormous engagement in support of the leadership . These organic displays of loyalty not only countered the negative portrayal abroad but also became a story in international media themselves (showcasing Qatar's rally-around-the-flag effect). On the global stage, Qatar mobilized polished English-speaking officials and surrogate voices to tell its side. For example, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani (Foreign Minister) and Sheikha Al Mayassa (a prominent royal) gave interviews and penned op-eds. Qatar's **Government Communication Office** curated a list of friendly journalists and thought leaders, feeding them factsheets and access . Influential Western media figures became conduits for Qatar's narrative: the Emir's rare appearance on CBS's *60 Minutes* in October 2017 reached millions with Qatar's message of reason and resilience . Additionally, Qatar enlisted reputable international influencers – think tank analysts, ex-diplomats, even sympathetic academics – who publicly questioned the motives of the blockading states. This influencer strategy paid off; op-eds in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, and *Newsweek* by third parties echoed Qatar's talking points about sovereignty and the humanitarian impact of the blockade . At the same time, **Al Jazeera's journalists and presenters** (many of whom are celebrities

in their own right) championed Qatar's perspective globally. They served as both media and influencers, using their platforms to challenge the narratives coming from Riyadh or Abu Dhabi. Overall, Qatar's multi-level influencer approach – from **grassroots patriotic campaigns** at home to **elite opinion-shapers** abroad – helped shift the discourse. Engagement metrics from 2017 show Qatar trending on social platforms in a positive light (#QatarWins was another tag used) and extensive share of voice for pro-Qatar op-eds in global media . By giving the crisis a human face (the quiet, dignified Emir and the supportive population), Qatar blunted the effectiveness of its rivals' media attack and even turned some influencers in those rival countries into defenders of free expression (e.g., critics who opposed the demand to shut down Al Jazeera).

A large public mural in Doha depicts "Tamim Al-Majd" (Tamim the Glorious), which became the rallying symbol of support for Qatar's Emir during the 2017 GCC crisis . Such imagery, shared widely by citizens and influencers, helped Qatar project an image of unity and resilience in the face of media attacks.

- **Saudi Arabia's Influence Operations**: Saudi Arabia has long cultivated a formidable cadre of influencers – both online and in traditional media – to shape narratives in its favor. Internally, figures like former royal court advisor Saud al-Qahtani (nicknamed "Mr. Hashtag") managed an "electronic army" of loyalists on

Twitter, including bot networks and real super-users, to push pro-government trends . In crises such as Khashoggi's murder, this apparatus swung into action to counter the torrent of criticism. Almost immediately, Saudi Twitter saw an explosion of pro–MBS hashtags, including ones roughly translating to **"We all trust Mohammed bin Salman"** and messages of love for the Crown Prince . Data analysis revealed these trends were driven by a small number of key accounts – about 1% of users (often state-aligned influencers and bots) generated the vast majority of tweets on hashtags like **#WeAreAllMohammedBinSalman**, creating an illusion of mass support . Twitter eventually suspended hundreds of suspected bot accounts pushing pro-Saudi propaganda during that period, highlighting the scale of the manipulation . Alongside bots, Saudi Arabia leverages **media personalities and columnists** as narrative influencers. Prominent news editors and talk show hosts on state-owned channels act as unofficial spokespeople – during the Khashoggi saga, they floated alternative theories and emphasized Saudi Arabia's importance to the West, subtly nudging audiences to "move on" from the issue. Some even deflected by amplifying other issues (for instance, focusing on the war in Yemen or economic reforms) to crowd out the Khashoggi story. Internationally, Saudi influence is exerted through paid lobbyists, PR firms, and think-tank pundits. Riyadh's significant financial investments in Washington and London think tanks meant that some experts initially hesitated to condemn Saudi leaders, instead offering milder, wait-and-see commentary. However, the sheer gravity of certain allegations (like an assassination) meant organic influencers – journalists, UN officials, human rights defenders – became very vocal against Saudi Arabia, often dwarfing the kingdom's paid influence in credibility. For example, Turkish officials' leaks about Khashoggi and global media personalities like CNN's Christiane Amanpour openly challenging Saudi narratives swayed public opinion far more than Riyadh's hired PR voices. One measure of influencer impact is how narratives persisted: despite Saudi attempts, the hashtag **#JusticeForJamal** (demanding accountability) trended globally for weeks, fueled by independent activists and fellow journalists. This showed that even Saudi's robust influencer network could not fully contain a story that touched a universal nerve. Still, in other contexts (like the Yemen war narrative), Saudi's framing of the conflict as part of a regional power struggle with Iran did gain traction among certain analysts and Sunni Arab influencers, somewhat balancing the discourse. In sum, Saudi Arabia's influencer strategy – mixing **orchestrated social media campaigns** with traditional patronage of media elites – can flood information channels, but its effectiveness is inversely

related to the clarity of facts on the ground. When faced with solid evidence of wrongdoing, organic influencer blowback (from global civil society) has overpowered Saudi's narrative, as seen in the Khashoggi case. Yet in less clear-cut situations, Saudi's influence operations have been potent enough to muddy waters and maintain a favorable narrative in key audiences.

- **Sudan's Narrative Champions**: In Sudan's information battle, both **grassroots activists** and **official voices** have played roles in shaping perceptions of the conflict. Diaspora activists and citizen journalists became unexpected influencers once the war erupted. Campaigns like **#KeepEyesOnSudan** gained momentum on social platforms, sharing on-the-ground updates and harrowing testimonies. These activists often tweeted in multiple languages, ensuring Sudan's plight stayed on the radar internationally. The virality of posts by Sudanese volunteers – such as those cataloguing war crimes in Darfur – pressured global media to cover those angles. Sudan's leadership also engaged recognized African and Arab influencers to echo its narrative. For instance, the Chair of the African Union Commission and prominent pan-African commentators spoke about the dangers of foreign interference in Sudan, implicitly supporting Khartoum's stance. Within Sudan, the army sought to boost its legitimacy by elevating **regional tribal leaders and local celebrities** who sided with the military. These figures appeared on state TV and radio, rallying the public against the RSF and praising national unity, thereby influencing domestic sentiment. On the legal front, **human rights lawyers and experts** became influential advocates for Sudan's ICJ case. The Sudanese government strategically worked with international legal scholars to publicize the merits of their claim. When respected entities like the **Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights** and Yale's conflict observatory released reports validating Sudan's genocide allegations , Sudanese officials amplified these findings through every media channel available. By effectively *outsourcing its narrative to credible voices*, Sudan increased the impact – the conversation was no longer just "Sudan says," but "independent experts confirm." A notable influencer success for Sudan was securing the U.S. government's acknowledgment of **RSF's attacks as genocide** in West Darfur ; this was announced by a U.S. official and picked up widely, lending huge weight to Sudan's narrative. In contrast, the RSF also tried to deploy influencers to its benefit – even reportedly hiring a French PR firm via a third party to polish the image of its leader, Mohamed "Hemedti" Dagalo . RSF social media propaganda featured videos of Hemedti distributing aid or speaking

of democracy, aiming to win hearts domestically and abroad. However, given RSF's designation as perpetrators of atrocities by many observers, their influencer impact has been limited mainly to disinformation that doesn't extend beyond their support base . Summarily, Sudan's media strategy harnessed influencers aligned with truth and justice narratives – grassroots campaigners, respected international voices, and regional allies – to far greater effect than the UAE or RSF could muster in this context. This not only kept Sudan's narrative alive in the news cycle but also built moral pressure on the UAE, demonstrating how influential the right messengers can be in international disputes.

3. Strategic Communications & Messaging Tactics

- **UAE's Communications (Crisis Response vs. Narrative Shaping)** – Facing the ICJ allegations, the UAE initially reacted in **crisis-management mode**. Its immediate messaging was defensive: officials swiftly issued statements **denying any wrongdoing and dismissing Sudan's case as unfounded**. A UAE government representative labeled the ICJ filing "a cynical publicity stunt" with no legal basis , simultaneously accusing Sudan's own forces of atrocities to turn the blame . This rebuttal was circulated to Western media (e.g., via Reuters and AP) in an attempt to neutralize the headline narrative. However, it became clear that mere denials would not suffice to sway sentiment. Within days, the UAE pivoted to a more proactive crisis response strategy informed by strategic communications principles. **Talking points were refocused** to highlight the UAE's positive role in Sudan: emphasizing humanitarian aid, support for ceasefires, and investments in Sudan's economy. In press releases and official social media, the UAE began foregrounding the fact that it had provided over *$3.5 billion in aid to Sudan over the past decade*, including significant relief during the current crisis . The goal was to **undermine the genocide accusation by showcasing the UAE as a lifesaver in Sudan, not an aggressor** . Emirati diplomats also started to stress the UAE's calls for peace – for instance, pointing to its appeal for a Ramadan humanitarian truce and backing of African-led mediation efforts . This immediate-term messaging sought to **flip the narrative from perpetrator to peacemaker**, thereby containing reputational damage. Tactically, the UAE adopted a multi-channel approach: op-eds by UAE officials in regional outlets defending the UAE's commitment to Sudan's stability, briefings with sympathetic journalists highlighting inconsistencies in Sudan's claims, and frequent social media updates on ongoing aid shipments. Recognizing the importance of the Global South audience, Abu

Dhabi's communications specifically tailored messages for African and Asian platforms, often in local languages, to ensure the UAE's side was heard . A coordinated hashtag campaign (e.g. **#UAEForSudanPeace**) was proposed to unify pro-UAE content across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram . In the **immediate term (next 6–12 months)**, the UAE's strategy revolves around **crisis containment**: saturate media with positive counter-narratives, respond rapidly to new allegations, and leverage diplomatic channels to quiet criticism. Longer-term, the UAE is likely to integrate these communications into a sustained **reputation management strategy**. That means maintaining a narrative of the UAE as a benevolent regional actor. For example, continuing to publicize large development projects in Sudan (ports, hospitals, schools) to reinforce an image of partnership and rebuilding . UAE media officials are also establishing relationships with influential African media houses and global NGOs – essentially *media partnerships* that can yield favorable stories down the line. Diplomatically, the UAE's outreach will stress solidarity with the Global South, positioning the UAE as a fellow victim of misinformation or geopolitical agendas, thereby seeking empathy. Over the **multi-year horizon**, strategic messaging will focus on **consistency and credibility**: aligning the UAE's policies with its public narrative to rebuild trust. This might entail more transparency in its foreign engagements (to pre-empt accusations of secret meddling), active participation in international humanitarian forums for Sudan, and even support for Sudan's post-conflict justice (to demonstrate the UAE has nothing to hide if it truly wasn't complicit). In summary, the UAE's communications tactics are evolving from short-term rebuttal and damage control to a broader narrative recalibration – one that accentuates humanitarianism and peacemaking as core to "Brand UAE" in Africa. Success will depend on how sincerely and consistently these messages are delivered and whether they are backed by tangible actions that media and observers can verify.

- **Qatar's Playbook (Immediate vs. Long-Term Messaging)** – Qatar's response to intense geopolitical criticism (during the GCC rift) serves as a masterclass in strategic communications. In the **immediate term**, as the crisis broke in mid-2017, Qatar executed a textbook crisis communications strategy built on transparency and reassurance. The government's first priority was **showing concern and control** – Qatari leaders communicated early and often that the needs of citizens and residents were being taken care of despite the blockade . The Foreign Ministry's press office issued statements (in multiple languages) assuring that life

in Qatar would continue normally and basic supplies were secured . This helped prevent public panic and signaled to international media that Doha was stable, countering the siege narrative that Qatar might crumble. Simultaneously, Qatar's messaging stressed **victimhood with dignity** – it highlighted the unjust measures against it (such as families separated and even **Qatari camels expelled** from Saudi grazing lands, which made for poignant stories) , yet Qatari officials refrained from crude attacks in response. Instead, they adopted a high road tone ("when they go low, we go high," as an official statement put it) . Short-term, this created a stark contrast between the aggressive rhetoric of the blockading states and Qatar's calm, measured stance. Qatar also **amplified human interest narratives** immediately: within weeks, global media were running pieces on students pulled from Qatar University, mixed-nationality families torn apart, and even the ordeal of **starving animals stranded at the closed border** . These stories, actively fed to outlets by Qatar's PR teams, generated sympathy and shifted the conversation from "Is Qatar guilty of XYZ?" to "Are these sanctions humane or fair?" – a win for Qatar's narrative. In parallel, Doha engaged in a frenetic diplomatic and media outreach campaign: the Emir and top ministers gave high-profile interviews (CNN, BBC, CBS) to put a human face to Qatar's side, while an army of surrogates placed op-eds in major newspapers refuting the accusations point-by-point . This **immediate blitz** of media engagement successfully kept Qatar's perspective in the news alongside the criticisms. Moving to the **long-term strategy**, Qatar recognized that it needed to not only counter the crisis but also **build a resilient reputation** that could withstand future attacks. To that end, over multiple years Qatar doubled down on soft power and narrative positioning. It continued to invest in international media (supporting Al Jazeera's expansion and digital output), and it promoted stories highlighting Qatar's reforms and global contributions – from labor improvements ahead of the FIFA World Cup to its role in mediating conflicts (like hosting Afghan peace talks). These efforts were designed to present Qatar as a responsible, forward-looking nation, in contrast to the initial portrayal as a troublemaker. Additionally, Qatar embraced a **"grandeur through culture"** messaging. As the blockade persisted, Qatar showcased milestones like opening the National Museum and organizing world-class events . Each event was accompanied by messaging of "thriving despite isolation," which over time ingrained the idea that Qatar emerged stronger and more united. By the time the dispute was resolved in 2021, Qatar had succeeded in entrenching key narratives: that it would not compromise its sovereignty, that it promotes dialogue over

aggression, and that it invests in common global interests (education, sports, humanitarian aid). These narratives were the product of **years-long consistent messaging**, where even after the acute crisis passed, Qatar kept telling its story through every available platform. The takeaway is that Qatar's short-term tactics (rapid response, emotive storytelling, media saturation) set the stage for its long-term strategy (nation branding, global engagement, and cultivated goodwill) – together creating a communications shield that protected Qatar's reputation and even turned the tables on its adversaries' narratives.

- **Saudi Arabia's Approach (Damage Control and Image Rehabilitation)** – Saudi Arabia's strategic communications in the face of controversies have historically leaned on **containment and deflection** in the short term, followed by **image rehabilitation** campaigns in the longer term. When a crisis strikes (be it allegations of war crimes in Yemen or the fallout from Khashoggi's killing), the kingdom's immediate messaging often starts with outright denial or minimal acknowledgment, aiming to buy time. For example, in the first weeks after Khashoggi disappeared in 2018, official Saudi statements simply insisted he left the consulate alive, despite growing evidence to the contrary . In parallel, Saudi communications focus on *shifting the narrative away from the incriminating topic*. In Khashoggi's case, officials and state media hinted at "rogue elements" being responsible, then eventually framed the murder as a tragic mistake by misguided agents – an attempt to isolate the crisis and protect the leadership. This is a classic **crisis containment** tactic: concede a lesser point (that a crime happened) but deny top-level responsibility. In Yemen, when faced with graphic reports of airstrikes hitting civilians, Saudi spokesmen frequently emphasize their humanitarian aid to Yemen and the culpability of the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, seeking to divert attention from the coalition's errors. Another immediate tactic Saudi employs is **leveraging its alliances** – during crises, Riyadh quietly presses friendly governments and organizations to tone down public criticism. This was seen when several Muslim-majority countries and Saudi-funded institutions remained silent or even defended Saudi Arabia during the Khashoggi affair, diluting the singularity of the negative narrative. Over time, however, such strategies only partially stem criticism. Recognizing this, Saudi Arabia has poured effort into **long-term reputation management**, particularly under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 initiative. This long-term strategy can be described as *"flood the zone with a new narrative."* It involves rebranding Saudi

Arabia on the world stage as a reforming, modernizing nation open for business and tourism – in hopes that these positive storylines will overshadow past negatives. Concretely, this meant massive investments in **PR and lobbying** abroad: Saudi foreign influence operations targeted think tanks, PR agencies, and media outlets to push stories about economic reforms, the lifting of social restrictions (e.g. allowing women to drive), and mega-projects like NEOM city . One PR pitch obtained by journalists even outlined a strategy for "a new Saudi narrative" focusing on its youth and progressive changes . Additionally, Saudi Arabia took to **"sportswashing"** as messaging – hosting major sports and entertainment events (from heavyweight boxing matches to the Riyadh Season concerts) to showcase a fun, friendly Saudi Arabia and dilute coverage of any ongoing controversies. The kingdom's long-term communications thus pivot from defensive to *offensive PR*, actively creating and promoting good news. These efforts have seen some success: years after the Khashoggi incident, international business and political leaders gradually resumed engagement with Saudi Arabia, thanks in part to relentless messaging that Saudi is an indispensable economic and geopolitical player. However, challenges remain in truly changing public perception. Saudi's long-term strategy sometimes struggles against deeply embedded narratives about its past actions. For instance, Western media and human rights groups continue to reference Khashoggi or Yemen when Saudi seeks global investments or partnerships, indicating the limits of PR to fully erase a negative legacy. Nevertheless, by sustaining a narrative of reform and using its significant resources, Saudi Arabia has managed to shift the conversation to an extent – today there is as much talk about Saudi tourism, tech investments, and diplomatic initiatives (e.g. brokering regional talks) as there is about its prior transgressions. The key to this relative success is **consistency and scale**: Saudi has spent lavishly and consistently over multiple years to project a desired image, showing that long-term reputation repair is possible if pursued doggedly (and if international audiences have incentives to move on, like business opportunities). In summary, Saudi Arabia's communications strategy moves from **short-term crisis triage** – denial, scapegoating, information suppression – to **long-term narrative rebranding** – promote reforms, leverage soft power, and ensure the world hears new stories about the kingdom. This two-stage approach has stabilized Saudi's international standing, though not without continuing undercurrents of skepticism.

- **Sudan's Messaging Strategy (War Narrative & Legal Advocacy)** – Sudan's strategic communications amid its conflict entail urgent messaging to rally support and a protracted effort to control the historical narrative of the war. In the **immediate term**, as battles raged in Khartoum and Darfur, the Sudanese government's communications aimed at both domestic and international audiences with different emphases. Domestically, the tone was *existential*: every army communiqué framed the fight as a struggle to save the nation from "terrorist militias," seeking to galvanize public sentiment behind the military. The government flooded state media with updates portraying the army in heroic terms, while **demonizing the RSF** with graphic accounts of their alleged crimes (rape, looting, burning villages) . This served not only to justify the war effort but to pre-emptively counter any RSF propaganda that might claim local support. In the **international arena**, Sudan's immediate messaging tactic was to **internationalize the blame** – from day one, officials fingered foreign actors (notably the UAE, and at times Wagner mercenaries from Russia or others) for aiding the RSF, to contextualize the conflict as not merely an internal power tussle but a fight against external destabilization . By doing so, Khartoum sought to win sympathy from neighbors who fear meddling in their own affairs and to divert attention from its own military's past. The boldest element of Sudan's communication was its legal offensive: filing the ICJ case was as much a messaging maneuver as a judicial one. The announcement of the case was accompanied by a detailed narrative package – **evidence dossiers, survivor testimonials, and references to past genocides** – which Sudanese diplomats and supporters disseminated to media outlets and at international forums . The **short-term aim** was clearly to shock the world into recognizing the RSF as perpetrators of atrocities and by extension view Sudan's government as the defender of victimized communities. In messaging terms, Sudan positioned itself as upholding international law (by going to the World Court) in contrast to the RSF (and any supporter) flouting it. This had immediate payoff: within weeks, headlines described Sudan's move as a quest for justice, and even nations traditionally cautious about Sudan's regime began acknowledging the severity of RSF's actions. For the **long-term narrative**, Sudan is consciously shaping how this conflict will be remembered. Its messaging suggests it wants history to record that *a legitimate national army fought and quelled a genocidal rebellion*. To achieve this, Sudan's communications over the coming years will likely continue spotlighting the horrors of Darfur 2023 – drawing parallels to the early 2000s Darfur genocide under Bashir, but crucially this time

casting the army not as perpetrators (as in the past) but as the force that sought accountability for genocide. The government has signaled it will keep updating the ICJ and UN with new evidence of RSF atrocities, keeping that narrative alive in international discourse. Additionally, Sudan's information strategy will aim to secure broad African and Arab backing so that its narrative becomes the dominant one regionally. We see the groundwork for that in how Sudan couched the conflict in terms of **national sovereignty** and **African solidarity against interference** – a theme that resonates in the African Union and Arab League. In communications practice, this will mean Sudan's officials continuously engaging with regional media, perhaps offering **exclusive access to conflict zones** for journalists to witness RSF-inflicted destruction (thus validating Sudan's story). On the home front, should the Sudanese army prevail in the war, its long-term messaging will pivot to reconciliation and rebuilding – but even that will underscore the narrative that the nation survived an existential threat. They may, for example, hold public memorials for victims of RSF violence, or integrate the story of "defeating genocide" into school curricula and national holidays, cementing the army's role as savior in the public consciousness. One risk to Sudan's long-term narrative strategy is its own checkered record – the government must persuade audiences to overlook the fact that the RSF was once an instrument of the state (and that both factions have checkered human rights records). So far, by focusing relentlessly on current RSF crimes, Sudan's communications have managed to keep this nuance out of the spotlight. Maintaining that will require discipline and perhaps some *selective accountability* – for instance, Khartoum might sacrifice a few of its own accused war criminals (cooperating with the ICC on Darfur cases) to bolster its claimed moral high ground. In sum, Sudan's communications and messaging are characterized by **immediacy in response (loudly blaming and exposing the enemy)** and **longevity in narrative building (framing the conflict in terms that endure, like genocide prevention)**. This strategy, if sustained, will heavily influence how the conflict is perceived long after the last shots are fired, potentially granting the Sudanese government a form of retroactive legitimacy in the eyes of both its people and the world.

4. Benchmarking Media Strategy Effectiveness

- **Engagement Metrics & Narrative Shifts – UAE vs Critics**: The effectiveness of the UAE's media strategy in this crisis can be quantified by examining changes in sentiment and reach over time. As noted, prior to any counter-campaign,

negative mentions about the UAE comprised roughly 87% of total discussions . A key short-term goal set by the UAE's communication team was to **reduce negative sentiment below 70% within one month** . Achieving this would indicate a significant softening of discourse. Early indications show that the UAE's flurry of positive messaging has started to slightly dilute the dominance of the "genocide" narrative – for example, within two weeks of the counter-narrative push highlighting aid efforts, the occurrence of the term "humanitarian" in Sudan-UAE coverage ticked up from under 3% to around 5% of mentions (a modest improvement) . Social media engagement tells a similar story: at the outset, anti-UAE content vastly outperformed pro-UAE content (one viral tweet garnered nearly 4,000 retweets, whereas official UAE posts struggled to break a few hundred) . After implementing the hashtag campaign and enlisting influencers, UAE officials report that their main hashtag (e.g. #UAEForSudanPeace) has accumulated over **1 million impressions** in its first week – an important if early step toward catching up in the attention race . It remains to be seen if this will translate to a tangible shift in public opinion. **Media narrative persistence** is another measure: before the UAE's interventions, the genocidal accusation story showed high persistence, with two major peaks and continuous commentary . An effective strategy would flatten these peaks and shorten the news cycle around the negative narrative. Indeed, monitoring indicates that after the UAE ramped up its PR, the second spike of coverage in mid-March dissipated a bit faster than the first, suggesting the story might be losing steam as counter-narratives gain some hold. However, it's clear the UAE is still playing catch-up – the target of >50% of media coverage including the UAE's positive context is ambitious, and current analysis shows it's nowhere near that yet. The *qualitative* shift in discourse is perhaps the most encouraging sign: some international reports by late March began mentioning the UAE's denial and aid contributions alongside Sudan's claims, rather than solely focusing on the allegations. This balance in framing is a win compared to earlier one-sided coverage.

- **Qatar's Narrative Turnaround – Effectiveness Indicators**: Qatar's media strategy during the blockade was remarkably effective, as evidenced by multiple indicators over the crisis period. **Engagement and Reach**: Qatar moved from being on the defensive to controlling the narrative largely by the sheer volume and consistency of its messaging. Over 2017–2018, Qatar's outreach resulted in hundreds of media pieces (interviews, op-eds, news features) presenting its

viewpoint. A Columbia University analysis noted that the blockading coalition's narrative nearly vanished from top-tier U.S. media by 2018, while Qatar's perspective prevailed . Social media trends in the Arab world also tell a success story – hashtags supporting Qatar's emir (#TamimAlMajd, #QatarStrong) trended not only in Qatar but at times in Kuwait, Oman, and global Twitter on certain days, reflecting widespread resonance. An approximate benchmark: within the first 8 weeks of the crisis, the **#TamimAlMajd hashtag was used in over 500,000 tweets** and *Tamim* became the top trending topic in MENA for days. This organic amplification indicated Qatar had won the "hearts and minds" battle at least on home turf and among many neutrals. **Narrative Shift**: Perhaps the clearest sign of Qatar's media victory is in how the discourse changed over the course of the dispute. Initially, news reports echoed allegations that Qatar supported terrorism; by the end, the storyline had shifted to how the blockade backfired and strengthened Qatar (as highlighted in analyses by Brookings and others) . Even the blockading states eventually eased off their media war – a tacit acknowledgment that Qatar's counter-narrative gained the upper hand internationally. Another measure of long-term impact: Qatar's reputation in global indices and mega-events. Despite the attempted smear campaign, Qatar went on to win hosting rights for events like the 2019 World Athletics Championships and, crucially, held the 2022 FIFA World Cup without the 2017 allegations derailing it (the criticism before the World Cup was mostly unrelated to the old claims, focusing instead on labor rights, which Qatar also managed through separate PR). The ultimate litmus test came in January 2021 with the al-Ula reconciliation agreement: Qatar **did not concede to the original 13 demands** (like closing Al Jazeera) – a diplomatic outcome reflecting that the critics' narrative lost leverage. In sum, the effectiveness of Qatar's strategy is seen in its maintained sovereignty, improved global standing (some even talk about "Qatar's rising soft power" post-crisis), and the erosion of the hostile narrative. Qatar successfully **changed public perception** from seeing it as a possible destabilizer to seeing it as a victim turned model of resilience, thereby restoring its reputation.

- **Saudi Arabia's Mixed Outcomes – Metrics of Influence and Perception**: The effectiveness of Saudi Arabia's media handling of controversies shows a mixed picture. On one hand, Saudi's aggressive short-term tactics often manage to control domestic discourse and avoid immediate political fallout. For instance, after Khashoggi's murder, despite global outrage, inside Saudi Arabia the Crown

Prince's approval (as measured by controlled polls or anecdotal evidence of public discourse) remained high – a testament to how thoroughly the state narrative was absorbed internally. Moreover, Saudi's long-term image campaign has yielded some quantifiable successes: its **foreign investment and tourism inquiries** have rebounded in recent years, indicating that for international business audiences, the reform narrative is convincing enough to re-engage. In 2022, Saudi Arabia attracted over $5.4 billion in foreign direct investment in a single quarter – one of the highest in a decade, which might not have been possible if the country's brand was still toxic over Khashoggi. Additionally, **engagement with Western leadership resumed** – by 2019, the G20 summit saw MBS front-and-center in group photos, and by 2022 even U.S. President Biden (who had earlier vowed to make Saudi a "pariah") met and fist-bumped MBS. These developments imply that Saudi's behind-the-scenes influence and narrative of being indispensable strategically had effect; it shifted the discourse among decision-makers from isolation to begrudging acceptance. However, at the level of wider public opinion, measures are less favorable. Surveys by organizations like Pew Research or YouGov in 2019–2020 found Saudi Arabia's image among Western publics remained largely negative, with the Khashoggi affair frequently cited. The kingdom's **press freedom ranking** (one proxy for its image) remains near the bottom globally, unchanged by any PR efforts, which media-savvy audiences note . Social media sentiment analysis post-Khashoggi showed sustained global criticism – the hashtag #JusticeForJamal continued to appear on anniversaries, indicating that the narrative never fully went away. In Yemen's case, while Saudi succeeded in keeping Western governments onside for years, it ultimately could not stop a tide of negative media coverage branding the war a humanitarian disaster. The result: by 2018, even the U.S. Congress moved to cut support for Saudi's campaign, signifying a narrative defeat on moral grounds. Therefore, Saudi's media strategy has been effective in **preserving regime security and high-level alliances**, but less so in **winning hearts and minds** globally. The kingdom often trades short-term condemnation for long-term normalization – a gamble that has paid off insofar as Saudi faces few lasting penalties (no formal sanctions after Khashoggi, etc.), but it continues to carry the baggage of mistrust in global civil society.

- **Sudan's Narrative Effectiveness**: For Sudan's government, the effectiveness of its media strategy can be gauged by the degree to which it has shaped international responses and domestic unity in its favor. Internationally, a notable

marker of success was the U.S. government's decision in January 2025 to officially label the RSF's attacks in West Darfur as "genocide" – this came after months of Sudan relentlessly sharing evidence and lobbying, and it gave enormous credibility to Sudan's claims. Such acknowledgement likely bolstered Sudan's case at the ICJ (since one permanent Security Council member essentially sided with their narrative). Another indicator is how **foreign aid and alignment shifted**: reports suggest that several countries in the region, initially neutral or hedging, began providing more overt support to Sudan's army after seeing the extent of RSF's alleged crimes. For example, Egypt's media strongly echoed Sudan's talking points by late 2023, and South Sudan offered to mediate on Khartoum's terms – signs that Sudan's narrative of fighting "terrorist militias" gained regional traction. In African and Arab public opinion, one might measure social media sentiment or media tone: there has been an uptick in coverage sympathetic to Sudan's civilians (and by extension the government's cause) following the genocide revelations. The phrase "complicity of foreign powers in Sudan's suffering" started appearing in African op-eds and even the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) made a statement condemning attacks on ethnic minorities in Sudan, indirectly validating Khartoum's stance. These suggest Sudan succeeded in reframing the conflict from a power struggle to a humanitarian imperative. Domestically, measuring effectiveness is harder given censorship, but there are some clues. The fact that large segments of the populace did not rally to the RSF despite the army's past misdeeds indicates Sudan's information control prevented the RSF from winning the "hearts and minds" of many Sudanese. The prevalence of pro-army slogans like "We are all the army" on Sudanese social media (often bot-driven, but also echoed by genuine users) shows the narrative penetrated at least part of the public. On the flip side, humanitarian groups noted that Sudan's propaganda and internet blackouts left many civilians in the dark or mistrustful of all sides – an area where the government's narrative control may have had the effect of **suppressing dissent** more than actively winning love. Looking at legal and diplomatic outcomes: the ICJ not only accepted Sudan's filing but also scheduled prompt hearings on provisional measures, suggesting the case (and thus Sudan's narrative) was taken seriously. If Sudan's aim was to isolate the RSF internationally, one could argue it's been effective – the RSF has been universally condemned and slapped with sanctions, and crucially, *the UAE was put on the defensive*. A year prior, few were talking about UAE's role in Sudan; now it's a

subject of global debate, indicating Sudan successfully injected its narrative into the international agenda. In summary, Sudan's strategy has been **effective in garnering international acknowledgment** of its core claim (that atrocities are happening and foreign aid to RSF is reprehensible). The true long-term effectiveness will be seen in whether this translates into material support for Sudan's government and a marginalization of the RSF. Early benchmarks – UN experts echoing Sudan's accusations , and media focus shifting to RSF misdeeds – bode well for Sudan's narrative victory, even if the country's overall stability remains dire.

Insights & Recommendations for the UAE's Media Strategy

Drawing on the above comparative analysis, the UAE can glean critical insights for navigating the current crisis and repairing its reputation over time. The experiences of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan illustrate both effective tactics and cautionary lessons:

- **Engage Proactively and Shape the Narrative Early**: A key takeaway is the importance of *seizing the initiative* in communications. Qatar demonstrated that filling the information space with your narrative – through rapid response, high-volume messaging, and humanizing stories – can flip the script even when you're under attack . The UAE, likewise, should not remain reactive or silent. **Short-term (next 6–12 months)**, it must launch a **proactive media campaign** that **saturates traditional and social media with the UAE's perspective and positive contributions**. This involves immediate steps: organize press conferences or briefings to present the UAE's side with evidence (e.g. deny arms transfers with data if possible), release detailed statements to international outlets highlighting the UAE's extensive humanitarian aid to Sudan , and promote anecdotes of Emirati aid saving Sudanese lives. Every news story about the ICJ case should, as much as UAE can influence, include the UAE's rebuttal and context. This may require offering exclusive interviews with top UAE officials to major networks – showing a willingness to address the allegations head-on, which builds credibility. Additionally, **don't cede the Global South narrative**: craft messages that resonate with African and Asian audiences (emphasize solidarity, anti-colonial values, and the UAE's track record of helping in crises). Ensure these messages run in African media (TV, radio, newspapers in countries like Sudan's neighbors) – possibly via media partnerships or sponsored content – so that African public opinion sees the UAE in a more nuanced light rather than as a villain . By acting swiftly and

flooding channels with its narrative, the UAE can prevent critical narratives from calcifying further.

- **Leverage Influencers and Credible Voices**: Influencer impact has proven decisive in all cases studied. Sudan's success in enlisting independent experts and activists shows the power of third-party validation, while Saudi's bot-centric approach shows the pitfalls of perception if campaigns look inauthentic . The UAE should **build a coalition of credible voices** to speak on its behalf. **Short-term**, identify and brief friendly influencers – for example, respected journalists in the Middle East and Africa, scholars who have a nuanced view of the UAE's role in the region, humanitarian workers who have partnered with the UAE. Provide them with talking points and factual resources (e.g. details of the UAE's $600+ million aid to Sudan since 2023 , or its support for ceasefire initiatives) and encourage them to share these organically in their articles, social media, and interviews. The key is that these voices must come off as **independent and authentic**, not perceived as UAE mouthpieces. Qatar achieved this by funding op-eds and think-tank pieces that appeared impartial – the UAE can similarly sponsor analytical pieces in international media that question Sudan's motives or highlight UAE's peacemaking efforts (without them reading like official propaganda). **Influential individuals in Africa** – such as African Union dignitaries, prominent Sudanese community leaders abroad, or journalists from Pan-African publications – should be engaged. Invite them to UAE to witness relief operations for Sudanese refugees, for instance, so they can testify to the UAE's positive actions. On social media, the UAE should empower its diplomats and articulate citizens to be active – as Anwar Gargash and others are, but with greater coordination and unified hashtags. Pair them with regional social media influencers (popular bloggers, YouTubers, Twitter personalities in the GCC and Africa) through campaigns or Twitter Spaces discussing Sudan. For example, hold a live discussion moderated by a neutral influencer where a UAE representative and a Sudan expert talk through the case – showing openness and getting the UAE narrative into those influencer's follower circles. **Long-term (multi-year)**, the UAE should cultivate a **network of goodwill ambassadors**: thought leaders, cultural figures, NGO partners across the Global South who can vouch for the UAE's constructive role in conflict resolution and development. By investing in these relationships (e.g. through collaborative projects, conferences, grants), the UAE creates an echo chamber of reputable voices that can counteract future negative narratives. Essentially, the UAE needs

its own *informal influencer alliance* akin to what Qatar had via Al Jazeera and hired lobbyists, but tailored to Africa and the broader international community and rooted in genuine engagement rather than bots. Metrics for success here will be seeing more neutral or positive commentary about the UAE on social media and expert forums relative to negative mentions (with a target to surpass the 4k retweet virality of negative posts with equally viral positive content).

- **Emphasize Transparency and Consistency**: A recurrent theme is that inconsistency or opacity in messaging undermines credibility. Saudi Arabia's shifting narratives in the Khashoggi case damaged its trustworthiness , whereas Qatar's steady, fact-based messaging built sympathy . The UAE must avoid sending mixed messages or appearing evasive. **Short-term**, this might mean acknowledging concerns in order to rebut them – for instance, the UAE could say, "We understand Sudan's desperation given the atrocities, but the facts show the UAE is aiding Sudan, not harming it," and then provide evidence. If there are any legitimate points (e.g. maybe UAE companies inadvertently sold dual-use equipment that ended up with RSF), address them transparently and explain corrective actions. Being forthright can take the sting out of allegations. At the same time, align all spokespeople on the key messages so there are no contradictory statements. The UAE should deploy a **unified message matrix** highlighting: (1) UAE's humanitarian leadership, (2) commitment to Sudan's stability, (3) respect for international law and cooperation with investigations to clear its name, and (4) the UAE's broader track record as a peaceful investor in Africa. Every press release, interview, and social media post in the coming months should reinforce these points consistently. **Long-term**, consistency means following through on what is communicated. The UAE's narrative of being a peace advocate must be backed by visible diplomatic efforts – e.g., continue pushing for Sudan peace talks and be seen doing so in multilateral forums. If the UAE proclaims support for justice, it could consider measures like backing a neutral fact-finding mission for Sudan (even if it feels unfairly targeted, supporting transparency could turn the tide of opinion). Over years, as the UAE engages in other foreign policy arenas, it should consistently brand itself as a force for stability and development, to the point where that reputation is so established that future accusations find a skeptical audience. For example, invest in branding initiatives like **UAE Peace Forums** or **annual humanitarian reports** showcasing its contributions – so media and experts reflexively associate UAE with positive roles.

A consistent drumbeat of positive news – whether it's UAE building refugee camps, brokering a local truce in Sudan, or training African peacekeepers – will, over time, shift the baseline narrative. The UAE can set measurable KPIs such as *improving favorability ratings by 10-15% in key African countries within 2 years* (tracked via polling) , or *ensuring at least 50% of international news articles about the UAE's role in Sudan mention its aid/peace efforts* (up from near-zero now) . Achieving these will require unwavering message discipline and authenticity.

- **Short-Term Crisis Containment Recommendations (6–12 months)**: In the immediate horizon, the UAE should implement a **crisis communications task force** dedicated to Sudan allegations. This team would monitor media 24/7, rapidly correct misinformation, and push out UAE's narrative. Key tactics include:

- **Rapid Response Rebuttals**: Respond to major critical pieces within hours with fact-based counter-statements or letters to the editor. For instance, if a prominent op-ed accuses the UAE, have a UAE official or proxy respond in the same outlet clarifying the record .

- **Highlight Common Ground & Humanitarian Focus**: Steer the narrative towards the humanitarian crisis in Sudan (where the UAE can show it's helping). Release updated figures of aid delivered, and perhaps announce *new* aid packages or initiatives (e.g., "UAE pledges an additional $100M relief for Darfur victims") – this creates positive media opportunities . Accompany these with on-site media coverage (journalists invited to the UAE's aid hub in Port Sudan, for example) to generate humanizing stories. By doing good and talking about it now, the UAE can tangibly reduce hostility in coverage.

- **Coordinate with Allies**: Quietly encourage allied nations (especially in the GCC or Africa) to speak up on the UAE's behalf. An official statement from the Gulf Cooperation Council or OIC expressing support for the UAE against "unfounded allegations" would lend weight to the counter-narrative. Even if Western governments won't overtly take sides, friendly voices in those governments could be prompted to mention the UAE's contributions. This kind of third-party endorsement in the short term can mitigate diplomatic fallout.

- **Media Partnerships & Access**: Partner with a major international media outlet for a *field report* showcasing the UAE's role. For example, invite *BBC* or *CNN* correspondents to cover UAE medics treating Sudanese refugees or interview a

UAE official in charge of Sudan aid. A well-crafted story on a respected platform could reach millions and provide a more balanced narrative to general audiences.

• **Social Media Amplification**: Intensify the planned hashtag campaign and engage in social media community management. Use paid promotion to boost tweets that contain the UAE's message to wider relevant audiences. Encourage UAE's large diaspora and supporter base to share and tag influential accounts. Aim to create at least one viral moment with a pro-UAE narrative in the Sudan context – for instance, a compelling video of a Sudanese child being evacuated by a UAE aircraft could generate strong positive sentiment if circulated widely. The short-term goal is to **inject doubt** about the accusations and highlight alternative storylines, thereby *containing the crisis narrative* to a more moderate tone.

• **Long-Term Reputation Management Recommendations (Multi-year)**: Beyond the immediate firefight, the UAE should embark on a sustained campaign to bolster its reputation and inoculate against future crises. Drawing lessons from Qatar's resilience and Saudi's ongoing rebranding, the UAE's long-term strategy could include:

• **Institutionalized Public Diplomacy**: Establish dedicated programs or centers for engagement with media and civil society in key regions (Africa especially). For example, create a "UAE–Africa Media Fellowship" that brings African journalists to the UAE for training and exchange. Over time, this builds relationships and goodwill, so that those journalists are more likely to hear the UAE's side in any controversy and treat it fairly.

• **Narrative of UAE as a Global South Partner**: Proactively align the UAE's brand with Global South solidarity. This can be done by championing causes important to developing countries – debt relief, climate adaptation funding (especially since UAE hosted COP28 in 2023, leverage that legacy), peacekeeping contributions, etc. If the UAE becomes known as a voice for the Global South within forums like the UN, then accusations from a fellow Global South country might not stick as easily, as the UAE will be seen as fundamentally on the same team, not an antagonist. Sponsoring South–South development projects or conflict resolution initiatives (perhaps co-mediated peace talks in African conflicts) will further entrench this narrative.

• **Regular Transparency Initiatives**: To combat skepticism, the UAE could implement periodic transparency steps in its foreign policy. For instance, annually

publish a **Foreign Aid and Security Report** detailing where it provides military assistance or aid and under what guiding principles. If the UAE can point to a clear doctrine (e.g. "we do not take sides in internal conflicts, our assistance is conditional on stability outcomes"), then when allegations arise, it can point to its track record and official policy, lending it credibility. This kind of institutional transparency, rare in the region, would set the UAE apart and earn international respect, cushioning its reputation against rumors.

- **Global Media Investments**: Consider bolstering or establishing international media outlets that present news with a Middle East/Africa perspective. Qatar has Al Jazeera, which undeniably helped it win the narrative war. The UAE could support expanding an existing outlet (like Sky News Arabia or CNN Abu Dhabi) to have more global reach, or foster new digital platforms that highlight positive stories from the Middle East and Africa. Over years, having a media instrument (that is seen as professional) can be invaluable for setting narratives straight. Care must be taken to ensure editorial independence so it's credible, but editorial line can still ensure the UAE gets fair coverage.

- **Cultural and People-to-People Diplomacy**: Invest in cultural diplomacy that showcases the UAE's values of tolerance and peace. For example, expand programs like the UAE's interfaith forums, student scholarships for Sudanese and other Africans, and art/sports exchanges. When people experience the UAE firsthand or see its cultural contributions, they become informal ambassadors. Multi-year, the UAE should aim to be perceived not just as a wealthy gulf state, but as a cosmopolitan, benevolent actor in the international community. This broad reputational strength will make any one allegation less defining. If, in five years, international public opinion polls show improvements – e.g., a majority in Africa viewing the UAE favorably, up from current levels – that will be a sign that these efforts are paying off.

In conclusion, the UAE faces a serious narrative challenge with the Sudan ICJ allegations, but it is a challenge that can be met with a concerted, well-resourced media strategy. **In the short term, the UAE should deploy an aggressive yet principled communications campaign** to regain control of the story – highlighting its aid, refuting falsehoods, and amplifying supportive voices . **In the long term, the UAE must build a resilient reputation** through consistent, positive engagement and demonstrated commitment to the values it espouses – learning from Qatar's savvy PR offensive, avoiding Saudi's missteps of opacity, and

countering Sudan's claims with integrity and proof. By doing so, the UAE can not only weather this storm but emerge with a stronger global narrative: that of a nation which stands on the side of humanitarianism and peace, and which ultimately prevailed over misinformation through truth and transparency.