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Dedication

This article is dedicated to the thousands who dreamed, hundreds of thousands who built, and tens of thousands who operated the Middle East's first World's Fair and men's soccer World Cup.

The three most widely attended events in the world are usually the World's Fair (also known as a World Expo or international exposition), the Summer Olympics, and the men's soccer World Cup. Historically, these events have taken place in different years and different regions. However, due to the COVID pandemic's disruption of the schedules,¹ all three of these global mega events, as well as the Winter Olympic Games, took place within a 17-month period between July 2021 and December 2022. Only two of the four events allowed visitors, the FIFA 2022 World Cup and Expo 2020 Dubai, which are the focus of this article.²

These events made history as they happened despite the world's closure. Moreover, it was the first time that either had taken place in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia (MENASA) region before. The events had never taken place in cities so close or in cultures so similar. Their proximity and similitude might have prompted an outside observer to incorrectly assume that the host cities, Doha and Dubai, were part of the same political entity, but while 50 years ago they may have discussed co-federation, today they are part of the independent countries of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).³

For these reasons, a reader may have expected several academic and popular comparisons of the two global mega events; however, such are not to be found. There is cross-pollination between the people on the ground working these events; people that work for the organizers or a country pavilion at a World Expo may also work for the organizers or one of the venues of an Olympic Games or a soccer World Cup. For instance, a venue manager at the USA Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai later served as one at a FIFA 2022 World Cup stadium. There is also cross-pollination between the governmental organizations responsible for participant country participation. The organizers of the Swiss country

pavilion at Expo 2020 were also responsible for the country's activation at the FIFA 2022 World Cup. Finally, a country such as the United Kingdom may even have a common office that is responsible for the country's participation and engagements at the global mega events that are the focus of this article.

Academic literature has tended to examine global mega events in isolation. For instance, a journal may run an article on X global mega event and how it handled Y issue, or as comparisons within a type, i.e. what was similar across the World Expos (or World Cups or Olympic Games) in A, B, and C cities. One can also find analyses of one country's hosting of back-to-back global mega events, such as Z country's hosting of the XXXX Summer Olympic Games and YYYY World Expo; however, the author has yet to find a comparative analysis of case studies of two different global mega events taking place in the same time frame and the same region.

The author does not recall coming across inter-event comparative references in media reporting either. This could be because the journalists writing on these events tend to be specialized, i.e. the same sportswriters may cover the men's soccer World Cup and the Olympics, but a World's Fair will likely be covered by a journalist with a different (political, economic, or cultural) beat. One might have expected an academic, with a longer time frame and the benefit of multiple reporting perspectives, to have written such an analysis, but here too the rigidity of academic disciplines impedes such inter-disciplinary analysis.

However, such an analysis lends itself particularly well to the FIFA 2022 World Cup and Expo 2020 Dubai given the countries' proximity and similar political-economic systems and cultures. Against this common background, one can examine how they bid for the events or handled similar external stimuli, be they geopolitical, economic, or cultural.

One could also examine how the events interacted with one another and compare their innovation on event delivery. In this case, the lack of an inter-event comparison becomes almost negligent when one considers the state of relations between the two host countries: that one had initiated and was actively enforcing a diplomatic, trade, and travel blockade against the other (the Gulf blockade also known as the Gulf conflict or Ramadan blockade), and that one of the proposed solutions to ending the blockade consisted of sharing the co-hosting rights for the other event!

This article provides an analysis comparing Doha and Dubai's bidding narratives, the events' response to external stimuli, and the countries' delivery of the two mega events and their innovations on event type. The article provides an initial framework for future inter-event comparisons within a region, or during a set period. This framework may be of increasing value as more countries, particularly those developing or ones seeking to brand or rebrand themselves on the global stage, adopt global mega events as part of their public diplomacy strategies. This is especially relevant in an era of competing powers vying for influence in a new non-aligned world. Finally, the insights from this article may be of interest for those studying Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Today, GCC countries find themselves with increasing financial assets coupled with a desire to differentiate themselves from one another (competition within the non-aligned world). They also have prior experience with hosting and a continued inclination to host global mega events in the future.

The author has a unique perspective from which to assess and write this analysis as a firsthand participant in the events. He is a career diplomat and a World's Fair enthusiast, policymaker, and practitioner. He has visited six World's Fairs, including the last five World Expos, and for the past five years, led the effort to realize a USA Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, first as the project manager at the U.S. Department of State

in Washington, DC, and later as the Deputy Commissioner General of the USA Pavilion in Dubai, UAE.⁴ Before serving as project manager for the Dubai pavilion, he led the diplomatic campaign for the United States' bid to host the 2023 World's Fair. His prior assignments in South Asia (Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan) helped him better understand the historic and contemporary linkages between South Asia and the Gulf. While living and working in Dubai, he spoke with people about the Gulf conflict, read contemporary English-language newspaper coverage, and spoke with people that were involved with the two events. At the conclusion of the Expo, he spoke with his colleagues at the Embassy in Doha helping transfer lessons learned from the United States' participation in one global mega event, Expo 2020 Dubai, to the practitioners at the other.

In November 2022, as a visiting senior fellow at the University of Southern California (USC), he organized an event at the Center on Public Diplomacy with a *Los Angeles Times* sportswriter looking back at Expo 2020 Dubai and forward to the FIFA 2022 World Cup.⁵ Insights in this article about the 2022 FIFA World Cup are based primarily on contemporary English-language media reporting of the event, conversations and firsthand observations from the author's visit to Doha for the final week of the event (December 12-19, 2022). This was the author's second visit to a men's soccer World Cup. In 2006, he supported the U.S. Department of State's flagship sports diplomacy intervention surrounding the FIFA 2006 World Cup in Germany and was responsible for American citizen engagement in Bavaria during the global mega event.

This inter-event comparative analysis of the FIFA 2022 Doha and Expo 2020 Dubai case studies found slightly different event positioning and narratives, more differentiated responses to the geopolitical and cultural developments, and similar innovations on event type. Given geopolitical trend lines (more competition by global and regional powers for

the non-aligned world), as well as the increasing propensity for joint-country bids for global mega events, one would expect to see more inter-event comparisons in the future, particularly within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region.

This article is part of the Center on Public Diplomacy's *Perspectives* series and research program on global mega events. The next section provides background on the host countries and the global mega events, including a description of the bidding process.

Host Country and Event Background

In 2022, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) hosted the world's most-watched and most-attended events of the year. The two small countries on the Arabian Gulf delivered the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia (MENASA) region's first World Cup (FIFA 2022) and first World's Fair (Expo 2020 Dubai).

Since their independence just over fifty years ago, Qatar and the UAE have recorded impressive levels of economic growth, capitalizing on their natural resources, geographic location and free trade orientation. At the same time, the countries have looked for opportunities to differentiate themselves from one another, ever since Qatar declined to join the UAE confederation. The UAE is composed of seven emirates, to a large extent autonomous city-states under the control of different ruling families. The two countries' land borders are only 70 kilometers apart, separated by Saudi Arabia, and the primary host cities are less than 400 kilometers (by air) and 700 kilometers (by road) from one another.

Their journeys to FIFA 2022 and Expo 2020 began in 2009 in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis and the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. The financial crisis had

a substantial negative effect on Dubai's economy, requiring a bailout from the neighboring emirate of Abu Dhabi, although Qatar was relatively insulated from the effects. Dubai's campaign played out during the Arab Spring, whose democratizing protests were of concern to the stability-oriented rulers of some of the GCC states. The two gulf countries leaned into their respective strengths and selected the global mega event that would serve as each country's organizing principle for a decade of development:

- To bid on the World Cup, Qatar leveraged its investments in culture and sports, membership in sports governance organizations and hosting of regional sporting events, most recently the 2006 Asian Games.⁶
- To bid on the Expo, the UAE bet on its location as a regional hub for trade, travel, and commerce; as well as its diverse demography, with more than 100 nationalities residing in the country and abundant tourism offerings.⁷

Bidding is the first phase of the five-phase delivery of global mega events: bidding, planning, construction and delivery, operations, and decommissioning. Winning the rights to host either of these events require multi-year, multi-million-dollar campaigns, albeit geared towards different audiences.

The rights to host the men's soccer World Cup, which occurs every four years normally in the northern hemisphere's summer season, are awarded by FIFA's executive committee through a secret ballot. FIFA's headquarters are in Zürich, Switzerland. At the time the executive committee was comprised of a president, eight vice presidents, and 15 members representing various regional soccer associations. The executive committee was subsequently reformed in

2016 in response to criminal indictments and allegations of corruption surrounding the awarding of World Cups.⁸

On the other hand, the rights to host the World Expo are awarded by member states of the Bureau of International Expositions (BIE), a treaty-based international organization based in Paris, France. At the time there were 164 member states, who also voted by secret ballot. The proceedings of the BIE General Assembly, including presentations by the bidding countries, are usually open to the press, whereas the FIFA deliberations take place behind closed doors. Insights about the BIE bidding process are informed by the author’s coordination of the United States’ diplomatic campaign to host Expo 2023, a specialized international exposition, which the BIE member states ultimately awarded to Argentina.⁹



Announcement of Bid	November 2011	May 2009
Date of Award	November 27, 2013	December 2, 2010
Duration	182	29
Opening – Closing Dates	October 1, 2021 – March 31, 2022	November 20, 2022 – December 18, 2022
Countries Participating	192	32
In-person Attendance	24M	3.4M (Stadiums) 1.8M (Fan Festival)
Broadcast Attendance	248M	5B 6B Social Media

Duration noted is in days

Analyzing Bid Videos to Discern Event Narrative

While the author did not have access to the bid dossiers, internal deliberations, or interviews with FIFA 2022 or Expo 2020 bid committee members, the author was able to access and view the bid materials that are still available online, specifically bid videos, to analyze each host country's theme and overarching narrative. The fact that both countries have continued to make those videos available online through YouTube channels (QatarFilmotion and Expo City Dubai) attest to their continuing resonance beyond the multi-year journey. Countries bidding for global mega events place a heavy importance on the bid videos in addition to in-person testimonials from government officials and cultural ambassadors. The scripts for these videos are closely edited; and the visuals, music, and voicing are chosen to maximize emotional impact.¹⁰

As part of the bid development phase, candidate countries look at past hosts and how they have previously used global mega events as part of their public diplomacy strategies: South Korea underscored its recent democratization (Seoul Olympics 1988, Taejon Expo 1993); Germany highlighted its reunification (Expo 2000 Hannover, World Cup 2006); and China announced its emergence on the world stage (Beijing Olympics 2008, Shanghai Expo 2010). Taejon was the first exposition hosted by Korea and the first to be held by a developing nation.¹¹ Korea would go on to host the 2012 specialized exposition in Yeosu and is bidding to host the 2030 world exposition in Busan. Germany's hosting of the World Cup—particularly its use of the event to embrace a concept of national pride and address its post-war guilt—was one of the guideposts for the Qatar FIFA 2022 bid. China's World's Fair, following closely on the heels of its hosting of the 2008 Summer Olympics, marked its arrival as a global economic powerhouse. China broke records with

attendance (72 million) as well as infrastructure investment. It served as a laboratory for social scientists examining nation branding as well as a road map for urban planning at global mega events.¹² Shanghai is now a repository of history and academic research on World Expos with the creation of the BIE-affiliated World Expo Museum on the former expo grounds.

Qatar produced three bid videos that focus on the historic nature of the first bid from the Middle East.¹³ The video showed visibly recognizable Muslims in Muslim attire, while not explicitly invoking the candidate's status as what would be the first Muslim host country. The videos described a "truly unique world cup destination," raised the prospect of Israeli and Arab teams meeting on the pitch as a reference to South African racial reconciliation and the 2010 World Cup, and appealed to the dream of an entire region: "We can completely change the image of the Arab region and the whole Middle East." Qatar's video included footage from Jerusalem, Cairo and Dubai. It closed with the memorable "For Football, for the Middle East, for the World. The time is now."

According to media reports, what really brought Qatar's message home was the final in-person presentation to the FIFA Executive Committee by the wife of the then-ruler of Qatar, Sheikha Moza. She opened her presentation with the question, "When is the right time for the World Cup to come to the Middle East?" She concluded her presentation with, "The time has come, the time is now."¹⁴ The continued relevance of this video and its message is further confirmed by its inclusion as a video installation in Qatar's new 3-2-1 Olympic Museum, which was opened in Doha on March 30, 2022 in advance of the FIFA 2022 World Cup.

The UAE's effort was led by Dubai—one of the seven emirates—as opposed to a federal-level endeavor. Dubai's two bid videos in retrospect seem a bit dated and underwhelming, especially when compared with the materials produced during the event and as part of the post-event wrap-up.¹⁵ The videos highlight Dubai's incredible growth, its location as the meeting place for East and West, and that it is the "UAE's turn to amaze the world." The initial bid videos are also less aspirational than Qatar's, which came out at the same time, and come across more as tourism promotion. The author heard from several sources that Expo 2020 Dubai was initially viewed as pure tourism promotion: "just another event for Dubai" and was included as part of the official Dubai Tourism Vision 2020 strategy launched in 2013.¹⁶ While the bid dossier presented to the BIE included a note about "how it was created not through armies of external consultants but through the work and vision of an internal team," that original emphasis on "knowledge creation," which may have been part of the team's vision, did not necessarily come across in the initial marketing materials.¹⁷ Only later, through the course of the event, would Dubai come to embrace, innovate and transform the Expo model, setting "a new bar," as the BIE Secretary General remarked at the delivery of the Expo 2020 final report.¹⁸ In examining Dubai's Expo journey, one can really see the qualitative and substantive difference between start and finish in the final in-person report by Expo 2020 Director General Reem al Hashemy at the 170th BIE General Assembly that took place in June 2022.

For both Qatar and the UAE, this was about more than hosting a one-month soccer tournament or a six-month international exposition. The rulers approached the historic task of hosting the region's first World Cup and World's Fair as national priorities and strategic elements in their nation-forming efforts. It was not just that the events were taking

place for the first time in the region, but they had never been held in countries as small, young, Islamic or rich before,¹⁹ all of which would play out later in global perceptions of the event. Hosting these global mega events would become the countries' guiding focus for the next decade; and given the size of the countries, the novelty for the region, and the competition between the two, which has been part of their history for the past century, there was an intensity of focus and purpose that was all-encompassing.

After they had won the bid, the hosts made multi-billion USD investments in infrastructure, built primarily by South Asian migrant workers, to connect entirely new city centers to existing commercial districts (in Qatar to Lusail City, and in the UAE to Expo City). They hired the world's best architects to build their pavilions and stadiums, sometimes inadvertently—although some would say deliberately—commissioning the same architect.²⁰

Dissection of the multi-year planning process and construction delivery of global mega events is an established area of academic literature, and these two events are no exception. Again, however, there is not any inter-event comparison. Architects compare Expo pavilions across Expos, and stadiums across World Cups, but there has been a lack of architectural and urban planning comparisons across event types focusing on the holistic visitor experiences.

This article does not dwell on the built environment, although in the section on innovations in event type, does describe how organizers went beyond traditional definitions of the event to create venues for commercial engagement (Expo 2020 Dubai) and cultural engagement (FIFA 2022 Doha). Organizers published official histories of the events capturing highlights of this multi-year journey.²¹ The next section largely skips over the construction and delivery phase

of the global mega events and looks at how the organizers responded to external events during the operations phase.

Responding to External Events

A decade ago, neither country could have predicted how external events, such as a global pandemic or geopolitical fissures, would impact the delivery of the global mega events or how they would force the countries to respond to socio-economic criticisms regarding LGBTQ rights, worker protections, or alcohol consumption. This section contextualizes the events with the Gulf blockade, which would complicate Qatar's participation in Expo 2020 Dubai and contribute to questions regarding Qatar's hosting of the World Cup. The section also describes the countries' reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, and Israel's normalization with some of its neighbors. The section concludes with a discussion of how Qatar and the UAE navigated the issues of homosexuality, migrant labor, and alcohol consumption; and how their approaches reflected subtle differences between the two countries.

COVID Global Pandemic

When the bids were originally won, the events were scheduled to take place more than 15 months apart, rather than eight. While the World Cup and World's Fair organizers prepared for a number of contingencies, neither anticipated nor could plan for a global pandemic such as COVID-19. The global COVID-19 pandemic impacted the construction and preparation of both events, while the primary operational impact was on Expo 2020 Dubai. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the world's interconnectedness and brought these two global mega events even closer—temporally—together.

In 2020, member states of the Bureau of International Expositions (BIE), the Paris-based international organization regulating World's Fairs, voted unanimously to postpone the opening date of the six-month exposition from October 20, 2020, to October 1, 2021. The Expo would now conclude on March 31, 2022, and the World Cup would begin less than eight months later on November 20, 2022.²²

The Expo 2020 organizers worked with UAE authorities to introduce rigorous testing protocols, including on-site laboratories, a vaccination and booster mandate for Expo staff, and community messaging that kept construction going, doors open, and visitors coming. Expo 2020 also mobilized volunteers to staff participant pavilions when their staff got sick during the event so that the pavilions could remain open. Even during the height of the January 2022 omicron surge, Expo 2020 never closed its doors due to COVID-19.

To put this in perspective, the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics, also delayed a year due to COVID-19, took place from July to August 2021 without any spectators; and Japan itself only re-opened to individual tourists in late 2022. Chinese visitors were largely absent from both FIFA 2022 and Expo 2020 due to China's stringent quarantine restrictions. The Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics took place without any spectators. By the time FIFA 2022 kicked off in November 2022, COVID protocols in and on arrival to Qatar had been completely lifted.

Gulf Blockade

On June 4, 2017, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, along with Bahrain and non-GCC member Egypt, imposed a diplomatic, economic, and travel blockade against Qatar in the holy month of Ramadan, issuing the country a series of political,

economic, and cultural demands. This was the culmination of a long-running dispute regarding leadership within the GCC and Qatar's pursuit of a more independent foreign policy. The six-country GCC, which had been founded in 1981 to promote greater political and economic connectivity in the region, was divided and essentially defunct.

Qatar used its membership in international organizations from the United Nations to specialized international agencies such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Court of Justice to protest the legality of Saudi Arabia and UAE's actions and highlight the negative impact on its population. While neither Qatar nor the UAE are signatories to the Rome Statute which established the International Criminal Court (ICC), Qatar invited the ICC Prosecutor for a private visit to discuss potential cooperation and raise awareness of international criminal justice and humanitarian law.²³ At the BIE's General Assemblies in 2017 and 2018, Qatar railed against the UAE's actions, highlighting the contradictory nature of UAE's pledge to "welcome the world" to Expo 2020 Dubai while excluding one of its closest neighbors. In 2018, Qatar availed of special BIE legislative procedures to expedite its application to host a specialized international horticultural ("flower") exposition in 2022; if it couldn't join Dubai's Expo, it would host its own.²⁴

As early as October 2017, the idea was floated that Qatar should share hosting rights of the 2022 World Cup with UAE and Saudi Arabia to break the deadlock, which Qatar quickly rejected. A well-funded social media campaign, allegedly supported by the UAE, was launched seizing on the sacrifices of migrant labor in Qatar and suggesting that the tournament should be moved away from the country. However, the idea went nowhere as the GCC protagonists lacked representation within FIFA's Executive Committee. During the rift, the media reported on suspicious hacking of

social media accounts, unauthorized access and disclosure of confidential files. Qatar and the UAE each had their fair share of unsavory public attention related to alleged FIFA corruption, the Dubai ruler's familial affairs, and sexual assault allegations against an Abu Dhabi royal.²⁵ Dirty laundry was everywhere and it was no-holds-barred, all-out information warfare.²⁶

On January 5, 2021, after three and a half years, and few tangible public concessions, Qatar and Saudi Arabia signed the Kuwait- and United States-brokered Al-Ula Declaration, ending the blockade. In May 2021, Qatar joined the Expo 2020 International Participants Meeting and signed its official participation agreement to become the 190th country to join Dubai's World Fair. On November 20, 2022, the ruler of Dubai joined the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and the President of Egypt as guests of the Qatari Amir for the opening match of the World Cup. The rift had closed and the GCC had come full circle.²⁷

Russia and the Region

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine and, at Expo 2020, the pavilions of both countries became sites of attention. The Ukrainian pavilion established a "Solidarity Wall" where visitors—pedestrian and dignitary—took pictures and left messages of support, an unusual sign of political expression in the country that was tolerated by Expo 2020 and UAE authorities. Meanwhile, the Russian pavilion established a perimeter to keep out any potential protestors and protect the pavilion's facade. Perhaps surprisingly, BIE member states did not attempt any formal actions within the BIE to attempt to expel or ostracize Russia from Expo 2020 Dubai as they did in other international organizations. Member states limited their official signs of disapproval in

the Expo 2020 setting to flying Ukrainian flags and projecting messages of support on their pavilions.²⁸

On the other hand, Russia—the host of the 2018 World Cup—was prevented by FIFA within a week of its invasion from participating in the qualifying rounds for the 2022 World Cup. Poland and other teams that had been scheduled to play Russia in the qualifying rounds had refused to play them. This was the first time that a World Cup host had been prevented by FIFA from participating in a successor cup.

Fall of Afghanistan

When the democratically elected Afghan government fell in August 2021, President Ashraf Ghani flew to Abu Dhabi; and the pavilion that had been reserved for the Afghan government became an unofficial Afghan cultural pavilion instead. Belying Qatar's closer ties, after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, the Taliban continued to use its former political office in Doha alongside its embassy to that country.²⁹ Both Qatar and the UAE temporarily hosted Afghan refugees fleeing their country, but only Qatar created an exhibition, visible outside of the Museum of Islamic Art during its global mega event, highlighting its support for Afghan refugees. This was one more sign of how Qatar viewed the hosting of the global mega event as an opportunity to transmit its political values and views of the region, whereas the UAE preferred to take a much more apolitical and non-provocative approach.

Israel and Palestine

The greater Middle East region's political conflicts were never far from the pavilions or the pitch. On September 15, 2020, the United States hosted the governments of the UAE, Israel, and Bahrain for the signing of the Abraham Accords,

which normalized relations between Israel and the two GCC members. In May 2021, Israel was announced as an official Expo 2020 participant country. In Dubai, the Israeli pavilion was the centerpiece of the country's public diplomacy efforts in the region, hosting dozens of Israeli ministers, thousands of Arab visitors, and a historic visit by the Israeli President—the first to the UAE. The UAE, as it has done throughout the normalization period, tried to evenhandedly manage its relations with the Palestinian Authority. Across the park, the Palestinian pavilion, funded by the UAE, won accolades for its interior design and sensory exhibition. Meanwhile, in Qatar, which has not normalized relations with Israel, Israeli visitors were coolly received, despite the historic direct flights between Israel and Qatar; and Palestinian visitors and those living in Qatar were embraced with their Palestinian flags into the stadiums. While rainbow and anti-Iranian regime flags were confiscated by FIFA officials as political provocations, Palestinian flags were not an issue.

Responding to Socio-Economic Critique

The inter-event comparison is especially interesting when once looks at how the two countries responded to socio-economic criticism. The underpinnings of their responses are very similar: resource-rich, small states with minority citizen Muslim populations dependent on foreign migrant labor (professional and working class). Both countries had to address foreign criticism of worker protections and labor practices produced by their economic models, and as Muslim societies, navigate the issues of homosexuality and alcohol consumption. Here it may be helpful to look at the role of religion—specifically Islam—in Qatar and the UAE.

For both Qatar and the UAE, the global mega events were accompanied by robust infrastructure programs. The countries rely on foreign labor; only 10% of residents are

citizens; and the overwhelming majority of construction workers are from South Asia. Labor advocates had legitimate concerns about worker welfare and labor conditions and much was written, particularly about Qatar, during the event.³⁰ That said, one important difference between the two events is that Expo 2020, perhaps reflective of the reputational risk of the countries participating in the event (more than a third of which were responsible for building their own pavilions) had a very deep and extensive worker welfare program.³¹ On the other hand, in Qatar, photos of the stadium workers at one of the stadiums were replaced with sponsor advertisements.³² Both countries offered a limited number of free or reduced price tickets to the stadium matches and fan festival and the Expo 2020 grounds. The consensus among labor advocates and academics is that Qatar's hosting of the global mega event led to improved de facto and statutory labor conditions. Reporting about Expo 2020 Dubai focused less on conditions for construction workers and more on those international workers recruited for event operations, where it was alleged that contractors were not meeting the Expo 2020 standards of employment.

Qatar was proud of and during the event highlighted the fact that it was the first Muslim country to host the World Cup, including in communications from the country's ruler. It leaned into its religious identity, decorating public spaces with religious sayings, setting up kiosks where individuals could learn more about Islam, and even organizing public programming in the National Museum of Qatar for those curious about prominent Muslim athletes. Qatar's foreign policy has also been viewed as more supportive to Islamic governments or movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been a source of tension between the two countries and one of the stated reasons for the UAE-imposed blockade.

On the other hand, the UAE also recognizes itself as a Muslim country, albeit one in which Islam co-exists alongside other religions. In 2019, the UAE celebrated a “Year of Tolerance,” which, according to the UAE government, “aim[s] to cement the values of tolerance and openness to cultures and peoples as a general community approach involving all segments of society and to establish a sustainable institutional framework across the country.”³³ The year began with a historic visit—the first ever visit of Pope Francis to the Gulf region—and included the signing of the Human Fraternity Document by Pope Francis and Dr. Ahmed Al Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, calling for reconciliation and unity to uphold interfaith harmony and spread peace in the world. In 2023, the UAE inaugurated the Abrahamic Houses of Worship, an interfaith complex including an Islamic mosque, Jewish synagogue and Christian church.

Excepting the prayer rooms, overt signs of religion on the Expo 2020 grounds were largely absent.³⁴ While individual country pavilions might describe the role of religion—for instance, the Holy See (Vatican) had an impactful exhibition—there was no “Islam pavilion” or public mosque on the Expo 2020 grounds.³⁵ This was very much in line with the UAE’s message of religious tolerance welcoming all religions side by side. While this was the first World’s Fair to take place in a Muslim country, it was not a superlative talking point that the Emiratis deployed, per the author’s analysis of Expo 2020 official publications. Whereas the UAE placed more prominence on the geographic region as the first MENASA country to host, Qatar gave an equal emphasis to religion and geography.

While homosexual acts are criminalized in both countries, the UAE has been seen as more tolerant and permissive of LGBTQ life than Qatar.³⁶ Before the event, the UAE introduced a new housing law that permitted unmarried opposite-

sex and same-sex individuals to cohabitate, although the previous restriction was rarely enforced. International pavilions at Expo 2020 also had the flexibility to employ and sponsor individuals with same-sex partners, and several had LGBTQ Commissioners or Deputy Commissioners General leading their pavilions. In Dubai there were also LGBTQ-friendly (or even exclusive) nights at several nightclubs. In Qatar, homosexuality became more of a media minefield and public battleground with Qatari officials sending conflicting messages that “everyone was welcome to Qatar to enjoy the games,” while adding, “as Muslims, we believe that LGBTQ is not acceptable in our religion.”³⁷ Meanwhile, FIFA officials explicitly mentioned that all sexual orientations would be welcome in public remarks and messages printed in stadium guides. While the legal situation for LGBTQ individuals may not have changed, hosting the global mega event has resulted in greater public and private discussion of homosexuality within Qatar, to include voices from members of the LGBTQ community in Qatar, who had previously not been part of the public discourse.³⁸

Alcohol was available on-site at both events, although it was limited at Doha’s World Cup to hospitality package ticket holders at the stadiums and fan festival. Up until a week before the event, and as printed in the stadium guides, World Cup attendees had expected alcohol to be available throughout the entire stadium and in fan zones. Ultimately, the World Cup organizers decided against public alcohol sales, citing local tradition and cultural norms. Post event, many attendees positively commented on the on-site alcohol ban, noting the improved family atmosphere. Expo 2020 permitted alcohol sales at pavilions and restaurants, although required the areas to be away from public promenades and sold from separate counters. After the World Cup, Dubai further liberalized its alcohol regime, suspending its alcohol tax and dropping the fee for drinking

licenses. Some commentators wrote that Dubai's decision may have been motivated by a desire to further differentiate itself from Qatar in the never-ending competition between the two GCC countries, although prevailing opinion is that it was driven by commercial interests.³⁹

Innovation on Event Type

For the two host countries, these global mega events were always about more than just soccer or public diplomacy. This section begins with a discussion of how the visitor or spectator experienced the two events, with a comparison of visitor and broadcaster numbers, and concludes with discussion of innovation on event type. Both looked to innovate on the delivery of their respective global mega events, leaning into their strengths, with Doha developing a cultural program and Dubai creating a commercial program. The two countries' successful innovation on the event would set a new standard for those hosts that follow.

Visitor or Spectator Experience

The World's Fair continued to be an in-person experience first, whereas the World Cup was a broadcasting and social media experience.⁴⁰ While Expo 2020 Dubai had the most in-person visitors (24 million visits throughout the six months), Doha's World Cup had the most visibility (1.5 billion tuned in to the final match between Argentina and France). While the UAE pushed in-person visitation for the World's Fair, it reached new online audiences through its virtual navigable environment virtualexpodubai.com (a World's Fair first), an Expo 2020 environment for Microsoft's Minecraft (another first), and social media and streaming platforms, including for its marquee concerts in Al Wasl Plaza. The UAE made it easy to travel to Dubai for the event with no special visa requirement and a free Expo ticket with almost every flight.

Expo 2020 reported that 30% of the 24 million visits were international.

On the other hand, Qatar limited entry to the country, requiring a special visa (Hayya permit) or a match ticket. FIFA reported 3.4 million spectators watched World Cup matches from within the stadium; 1.8 million people visited the FIFA Fan Festival; nearly half a billion people tuned in to the World Cup's opening match; and five billion engaged with the event throughout its lifecycle. According to Nielsen, there were nearly 94 million posts with a 262 billion cumulative reach, delivering almost 6 billion social media engagements.⁴¹ It's no question which event had the bigger traditional and digital media footprint, but collective impact is harder to assess. It goes back to one of the quintessential public diplomacy questions: how do we comparatively value the in-person versus digital experience?

Expo 2020 Dubai was also a more global event, as measured by official international participation. By design, the 2022 World Cup had 32 national teams,⁴² whereas Expo 2020 had 192 participating countries, each with its own pavilion. Hosting the World's Fair provided the UAE with more international and diplomatic touchpoints in the event's run-up than Qatar's hosting of the World Cup. While the lead-time for FIFA 2022 was longer than Expo 2020 (13 years versus 9 years), international engagement with Expo 2020 began earlier than FIFA 2022 and was more sustained, given the need for countries to build or design their pavilions.⁴³ Hosting the World's Fair, with nearly universal participation, also reduced the incentive for participating countries to disparage the event or contribute to negative publicity about the country's official representation, which Qatar seemed to have experienced.

Doha's Cultural Program

One of the surprises about FIFA 2022 was the strength of Qatar's cultural program, which outshined any of the recent World Cup hosts. The whole country turned out for this event. The award-winning national museums (Museum of Islamic Arts and National Museum of Qatar) had been renovated. Qatar Museums hosted well-curated, international-level, highly-political temporary exhibitions on Baghdad across the years, the Doha-based international broadcaster Al Jazeera (one of the Gulf blockade demands had been to shutter Al Jazeera), and Qatar's resilience in overcoming the Gulf blockade. There was a temporary exhibit on the new Lusail Museum, a civilizational dialogue museum that would be the centerpiece of the new Lusail city district. Those interested in fashion could visit the Italian fashion designer Valentino's retrospective in Doha's new design district or view the fashion show-cum-closing concert in Stadium 974. There were not one, but two, daily electronic dance festivals, complete with the Glastonbury Spider and nightly concerts—free to FIFA ticket holders—at the FIFA fan festival. To top it off, Qatar Museums even commissioned a two-week dance festival, which featured famed dancer and choreographer Benjamin Millepied and the L.A. Dance Project, performing in front of Doha's most famous museums and monuments. There was something for everyone, even "Exploring Islam" discussions for those visitors curious to learn more about the religion.

Dubai's Commercial Program

Expo 2020 Dubai, which contrary to some uninformed reporting, was not a trade show, nevertheless had an incredible commercial and business program, unusual for a contemporary World's Fair. The organizers prepared ten theme weeks to curate cultural and commercial

programming, aligning the weeks with Dubai's annual and semiannual regional trade shows such as Gulfood and Arab Health; stacked the international conference schedule to host specialized conferences such as the region's first International Aeronautical Congress (aka Space Conference); and relocated other UAE gatherings such as the Dubai World Summit and Sir Bani Yas Forum to be Expo-adjacent. The newly built Dubai Exhibition Center, a permanent building located on the Expo 2020 grounds, hosted three Global Business Forums for ASEAN, Africa and Latin America to attract new business investment in the UAE. In the closing days of Expo 2020, Expo 2025 Osaka organizers acknowledged publicly the value of the theme week organizing principle. Privately, they have discussed how to address Expo Dubai's successful emphasis on its business program.⁴⁴

The Future and Lessons Learned

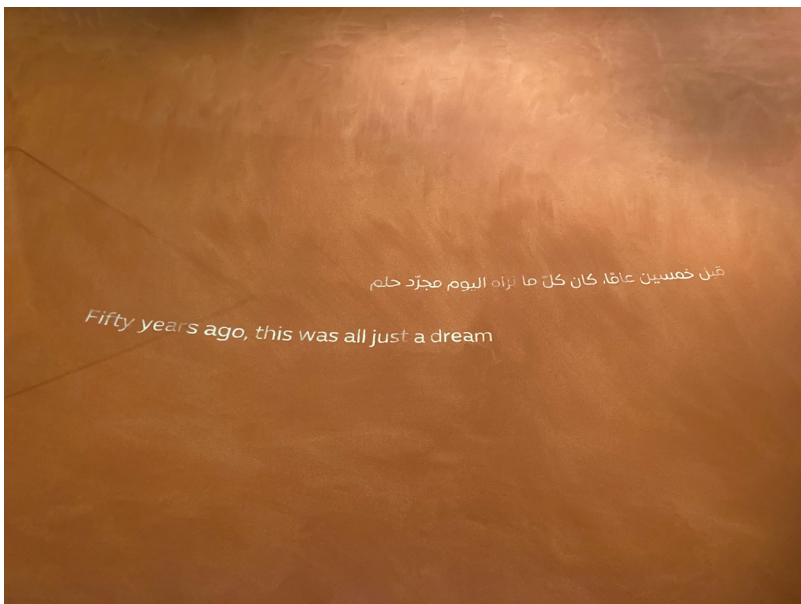
Qatar and the UAE brought whole-of-country focus and an almost city-state clarity of purpose to hosting these global mega events as part of their public diplomacy strategies. Qatar leveraged its investments in sports, and the UAE doubled down on its position as a global hub for doing business.⁴⁵ It proved to themselves and the world that they could host the world's largest and most-watched events. Hosting the events has contributed to the countries' workforce development strategies with a newly trained professional labor pool that can be deployed for future events and a new class of Qatari and Emirati professionals in government and private sector positions.

What does this mean for the immediate future? As both Qatar and the UAE have expressed public and private satisfaction with the delivery of these mega events, we are likely to see other MENASA countries adopt them as part

of their nation branding strategies, especially as the new non-aligned world seeks to compete for the attention of global powers and with its brethren for distinction. This comparative article provides a frame for consideration of global mega events across type and within a region. In addition to the first inter-event comparison, it also provided the first narrative evaluation of archived bid videos. While countries of such size will probably not host the World Cup again on their own, especially with the expansion to 48 teams, a regional bid may be more likely, making a regional comparison of further value. Already Saudi Arabia has bid to host Expo 2030 and has expressed interest in hosting World Cup 2034.

Doha and Dubai have their next acts booked: Dubai's Expo City will host the COP 28 climate talks and Doha will host its horticultural exposition and the regional soccer tournament, the Asian Cup, in 2023. Further out, Doha will host the Asian Games in 2030 and Dubai will continue to look for opportunities to host intergovernmental gatherings.⁴⁶

Who will be the first MENASA country to host the third leg of the global mega event triad, the Olympics? The lessons from Doha and Dubai are that a successful global mega event will lean into national strengths, innovate on design, and include cultural and commercial components. Perhaps another lesson—to prevent sniping, regional rivalries, and negative outside coverage—might be to consider the merits of co-hosting as a region. Might a GCC bid for the Olympics succeed? Which GCC countries will participate in it?⁴⁷ Who knows. You never know until it is tried. And in 2022, Qatar and the UAE made history as they tried, and succeeded, in hosting the region's first World Cup and World's Fair ever.



50 years ago, neither Qatar nor the United Arab Emirates existed as independent countries. Both of them would celebrate their Golden Jubilees during the course of their events. The exhibition at the UAE Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, pictured here, told the country's story.



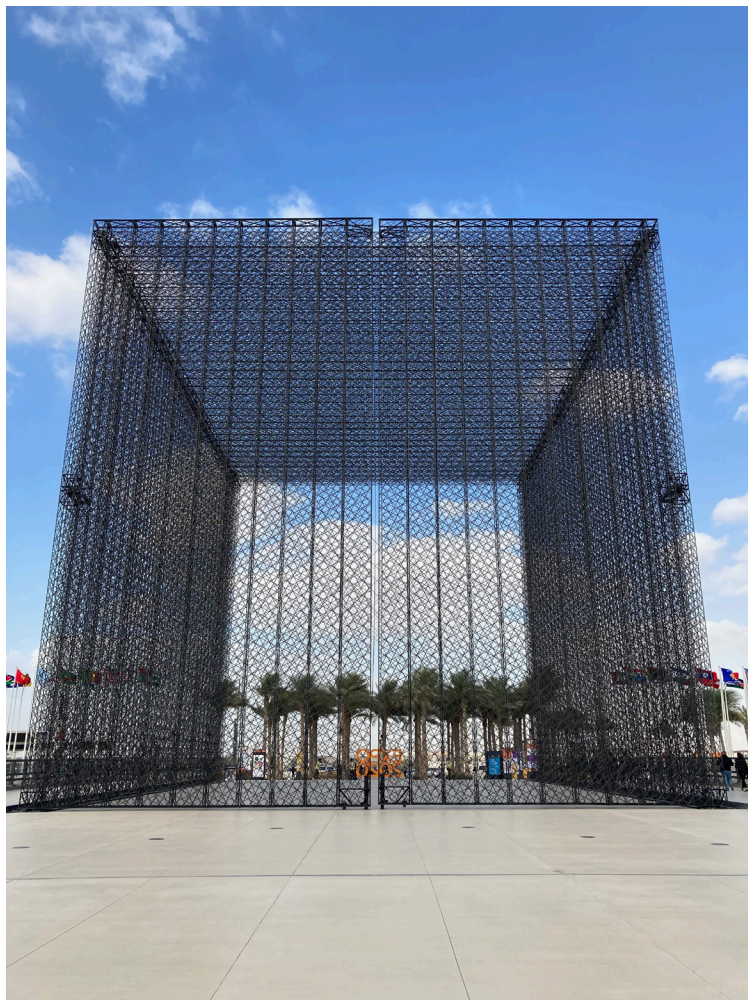
Dubai built a new city "Expo City" to host Expo 2020 Dubai complete with a new metro line, convention center and at its center "Al Wasl Dome." The dome, designed by an American architect, stood 67.5 meters tall, and is the world's largest 360-degree projection surface. The venue hosted National Day celebrations, concerts and speakers. On December 10, 2021 American artist Alicia Keys debuted her new album "Keys" in Al Wasl.



The United States was one of 192 participating countries in Expo 2020 Dubai—the first World’s Fair to take place in the Middle East, North Africa or South Asia. The Ruler of Dubai and the UAE’s Vice President and Prime Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum was the USA Pavilion’s first visitor on Opening Day October 1, 2021. The USA Pavilion’s Commissioner General Bob Clark is shown here discussing the importance of religious freedom and the pavilion’s display of Thomas Jefferson’s Quran on loan from the U.S. Library of Congress.



The United States' Presidential Delegation led by Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo visited the Ukraine Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai on March 6, 2022. The delegation added their notes to the pavilion's Solidarity Wall which was impromptu established after Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.



The British-Pakistani architect Asif Khan designed the three 21-meter-tall carbon fiber welcome gates for Expo 2020. The gates were so large that they had to be transported via the Ukrainian Antonov airplane, the world's largest commercial cargo aircraft, which was destroyed in the early days of Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.



Dubai's skyline—including the world's tallest building, the Burj al Khalifa, and the city's newest addition the iconic Museum of the Future—were on display for the world to see during the six-month World Expo.



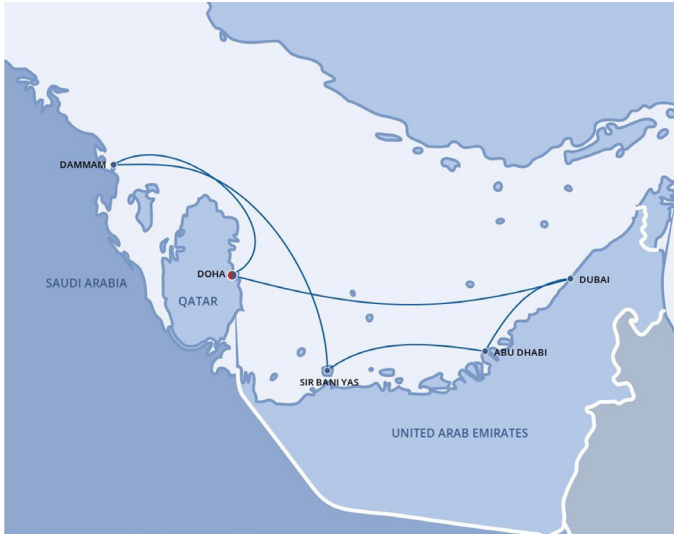
The final of the 2022 men's soccer World Cup was held in Lusail Stadium, which was the centerpiece of the new "Lusail City" constructed north of Doha, Qatar. Lusail Boulevard became a central gathering point for fans and was the site of the Victory and National Day Parades on December 18, 2022.



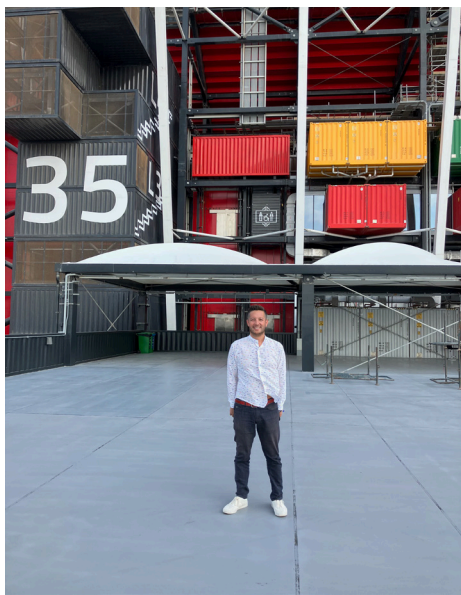
The author was one of 89,000 who watched Argentina defeat Croatia in the semi-final match on December 13, 2022 at Lusail Stadium.



Qatar's Supreme Committee worked with FIFA 2022 organizers to create engaging fan experience zones on Doha's Corniche and at sites around the country, including Stadium 974's beach. The MSC World Europa is visible in the distance.



The author stayed on the MSC World Europa—a brand-new 22-deck, 1,000+ foot long cruise ship—which was christened in Doha on November 13, 2022 and used as a floating hotel during the one-month World Cup. She departed for her inaugural cruise in the Arabian Gulf the day following the World Cup Final on the route shown.



A temporary stadium named for Qatar's international dialing code (+974) and built out of shipping containers hosted a superlative fashion show and concert on the eve of the World Cup Final. The author shown here in front of Gate 35.



The L.A. Dance Project participated in the two-week Festival in Motion dance festival sponsored by Qatar Creates held during the World Cup. The dance company is shown here in front of the National Museum of Qatar, whose exhibits were updated to include a new room on Qatar's resilience in overcoming the Gulf blockade.

All photos are from the author or the USA Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, with the exception of the Dubai sunset photo (Commissioner General Bob Clark) and the MSC World Europa map (MSC Cruises).

Author's Biography

Matthew Asada is a U.S. Foreign Service Officer currently assigned as a visiting senior fellow at the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy. His research focuses on the delivery of global mega events such as the World's Fair, World Cup and the Olympics. He served as the Deputy Commissioner General of the USA Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai and visited Doha for the final week of the World Cup.

End Notes

1. The Summer Olympics and the men's World Cup are normally held every four years, two years apart from one another. The World Expos are every five years, so there is potential intersection with either the Summer Olympics or the men's World Cup every 20 years, i.e. four iterations. The Summer and Winter Olympics were held in the same year, every four years through 1992 before they moved to alternating every two years.
2. The Summer Olympic Games (Tokyo 2020), which were held in 2021, and the Winter Olympic Games (Beijing 2022) occurred without spectators.
3. At the time of independence, original negotiations envisaged a nine-member United Arab Emirate (UAE) federation to include Bahrain and Qatar.
4. Asada, Matthew. "The Journey to Expo 2020 Dubai and Its Legacy." *Foreign Service Journal*, May 2023, 53-60 (2023). <https://afsa.org/journey-expo-2020-dubai-and-its-legacy>.

5. <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/event/global-mega-events-expo-dubai-world-cup-qatar>. <https://youtu.be/IAMTYhv4XMM> Website and YouTube video accessed June 6, 2023.
6. See *Qatar and the 2022 FIFA World Cup: Politics, Controversy, Change*. Paul Brannigan and Daniel Reiche (2022).
7. This statement is based on the author's analysis of Expo 2020 communications. The author was unable to find an academic analysis similar to Brannigan and Reiche (2022) for Expo 2020 Dubai.
8. See *The Ugly Game: The Qatari Plot to Buy the World Cup*. Heidi Blake and Jonathan Calvert (2015).
9. Argentina was unable to deliver the event due to its financial crisis.
10. Observation from the author's own involvement in the United States' Expo 2023 campaign, which included attendance at several BIE General Assemblies.
11. See *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*. John Findling and Kimberly Pelle ed. (2008).
12. See *Shaping China's Global Imagination: Branding Nations at the World Expo*. Jay Wang (2013).
13. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MouGKZ39Q7s> - First FIFA 2022 Bid Video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaaj6AfE0Jc> - Second FIFA 2022 Bid Video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNi_L-TEN44 -

Final FIFA 2022 Bid Video. Videos accessed February 20, 2023.

14. Expo 2020 Dubai riffed on this line in their theme song "This is our Time."
15. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnhnOsnpGFw> - Expo 2020 Dubai Bid Video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=On9Ct7YsP_Y - Expo 2020 Dubai Bid Video "the Journey"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hIOXHe9HXA> - Expo 2020 Dubai Final Report. Videos accessed February 20, 2023.
16. The Dubai Tourism Vision 2020 strategy was launched in 2013, after winning the rights to host the Expo, as a roadmap to attract 20 million annual tourists to Dubai by the year 2020. See <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/strategies-plans-and-visions-until-2021/dubai-tourism-strategy-2020> accessed June 14, 2023.
17. Bid dossier note and emphasis on "knowledge creation" from conversation with Expo 2020 Dubai official.
18. Author conversation with Expo 2020 official. See Expo 2020 Dubai Final Report video for BIE Secretary General comment.
19. Most recent host countries of the men's soccer World Cup (Russia, Brazil, South Africa, Germany, Korea/Japan) and Expo (Kazakhstan, Italy, Korea, China, Spain, Japan).

20. The award-winning Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava designed the UAE and Qatar pavilions at Expo 2020.
21. In the case of Expo 2020 Dubai, they went above and beyond past organizers through their partnership with Assouline, a luxury book publisher, that released eight volumes, including an oversized 16" x 19" 240-page \$1,200 edition.
22. In 2018, soccer's international governing body, FIFA, announced that FIFA 2022 would take place during the European winter, rather than its traditional summer timeframe, due to the region's extreme heat.
23. The ICC Prosecutor's office subsequently issued a media statement referencing the GCC rift "At no time did the Prosecutor express a position on the current situation in the sub-region." <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-office-prosecutor-regarding-recent-visit-prosecutor-doha-qatar> accessed June 21, 2023.
24. BIE member states approved Qatar's extraordinary request, and in 2020 unanimously approved Qatar's request to delay the horticultural expo by one year due to COVID.
25. "Leaked Documents Expose Stunning Plan to Wage Financial War on Qatar—and Steal the World Cup" article by Ryan Grim and Ben Walsh for the Intercept. November 9, 2017. <https://theintercept.com/2017/11/09/uae-qatar-oitaba-rowland-banque-havilland-world-cup> accessed June 21, 2023.

26. "Gulf Rivalries and the Qatar World Cup" report by Simon Henderson for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. November 17, 2022. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/gulf-rivalries-and-qatar-world-cup> accessed June 21, 2023.
27. On June 19, 2023, the UAE and Qatar resumed full diplomatic relations, re-opening their embassies in the respective capitals.
28. One of the early infrastructure casualties was the Russian bombing and destruction of the Ukrainian Antonov airplane, the world's largest commercial cargo aircraft. Expo 2020 commissioned the Antonov to transport the three 21-meter-tall carbon fiber welcome gates.
29. While the United States suspended diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and closed its embassy in Kabul following the Taliban's takeover, in November 2021, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the United States' diplomatic interests in Afghanistan would be represented by Qatar. <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-qatari-deputy-prime-minister-and-minister-of-foreign-affairs-mohammed-bin-abdulrahman-al-thani-at-a-signing-ceremony-and-joint-press-availability-for-the-u-s-qatar-str> accessed June 21, 2023.
30. See Brannagan and Reiche (2022).
31. Expo 2020 Dubai built a memorial on the grounds to the workers who built the World's Fair.

32. "A Stadium Mural Celebrated Migrant Workers. When the World Cup Began, It Was Gone." Article by Tariq Panja. November 28, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/28/sports/soccer/mural-migrant-workers-world-cup.html> accessed June 21, 2023.
33. <https://www.moec.gov.ae/en/-/en/year-of-tolerance-1> accessed June 14, 2023.
34. At Expo 2000 in Hanover, Germany, the Protestant and Catholic Churches had built a "Christ Pavilion" on the Expo grounds.
35. Interestingly, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is establishing its first temple in the Middle East at Expo City. "Mormon church plans first Middle East temple near Expo City Dubai." Article by Ramola Talwar Badam for the National. December 11, 2022. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/heritage/2022/12/12/mormon-church-plans-first-gulf-temple-near-expo-city-dubai> accessed June 21, 2023.
36. "Peril and privilege: gay expat nightlife in Dubai" article by Ryan Center. September 7, 2021. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/research/research-for-the-world/society/peril-and-privilege-gay-expat-nightlife-in-dubai> accessed June 21, 2023.
"Confusion, exasperation and dating apps—my month as a gay reporter at the Qatar World Cup" article by Adam Crafton. December 22, 2022 <https://theathletic.com/4021651/2022/12/22/gay-lgbt-world-cup-qatar> accessed June 21, 2023.
37. "LGBTQ is not acceptable in our religion" article by Paul Ronzheimer for Bild Zeitung November 30, 2022 <https://www.bild.de/politik/international/>

- bild-international/qatars-energy-minister-lgbtq-is-not-acceptable-in-our-religion-82105274.bild.html accessed June 21, 2023.
38. "Queer Qataris and the World Cup: A Critique of the Western Media Storm" article published in My.Kali webzine January 21, 2023. <https://storage.googleapis.com/qurium/mykalimag.com/en-2023-01-21-queer-qataris-and-the-world-cup-a-critique-of-the-western-media-storm.html> accessed June 21, 2023.
 39. "Dubai puts alcohol tax on ice as it competes for tourists, expats" article by Bryan Pietsch New York Times January 3, 2023 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/03/dubai-alcohol-tax-license-prices> accessed June 21, 2023.
 40. For a review of the Expo 2020 Dubai experience, see Cull, Nicholas J. The Greatest Show on Earth? Considering Expo 2020, Dubai. *Place Brand Public Diplomacy* 18, 49–51 (2022). For a review of the FIFA 2022 Doha experience, see Culpepper, Chuck. "In a nation of guest workers, the world showed up at Qatar's World Cup." Washington Post, December 20, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2022/12/20/qatar-guest-worker-world-cup-fans> accessed June 21, 2023. See also Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. Qatar's Successful World Cup Signals a New Era in the Gulf and Beyond, Arab Center Blog, January 5, 2023. <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/qatars-successful-world-cup-signals-a-new-era-in-the-gulf-and-beyond> accessed June 21, 2023.
 41. "One Month On: 5 billion engaged with the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022" FIFA Press Release January 18, 2023 <https://www.fifa.com/tournaments/mens/worldcup/>

qatar2022/news/one-month-on-5-billion-engaged-with-the-fifa-world-cup-qatar-2022-tm accessed June 21, 2023.

42. The 2026 and future editions of the World Cup will have 48 teams participating.
43. This is based on author's involvement in Expo 2020 Dubai and conversations with his State Department colleagues that were involved with FIFA 2022 Doha.
44. "Japan learns from Expo 2020 Dubai as it looks to Expo 2025 Osaka Kansai" press release from Expo 2020 Dubai on March 21, 2022 <https://www.expo2020dubai.com/en/news/japan-learns-from-expo2020> accessed June 21, 2023.
45. During the Expo, on January 1, 2021, the UAE took advantage of the world's attention to change the official workweek to Monday-Friday, away from the traditional Islamic calendar.
46. COP 28 (November 30 - December 12, 2023) takes place in the middle of Qatar's horticultural Expo (October 2, 2023 - March 28, 2024).
47. There has been some speculation about a joint 2036 Olympic bid between Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

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