

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy in the Yemen Conflict (2011–2024)

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Abstract

In the discipline of International Relations, the "emotional turn" has challenged the traditional assumption of state rationality by foregrounding how emotions shape not only the perceptions of policymakers but also the collective identity of states. From this perspective, foreign policy is not merely a product of material interests or strategic constraints; it is also an expression of how states feel. This study investigates the emotional foundations of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy during the Yemen conflict (2011–2024), arguing that emotions—rather than material rationality alone—shaped Riyadh's strategic behavior. Drawing on Markwica's Logic of Emotion and an extensive discourse analysis of official speeches, coalition statements, and state-aligned media, the article identifies four dominant affective drivers: fear, pride, anger, and humiliation. The findings reveal that fear of Iranian encirclement triggered the 2015 intervention, pride sustained Saudi leadership narratives, anger fueled escalation during periods of military stalemate, and humiliation after 2019 facilitated diplomatic recalibration. The study contributes to psychological constructivism by demonstrating how emotions become institutionalized in state discourse and operate as causal mechanisms in foreign policy decision-making. The article concludes that Saudi Arabia's Yemen strategy cannot be understood without recognizing its affective logic, which shaped not only policy outcomes but also the kingdom's evolving regional identity.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Yemen, foreign policy, emotions, constructivism, Middle East.

Introduction

Since the eruption of the Arab uprisings in 2011, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy has undergone a profound transformation, reflecting the kingdom's growing ambition to assert itself as the principal arbiter of regional order in the Arab world. Nowhere has this transformation been more visible than in its intervention in Yemen—a conflict that has evolved from a limited security concern into a protracted geopolitical and humanitarian crisis. While mainstream interpretations often frame Riyadh's behavior in terms of rational calculations of power, security, and deterrence, such analyses fall short of capturing the deeper psychological and affective forces that have animated Saudi decision-making throughout the Yemen conflict. This study therefore seeks to illuminate the emotional foundations of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, situating the Yemen war within a broader logic of affect that intertwines identity, perception, and power.

In the discipline of International Relations, the "emotional turn" has challenged the traditional assumption of state rationality by foregrounding how emotions—such as fear, anger, pride, and humiliation—shape not only the perceptions of policymakers but also the collective identity of states. From this perspective, foreign policy is not merely a product of material interests or strategic constraints; it is also an expression of how states feel about themselves and others within a social and historical context. Saudi Arabia, as the self-proclaimed guardian of Arab and Islamic legitimacy, has long linked its external behavior to narratives of dignity, prestige, and moral leadership. These emotional self-conceptions have become particularly salient in moments of perceived threat or defiance, where the preservation of honor and identity overrides the cold calculus of material interests.

The Yemen conflict represents a critical arena in which Saudi Arabia's affective motivations have been projected and contested. The 2015 intervention, launched under the banner of "Operation Decisive Storm," was not solely a response to strategic encirclement or Iranian expansion. It was also an emotionally charged act driven by fear of losing regional primacy, anger at the symbolic challenge posed by the Ansarollah movement, and pride in the kingdom's self-image as the defender of Arab order. Over time, however, the protracted nature of the war and its humanitarian toll have produced feelings of frustration and humiliation, revealed the limits of coercive power when detached from political empathy and strategic restraint.

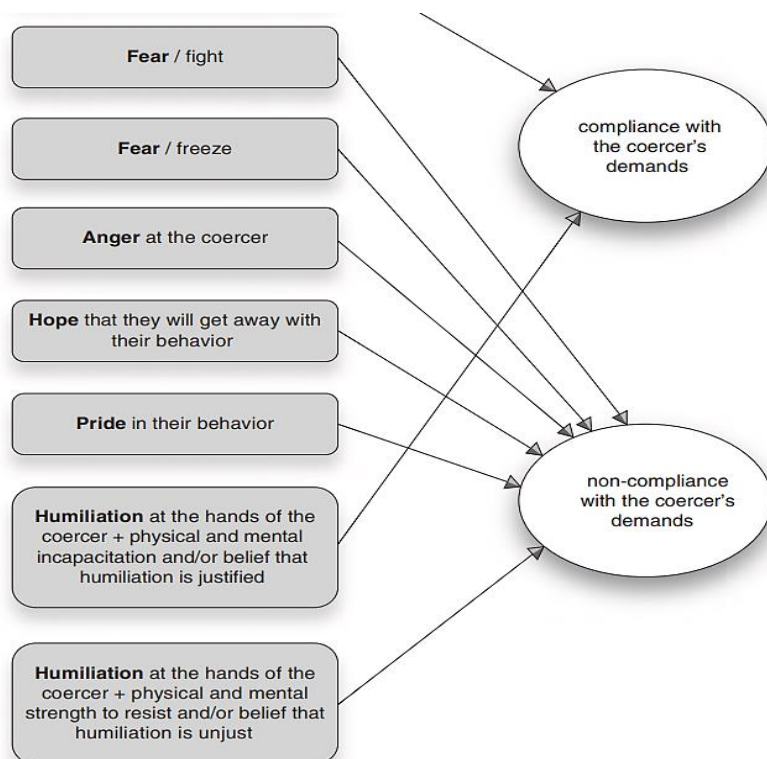
Analyzing Saudi Arabia's engagement in Yemen through the lens of emotion thus allows for a more nuanced understanding of both the persistence and contradictions of its foreign policy. Ultimately, the article argues that acknowledging the affective dimensions of Saudi Arabia's policy toward Yemen is essential for understanding the endurance of its interventionist posture despite mounting costs and international criticism. The emotional resonance of leadership, threat, and humiliation has sustained a logic of confrontation that transcends rationalist models of strategic calculation. Situating this analysis within the framework of psychological constructivism, the study aims to advance theoretical discussions on the role of emotions in state behavior while offering an empirically grounded interpretation of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy in one of the most consequential conflicts of the post-Arab Uprising era.

1. Theoretical Framework

Traditional theories of International Relations (IR)—such as Realism and Liberal Institutionalism—conceptualize states as rational actors that pursue clearly defined interests in an anarchic system. These frameworks assume that political behavior is primarily the product of strategic calculation, cost–benefit assessment, and material capabilities (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001; Keohane & Nye, 1977). Emotions, as transient and subjective phenomena, have thus been systematically excluded from mainstream theorizing. From the realist viewpoint, emotions are considered irrational and unpredictable, while for liberalism they are largely irrelevant to institutional cooperation and economic interdependence. Yet, this "rationalist orthodoxy" has faced increasing criticism for its inability to explain why states often act against seemingly objective interests, escalate conflicts unnecessarily, or sustain costly foreign policies driven by moral or identity-based imperatives (Crawford, 2000; Mercer, 2005). The rise of constructivism in the 1990s partially addressed this gap by emphasizing that international politics is socially constructed through intersubjective meanings, identities, and norms rather than determined solely by material power (Wendt, 1992). Constructivists argue that states act based on who they believe they are and how they perceive others. However, even constructivism, in its conventional form, has treated emotions as secondary to identity—as reflections of social meaning rather than as autonomous causal forces (Bleiker & Hutchison, 2008). Psychological constructivism

advances the argument that state identities are not only cognitive and normative but also affective. Emotions are embedded within collective self-conceptions and shape how states interpret threats, allies, and moral obligations. According to Hymans (2010), without acknowledging the emotional undercurrents of identity, explanations of foreign policy remain incomplete and superficial. Emotions—such as fear, pride, humiliation, and anger—mediate between perception and action, transforming social meanings into political conduct.

Within this intellectual evolution, Robin Markwica's (2018) theory of the "Logic of Emotion" provides one of the most refined frameworks for analyzing affective decision-making in foreign policy. Building on both sociological and psychological insights, Markwica identifies three distinct logics that guide human and state behavior: the logic of consequences (rational choice), the logic of appropriateness (normative behavior), and the logic of emotion. The logic of consequences assumes actors make strategic calculations to maximize utility; the logic of appropriateness suggests actors conform to social norms and role expectations; and the logic of emotion posits that feelings—such as fear, anger, hope, or shame—constitute a separate and equally powerful source of action (Markwica, 2018, pp. 3–7). Under the logic of emotion, decisions are not made through detached reasoning but are filtered through the emotional states that shape perception, evaluation, and motivation. Emotions operate as cognitive appraisals that ascribe meaning to events and actors. Emotional mechanisms are not merely psychological reactions but socially produced patterns embedded in identity narratives, historical memories, and political discourse (Ross, 2006). Markwica (2018) identifies four categories of emotional indicators observable in foreign policy behavior: explicit emotional expressions (use of emotional vocabulary in official discourse); implicit discursive cues (symbols, metaphors, and narratives carrying affective meaning); cognitive indicators (patterns of reasoning and framing that reveal emotional appraisal); and behavioral indicators (tangible actions such as threats, alliances, or sanctions expressing emotional intent).



Source: (Markwica, 2018: 19)

Figure (1): How the Five Key Emotions Shape Target Leaders' Decision-Making

These indicators allow researchers to trace how emotions become manifest in diplomatic rhetoric, decision-making, and international conduct. They also facilitate empirical analysis of how emotions shape state strategies and inter-state relations beyond the narrow confines of rational calculation. Markwica begins by categorizing the emotions that play a role in international politics. In his framework, five core emotions—fear, anger, hope, pride, and humiliation—constitute the primary affective drivers of political leaders engaged in coercive diplomacy. Each of these emotions possesses its own distinct appraisal tendencies, action tendencies, and cognitive orientations, all of which shape how leaders interpret situations and ultimately make decisions.

Table (1): Core Emotions and Their Appraisal, Cognitive, and Action Tendencies in Coercive Diplomacy

Emotion	Definition	Action Tendencies	Cognitive Tendencies	Illustrative Example
Fear	A response to a perceived threat combined with a sense of limited control over outcomes.	Flight, freezing, or pre-emptive attack; avoidance of risk.	Focus on threat cues; negative assessment of one's ability to manage the situation.	The United States' pre-emptive attack on Iraq in 2003.
Anger	A reaction to perceived norm violation, injustice, or humiliation accompanied by a sense of power.	Desire to punish; aggressive responses; rapid decision-making.	Optimistic risk assessment; heightened confidence in capacity to retaliate.	Saudi Arabia's reaction to Qatar during the 2017 crisis.
Hope	The belief that a positive change is achievable through alternative pathways or negotiated solutions.	Persistent pursuit of goals; efforts to revise or improve conditions.	Emphasis on opportunities rather than threats; search for compromise.	Diplomatic engagement between Iran and the United States during the JCPOA negotiations.
Pride	A feeling of elevated self-worth derived from status, honor, or collective identity.	Symbolic displays of strength; avoidance of concessions; assertion of dignity.	Strong desire to maintain face and uphold national or identity-based prestige.	China's behavior toward Taiwan.
Humiliation	An experience of status loss, disrespect, or perceived injustice in international relations.	Withdrawal, retaliatory behavior, or attempts to restore dignity.	Persistent focus on unfair treatment; sensitivity to status degradation.	Germany's aggressive policies after World War I.

Source: (Markwica, 2018)

The second step in Markwica's approach to inferring emotions concerns the extraction of emotional indicators from textual material. According to Markwica, emotions can be identified by locating signals that carry or encode affective content. He thus develops a four-fold typology of emotional indicators consisting of explicit, implicit, cognitive, and behavioral cues (Markwica, 2018, p. 98). The first category includes explicit indicators—direct references to emotions expressed through affective terminology. Markwica distinguishes between two types of emotional terms: descriptive and figurative. Descriptive emotional terms explicitly specify an emotion and are therefore easily identifiable through textual emotion analysis. These include nouns such as anger, sadness, or hatred; verbs such as to hope, to fear, or to worry; and adjectives such as proud, afraid, or angry (Markwica, 2018, p. 100). The second category encompasses implicit emotional cues—signals embedded within discourse that imply affective states without naming them directly. Drawing on discourse-based analysis, such indicators can be conceptualized as central signifiers (Kleres, 2011, p. 194). These signifiers often relate to themes that are affectively charged: physical or psychological threat (fear), obstruction, disrespect, or insult (anger), aspiration toward a valued goal (hope), assumption of responsibility for an important social or personal outcome (pride), experiences of degradation or shame (humiliation) (Markwica, 2018, p. 101). The third and fourth categories refer to cognitive and behavioral indicators, which extend beyond the textual level and focus instead on how actors think and behave. For example, in the case of anger, cognitive indicators may include: increased confidence in one's ability to control the situation; heightened sense of power and invulnerability; optimistic risk assessment; reduced attention to argument quality; and reliance on superficial cues. Behavioral indicators of anger, in turn, may involve: aggressive or confrontational rhetoric; demanding compensation or retribution; directly confronting the perceived source of anger; and attempts to remove obstacles or punish the offender (Markwica, 2018, p. 102).

Table (2): Types of Emotional Indicators and Their Analytical Characteristics

Type of Emotional Indicator	Definition	Analytical Feature	Example
Explicit	Direct words or	Identifiable at the	Threatening

Type of Emotional Indicator	Definition	Analytical Feature	Example
	phrases carrying explicit emotional meaning	linguistic level without requiring deep interpretation	language, national pride, expressions of disrespect
Implicit	Indirect affective signals embedded in speech style, metaphors, or semantic structures	Requires discourse analysis to uncover underlying emotional meaning	“They brought us to our knees,” “They silenced the voice of the nation”
Cognitive	Subjective evaluations of threats, opportunities, self, and others	Directly connected to decision-making and policymakers’ perception	Depicting the enemy as an imminent or unjust threat
Behavioral	Political or symbolic actions that reflect emotional states	Complements textual indicators and appears at the behavioral level	Severing diplomatic relations, summoning ambassadors, harsh diplomatic reactions

Source: (Markwica, 2018)

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research design aimed at uncovering the emotional dimensions of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy toward Yemen between 2011 and 2024. Given the complex, multi-layered nature of emotions and their embeddedness in language, identity, and perception, a purely quantitative approach would be insufficient. Instead, the study draws upon an interpretivist paradigm that seeks to understand how meanings, emotions, and discourses co-constitute foreign policy behavior (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 35). Within this framework, emotions are treated not as measurable variables but as contextual phenomena that can be inferred from discourse, symbolism, and policy action. The methodological foundation of this article is based on Robin Markwica's (2018) model of emotional analysis, which identifies four analytical layers through which emotions can be detected in foreign policy: explicit emotional expressions, implicit discursive cues, cognitive indicators, and behavioral manifestations. This model is operationalized within a psychological constructivist

framework, integrating the interpretive logic of social meaning with the affective dimension of human behavior (Hymans, 2006; Ross, 2006). The key assumption is that emotional states are socially produced and politically expressed through discourse and diplomatic practice. Accordingly, this study investigates how Saudi officials and state media have articulated, performed, and reproduced specific emotions—such as fear, pride, anger, and humiliation—in relation to the Yemen conflict.

The empirical foundation of this research relies on secondary qualitative data drawn from a triangulated set of sources to ensure both breadth and depth of interpretation. These include official Saudi government statements and speeches delivered by the King, Crown Prince, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs between 2011 and 2024; press releases and communiqués from the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen; content published in Saudi state-affiliated media outlets (Al-Arabiya, Saudi Press Agency, Okaz, Asharq Al-Awsat); diplomatic documents and UN Security Council briefings related to the Yemen conflict; and scholarly analyses and regional policy reports by think tanks such as the Gulf Research Center and Carnegie Middle East. The dataset consists of 100 official texts, speeches, interviews, and statements delivered by 15 high-ranking Saudi officials between 2015 and 2024. These discourses were collected from official sources, international media outlets, and Saudi state broadcasters.

The study employs a combination of discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis, techniques particularly suited for examining the interplay between language, emotion, and power. This method interprets how emotional meaning is produced and circulated through political language. By examining key metaphors, moral frames, and identity constructions in Saudi official discourse, the study identifies the affective logics underpinning policy justifications. For example, the invocation of "defending Arab legitimacy" or "countering betrayal" reflects both pride and anger as organizing emotions in Saudi rhetoric. The emotional analysis process in this research is based on the "Affective Discourse Analysis" approach, inspired by Markwica's (2018) logic of affect framework. Within this approach, emotions are not regarded as individual or psychological states, but rather as social-discursive mechanisms that play a crucial role in the production of meaning and the reproduction of political power. Accordingly, the data coding process in this study was conducted across three analytical levels: the linguistic level, the semantic-conceptual level, and the

discursive-narrative level.

At the linguistic level, lexical choices, metaphors, and syntactic structures were examined to identify explicit emotional markers. This stage involved extracting words and expressions that directly carry emotional connotations, such as "sacred defense," "threat," "courage," "enemy," "brotherhood," and "peace." At the semantic-conceptual level, the underlying content and semantic networks within the discourse were analyzed to uncover the internal linkages between emotional words and conceptual themes. For instance, when terms such as "defense," "sanctities," and "support for legitimacy" co-occur frequently in speeches, they form a semantic framework of "righteous and dutiful anger." Additionally, the relational dichotomy between "self" and "other" was extracted from Saudi foreign policy discourse, wherein the Self is represented as a responsible and sovereign state while the Other (e.g., Ansar Allah or Iran) is depicted as a threatening force. At the discursive-narrative level, the focus was placed on the macro-narrative structures and the organization of emotions over time to understand the overarching logic of emotional transitions—from anger to hope, or from threat to peace.

Following data collection, the texts were systematically coded through open, axial, and selective coding. The unit of analysis was each independent semantic unit (sentence, clause, or paragraph) containing an explicit or implicit reference to Yemen or Ansar Allah. The emotional intensity of each statement was assessed on a three-point scale (low, moderate, high), and emotions were classified into five main categories: anger, fear, pride, compassion, and hope. Emotional expressions were also categorized according to their temporal and political context (e.g., onset of war, consolidation of conflict, onset of negotiations) to trace the evolution of affective dynamics over time.

3. Findings: An Emotional Perspective

A systematic analysis of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy discourse and behavior toward Yemen between 2015 and 2025 reveals that political emotions have occupied a central role in the Kingdom's decision-making, legitimacy-building, and strategic behavior. Drawing on both explicit emotional indicators—such as emotional words, metaphors, and propositions in official speeches—and cognitive-behavioral indicators—such as observable actions, military operations, and diplomatic initiatives—this study identifies four dominant emotional clusters that have shaped Saudi policy

over the course of the conflict: hostile-security emotion associated with threat, aggression, defensive legitimacy, and terrorism; paternal and protective emotion expressed through assistance, reconstruction, Arab brotherhood, and compassion toward the Yemeni people; national pride and civilizational superiority emotion centered on Saudi Arabia's leadership role in the Arab world; and peace-oriented and image-restoration emotion emerging in recent years parallel to Riyadh's broader regional policy shifts.

The emotion of anger and fear has constituted the central axis of hostile emotion toward Yemen since the launch of Operation Decisive Storm in March 2015. Terms such as "revolution," "revolutionaries," "terrorism," and "Iranian threat" frequently appeared in official Saudi statements during this period. In one of his earliest public remarks, Saud al-Faisal asserted that "there is no solution other than rejecting the Houthi [Ansarollah] coup" (Faisal, 2015). This statement carried a strong emotional charge, framing the "coup" not merely as a political event but as a moral transgression and a threat to legitimate order. Saudi Arabia positioned itself from the outset as the "defender," with al-Faisal declaring, "We did not start this war, but we are prepared for it" (Faisal, 2015). This combination of restrained anger with a sense of defensive duty shifted the Saudi discourse from "aggression" to "protection of legitimacy." In subsequent years, this hostile effect intensified in the rhetoric of Saudi military officials such as Ahmed al-Asiri and Turki al-Maliki. In 2015, al-Asiri stated that "what matters to the coalition is the Houthis' [Ansarollah] actions, not their words" (al-Asiri, 2016), reflecting not only deep-seated mistrust but also the emotion of enemy contempt. Al-Asiri's additional claim that "the Houthis [Ansarollah] have turned hotels, schools, and hospitals into weapons depots" (al-Asiri, 2015) invoked moral outrage, serving to justify continued military operations. Similarly, expressions such as "the Houthis [Ansarollah] showed no respect for the sanctity of Mecca nor for human conscience" (al-Jubeir, 2016) evoked the emotion of sacrilege, blending religious anger with national sentiment to mobilize public feelings and reinforce Saudi Arabia's image as the defender of the Two Holy Mosques.

Beyond explicit discourse, Saudi Arabia's behavior during the early years of the conflict exhibited pronounced emotional indicators. The concentration of airstrikes on Sana'a and northern regions—the symbolic core of the Ansarollah movement—was driven less by strict military necessity than by a logic of symbolic revenge. The bombing of the presidential palace, training camps,

and affiliated media outlets conveyed a message beyond tactical objectives: the expression of Saudi anger at the challenge to its Arab leadership. Coalition spokesperson Ahmed Asiri asserted that "we will not allow the Houthis [Ansarollah] to dominate Yemen; there will be no peace unless their military wing is destroyed" (al-Asiri, 2016). Such statements express an exclusive understanding of security and peace while emotionally reflecting fear of disorder and anger over weakened authority. According to Markwica's model, the fusion of these emotions often produces actions that are simultaneously deterrent and performative—precisely what characterized Saudi Arabia's air campaign. Continued airstrikes on urban areas and economic blockades can be interpreted as the persistence of anger-driven behavior to regain political control, with each escalation accompanied by emotionally charged rhetoric. In 2018, responding to Ansarollah missile attacks on Riyadh, Mohammed bin Salman stated that "the Houthis' [Ansarollah] missiles are their last desperate attempts" (bin Salman, 2018). The term "desperate" reflects a transition from anger to victorious confidence—the transformation of fear into pride.

Alongside hostile emotions, Saudi discourse has also employed supportive and paternal emotions, representing Yemen not as an enemy but as a "misguided brother" or a "nation in need of support." This paternal sentiment draws upon the long-standing Saudi rhetoric of Arab unity and guardianship toward weaker Arab neighbors. In 2016, Adel al-Jubeir stated at the onset of the Yemen war that "the Houthis [Ansarollah] are part of Yemen's social fabric" (al-Jubeir, 2016), conveying a subtle recognition of shared identity—a paternal empathy implying, "We still consider you one of us." The repeated use of terms such as "reconstruction," "development," "stability," and "support for the Yemeni people" (al-Jaber, 2019) reinforces a positive, paternal emotional tone that seeks to soften the image of war beneath a veneer of care and compassion. However, this paternal affection operates within clearly defined boundaries: support remains legitimate only as long as Yemen remains within Saudi Arabia's strategic orbit. When al-Jaber asserts that "the Houthis [Ansarollah] are calling the Yemeni people to die for Iran" (al-Jaber, 2019), he reestablishes the emotional border between "Arab brotherhood" and "Iranian betrayal." From this perspective, Saudi paternalism derives meaning only in relation to a rebellious offspring—love intertwined with reprimand.

The emotion of national pride and civilizational superiority constitutes the third affective axis, evident across much of Saudi

officials' discourse. From the outset of the crisis, Saudi narratives sought to frame the Yemen war not merely as a bilateral dispute but as a stage for demonstrating the "leadership power of the Arab world." Saud al-Faisal repeatedly emphasized that "Yemen's security is inseparable from the security of the Gulf" (Faisal, 2015). Mohammed bin Salman, in multiple interviews, spoke of the "decisive power and capability of Saudi Arabia," asserting that "we could end the battle in a few days, but we do not want civilians to be harmed" (bin Salman, 2017). This utterance fuses the pride of power and humanitarian compassion to produce an image of a "strong but benevolent" leadership. Pride functions not as mere arrogance but as a political instrument used to consolidate Saudi Arabia's regional status. At the military register, officials such as Ahmed al-Asiri and Turki al-Maliki frequently invoked claims of near-total control, referring to the coalition's capacity to achieve air superiority and to "neutralize 95% of the Houthis' [Ansarollah] capabilities" (al-Asiri, 2015). Statements like "we will not become enraged, but if we do, it will be painful" (al-Maliki, 2022) theatrically perform national gravitas: a calm exterior that nonetheless signals retaliatory capacity and deterrent strength. Saudi national pride also manifests as moral superiority, with assertions such as "this coalition does not target civilians and adheres to strict rules of engagement" (al-Bunyan, 2017) aiming to morally distinguish Saudi "legitimate war" from what is depicted as the "inhuman violence" of Ansar Allah.

In recent years—particularly since 2020—a notable shift in the tone of Saudi discourse on Yemen has occurred. Where the early years of the war were dominated by anger and threat, later stages saw the emergence of vocabulary centered on "peace," "dialogue," "settlement," and "ceasefire." Adel al-Jubeir stated that "all Yemenis, including the Houthis [Ansarollah], have a role in Yemen's future, and the only feasible solution is political" (al-Jubeir, 2020), indicating a movement from hostile affect to an effect of empathy. This transformation can be understood as a form of restorative affect aimed at reconstructing Saudi Arabia's international image following extensive humanitarian criticism of the war. Faisal bin Farhan stated: "We are seeking a comprehensive and durable ceasefire in Yemen" (Farhan, 2022), adding that "this requires the Ansarollah to understand that Yemen's interests lie in dialogue and peace." Even within the military discourse, Turki al-Maliki spoke of "reopening humanitarian corridors" and "ensuring the security of international navigation" (al-Maliki, 2022), signaling

a discursive pivot from war to order and peace. Concurrently, traces of implicit remorse can be found in some statements. Adel al-Jubeir admitted in an interview with the BBC that "perhaps we did not engage sufficiently with others" (al-Jubeir, 2018), a rare self-critical remark within Saudi official discourse. At the cognitive-behavioral level, Saudi Arabia's protracted war, mounting humanitarian pressures, and diminished U.S. support prompted a cognitive reassessment of the crisis. In April 2021, the Crown Prince declared: "The Houthis [Ansarollah] are Yemeni, they are Arab, and we hope they return to the negotiating table" (bin Salman, 2021). This statement represents a pivotal moment in the affective evolution of Saudi policy, where prior feelings of anger give way to compassion and a desire to rebuild human relations. In an interview with Fox News in September 2023, the Crown Prince emphasized: "The time has come to end the war and reconstruct Yemen; we do not want problems from Yemen to reach us" (bin Salman, 2023), embodying a dual affective orientation: a desire for peace coupled with a sense of moral responsibility.

Overall, the analysis of explicit and implicit affects in Saudi official discourse on Yemen reveals a trajectory from sacred anger and security hostility at the outset, toward paternal support and conditional reconciliation in recent years. Emotions here are not merely personal states but strategic tools: Saudis have mobilized anger to legitimize war, compassion to justify aid, pride to consolidate leadership, and appeals to peace to rehabilitate their international standing. This finding underscores that in Saudi foreign policy logic, affect and rationality are not oppositional but intertwined; emotions play a decisive role in shaping the language of policy, the architecture of meaning, and the strategies of legitimation. Within this framework, the concept of "strategic affect" functions as a central analytical tool, denoting situations in which political actors express emotions not merely spontaneously but in a guided and purposeful manner to convey a specific message to domestic and international audiences. The cognitive-behavioral indicators of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy toward Yemen between 2015 and 2025 can be categorized into four primary types: military and deterrent actions (such as Operation Decisive Storm, sieges, and airstrikes); coalitional and performative actions (such as the formation of the Arab Coalition and regional joint meetings); diplomatic and redefinition-oriented actions (such as peace plan announcements and dialogues with Iran and Oman); and discursive-symbolic actions (such as official statements and speeches drawing on collective affect).

Conclusion

A systematic analysis of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy discourse toward Yemen between 2015 and 2025 demonstrates that political emotions have occupied a central, rather than peripheral, role in the Kingdom's decision-making and legitimacy-building processes. Contrary to traditional perspectives that view politics purely through the lens of rationality, this study reveals that emotions embedded in Saudi officials' speech—from anger and anxiety to compassion, pride, and hope—constitute an integral mechanism of meaning-making in foreign policy. At an analytical level, the emotional evolution of Saudi discourse on Yemen can be summarized in three distinct stages. The first stage, spanning from 2015 to 2018, coincides with the launch of Operation Decisive Storm, during which Saudi rhetoric was saturated with terms such as "aggression," "coup," "Iranian threat," and "defense of legitimacy." The dominant effect during this stage was moral anger coupled with existential fear. Saudi Arabia positioned itself as a victim of aggression and guardian of legitimate order. Anger functioned as a mobilizing force, enabling the state to organize domestic public opinion and Arab allies around the perceived "Ansarollah-Iranian threat." The second stage, covering the period from 2018 to 2020, marked a shift in Saudi official discourse from anger toward "moral authority" and "regional responsibility." Lexical markers such as "Arab brotherhood," "aid to the Yemeni people," "reconstruction," and "Saudi leadership role" became prominent. During this period, the Kingdom sought to distance itself from the image of a "warmonger" and replace it with that of a "benevolent leader." The prevailing effect was pride, reflecting a sense of power in the role of protector and custodian. The third stage, from 2020 to 2025, has witnessed a softening of Saudi rhetoric toward Yemen alongside regional policy developments and decreased tensions with Iran. Terms such as "ceasefire," "dialogue," "shared future," and "political solution" have gradually replaced earlier wartime concepts. This transformation signals a transition from anger to "caretaking hope"—a hope still framed within conditions and control, such as the provision that the Ansarollah lay down their arms. Collectively, this evolution indicates that emotions in Saudi discourse are shaped by strategic developments rather than being merely reactive or incidental factors. Initially, feelings of threat and anxiety over Iranian influence generated defensive anger; subsequently, during the consolidation of war, pride and paternalism became instruments of moral legitimacy; and finally, in the recent phase, hope and

peace-orientation have been employed to rebuild international reputation and facilitate new regional engagement. From a theoretical standpoint, these findings demonstrate that emotions and political identity are co-constitutive in Saudi foreign policy. By leveraging emotional language, the Kingdom has been able to represent its role sequentially as "legitimate defender," "moral leader," and finally "peace mediator." This process exemplifies what the theoretical literature terms "affective management of power" (Markwica, 2018, p. 263)—the deliberate use of emotion to shape political perceptions at both domestic and international levels.

**Table (4): Emotional Patterns in Saudi Foreign Policy Discourse
Toward Yemen 2015-2024**

Row	Emotional axis	Type of emotion	Linguistic and metaphorical features	Proposition or speech pattern	Political and discursive function
1	Hostile and security	Anger, anxiety, hatred	Words: threat, enemy, terrorism, coup; religious metaphors of (defense of Mecca)	"The Ansarollah are acting like ISIS and Al-Qaeda in terrorism" / "Defending the country and legitimacy"	Legitimizing military intervention; domestic mobilization
2	Fatherly and supportive	Compassion, sympathy, kindness	Keywords: brotherhood, assistance, reconstruction, Arab nation	"Yemen is our brother", "Financial assistance to alleviate people's suffering"	Rebuilding the human and moral image; continuing soft influence
3	National pride and civilizational authority	Pride, self-confidence, power	Vocabulary: power, leadership, decisiveness, discipline	"We can end the war in a few days," "Leadership of the Arab World"	Establishing internal legitimacy and demonstrating leadership ability
4	Peaceful and image-building	Hope, rationality, appeasement	Dialogue, ceasefire, hope, reconciliation	"All Yemenis have a role in the country's future," "The solution is only political"	Restoring international image, transitioning from war to diplomacy
5	Feeling of external threat	Fear, anger, contempt	Vocabulary: interference, sedition, support for rebellion	"Iran has destabilized the region with its interference"	Creating a common enemy, internal cohesion

Source: Research Findings

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