



Identity Discourse Analysis in Foreign Policy: A Comparative Study of Iran, Turkey, and Egypt in the Yemen Crisis

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ABSTRACT

The Yemen crisis, as one of the most complex conflicts in West Asia (or the Middle East) in the past decade, has involved numerous actors. One of the less explored dimensions of this conflict is the role of identity representation and the discursive patterns adopted by the states engaged in it. Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey (also Turkiye), and Egypt each approach the Yemen conflict through their own identity-based narratives and have consequently pursued distinct foreign policy strategies. Accordingly, the central question of this study is: Why have these three countries, when faced with the same crisis, adopted such divergent—and at times contradictory—approaches? The aim of this research is to analyze and compare the identity discourses of Iran, Turkey, and Egypt regarding the Yemen crisis and to examine how these discourses shape their foreign policy behavior. The study assumes that Iran, relying on a “resistance” discourse and supporting aligned groups, seeks to strengthen an anti-hegemonic axis; Turkey, by reviving a “Neo-Ottoman” discourse, aims to redefine itself as a soft power and active mediator in the region; and Egypt, emphasizing “national security and regional stability,” seeks to contain threats and preserve order in its surrounding environment. Based on the qualitative analysis of the study’s data, the findings indicate that the foreign policies of Iran, Turkey, and Egypt toward Yemen are shaped less by purely geopolitical necessities and more by the reproduction of their respective identity discourses. Iran positions itself as the heart of regional resistance; Turkey pursues the revival of its civilizational–historical role as a supra-regional power; and Egypt places primary emphasis on maintaining national stability and safeguarding its peripheral security.

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1. Introduction

Since 2015, the crisis in Yemen has evolved into one of the most complex conflicts in West Asia (or the Middle East). This crisis does not stem solely from domestic roots; rather, it has become an arena for regional and international rivalries. Within this context, three countries—Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey (also *Turkiye*), and Egypt—have each adopted distinct positions and roles based on their unique identity constructions and representations. Examining their foreign policies cannot be sufficiently explained through material calculations or economic-security interests alone; instead, it requires attention to the deeper identity layers that shape how these actors understand themselves and others. In this regard, identity discourse analysis offers an effective tool for understanding how the Yemen crisis is framed within the foreign policy discourses of these three states.

As this study argues Iran interprets the Yemen crisis through the lens of a “resistance” discourse and opposition to Western hegemony and its regional allies, particularly Saudi Arabia. Turkey, drawing on identity markers such as its Ottoman heritage and its self-image as a Muslim and democratic power, seeks to secure a distinctive role in Yemen’s developments. Egypt, emphasizing Arab identity and national security considerations, views this crisis primarily as a threat to the stability of the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. These differences in identity-based interpretations indicate that any analysis of foreign policy that overlooks semantic and identity dimensions remains incomplete and one-dimensional.

Identity discourse analysis facilitates a movement beyond tangible interests and threats, enabling an examination of how the concepts of “self” and “other” are constructed within formal and informal discourses. From this perspective, foreign policy positions are viewed not merely as the outcome of cost-benefit rationality; rather, they are shaped by historical, cultural, and ideological identities activated within foreign policy practices. Consequently, a comparative assessment of the positions of Iran, Turkey, and Egypt on the Yemen crisis from an identity-discourse perspective not only highlights critical differences and similarities but also elucidates the underlying logic informing their respective foreign policy behaviors. The central concern of this study is that the positions and actions of Iran, Turkey, and Egypt regarding the Yemen crisis reflect more than just balances of power or material interests; they are profoundly rooted in political-ideological identities and historical narratives. Iran frames the crisis within the discourse of resistance and opposition to the influence of Saudi Arabia and the United States; Turkey interprets it through a “Neo-Ottoman” discourse aimed at reproducing a regional leadership role; and Egypt, emphasizing Arab identity and concerns over security threats in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, adopts a position that at times aligns with the security order of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The main question, therefore, is how the identity discourses of these three states provide the semantic frameworks that shape their foreign policy toward Yemen and generate divergence or convergence in their behavior.

The importance of this discussion can be assessed on several levels. Theoretically, an identity-discourse approach reveals the limitations of realist and materialist frameworks in foreign policy analysis and highlights the significance of identity, meaning, and representation in explaining state behavior. Practically, understanding how the Yemen crisis is interpreted in

the foreign policies of Iran, Turkey, and Egypt offers clearer insights into regional patterns of competition and cooperation and contributes to forecasting future dynamics in the Middle East. For Iranian policymakers and scholars, this study is especially valuable, as it clarifies how Iran's foreign policy is defined within a field of discursive competition with other regional powers and what implications this has for Iran's regional standing and national security. Accordingly, a comparative analysis of the foreign policies of Iran, Turkey, and Egypt toward Yemen—centered on identity discourse—not only deepens our understanding of the reasons behind their differing positions but also provides a basis for assessing potential future pathways of interaction and confrontation among these actors.

2. Literature Review

works that examine the crisis in Yemen and its various dimensions. For example, Sahraei (2025), in a study titled *"Identifying and Explaining the Key Drivers Influencing the Yemen Crisis,"* argues that there is a significant correlation between the diminishing presence of Saudi Arabia in Yemen and improvements in governance indicators such as the formation of an inclusive government, access to energy resources, and the lifting of sanctions. This implies that a reduced Saudi presence corresponds to a decline in the influence of one of the crisis's most pivotal actors. In another perspective, Maghoumi et al. (2023), in their study *"Geopolitical Interests of Regional Actors in the Yemen Crisis,"* contend that the crisis has prompted the United Arab Emirates to intervene due to its geopolitical ambitions. According to their findings, the UAE has pursued maritime diplomacy in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden with the aim of enhancing its regional and extra-regional standing, investing heavily in Yemen's strategic islands. Finally, Pourdanesh et al. (2022), in a study entitled *Analyzing the Causes of the Persistence of the Yemen Crisis Based on Structuration Theory (2011–2021),* argue that, drawing on Giddens' understanding of structuration, the Yemen crisis can be conceptualized through two poles: structure and agency. From this perspective, elements such as the geopolitical desirability of Yemen's environment for neighboring states reflect structural factors, whereas the impossibility of resolving the crisis without the consent of all actors involved represents agency. Accordingly, they conclude that the crisis can only be resolved if both structural and agential conditions are simultaneously addressed.

For instance, Daraj and Elitaminiya (2020), in a study entitled *"A Constructivist Analysis of the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Toward Political Developments in Yemen,"* argue that, given the prominent role of soft power in Iran's foreign policy, the country seeks to employ this capacity to export the Islamic Revolution and consequently portray Yemen as an idealistic state confronting the Western bloc. In another perspective, Rasouli Sani Abadi (2023), in a study titled *"Foreign Policy Requirements of Iran in Different Types of International Order,"* emphasizes that Iran's foreign policy must pay closer attention to three key elements: institution-driven order, balance-of-power-driven order, and considerations related to hegemony. Finally, Dehghani Firouzabadi and Zabihi (2024), in their work *"Iranology and Iran's Foreign Policy: Capacities and Grounds for Engagement,"* contend that one of the major challenges facing the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran lies in shaping an accurate global image of "Iran" as a subject of

international perception. They argue that Iran's cultural soft power—rooted in Iranology—can significantly assist foreign policy institutions in enhancing this global image.

The third group comprises studies that examine the foreign policy of Turkey, including its identity-related dimensions. For example, Mehmetçik et al. (2025), in a study titled *“Understanding Turkish Foreign Policy Studies: A Bibliometric Analysis,”* argue that Turkey's foreign policy has been profoundly shaped by identity, to the extent that the doctrine of Neo-Ottomanism has become a central principle in the country's foreign policy framework. According to their findings, the ultimate objective of this doctrine is first to achieve comprehensive regional influence and subsequently to expand Turkey's presence beyond its immediate neighborhood at a transregional level. In another perspective, Düzgit et al. (2025), in their study *“Strategic Autonomy in Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Multipolarity: Genealogy and Contradictions of an Idea,”* maintain that Turkey has sought to cultivate new alignments across the non-Western world—from the Russia-China axis to the Middle East and beyond—thereby creating a space of greater independence from its traditional Western allies. However, they argue that geopolitical imperatives and domestic political priorities often conflict in Turkey, limiting the country's ability to implement its aspirations for strategic autonomy effectively. Finally, Kardaş (2025), in a study entitled *“Turkey's Turn to Hard Power in Foreign Policy,”* asserts that since 2015, Turkey has adopted an increasingly assertive foreign policy approach, primarily driven by the goal of neutralizing perceived threats in the Middle East through the threat or direct use of hard power beyond its borders. He further notes that the securitization of Turkey's regional policies and the deliberate attempt to place strategic autonomy at the center of its external conduct have made the Turkish case particularly intriguing both theoretically and empirically.

The fourth group includes studies that examine the foreign policy of Egypt, including its identity-related dimensions. For example, Shishch (2024), in a study titled *“Strategic Cooperation Between the United States and Egypt: A Historical Overview,”* argues that Egypt's strategic location and control over the Suez Canal contribute significantly to its role in global trade and military strategy. Since the Cold War, relations between Egypt and the United States have been characterized by substantial military cooperation and economic assistance, despite occasional tensions over human rights and democratization. The study highlights the duality in U.S. foreign policy toward Egypt, revealing a persistent tension between promoting democratic values and safeguarding U.S. security interests. From another perspective, Turgon (2025), in his research titled *“The Egyptian Conundrum: Shadows of Modernism and Islamism,”* contends that Egypt faces a fundamental dilemma between efforts toward political and economic modernization and a return to religious and cultural identity. In this context, Egypt appears as a contested arena in which tradition and modernity, hope and crisis, simultaneously reinforce and constrain one another. Finally, Hak et al. (2025), in their study *“Externalizing Migration Controls Through Development Programs in Egypt,”* argue that the European Union seeks to transform Egypt from a so-called transit country into a destination country. This policy shift, they maintain, has encouraged Egypt to prioritize developmental approaches over traditionalist tendencies in its foreign policy orientatality.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Definition of Core Concepts

3.1.1. Identity

Identity is a response to the fundamental question, “*Who are we?*”—both at the individual and collective levels. This concept may stem from feelings or awareness, appear real or imagined, and at times be perceived as authentic or constructed. Two central dimensions shape this phenomenon: *self-perception* and *other-perception*, which are assessed through a range of criteria—from scientific to non-scientific, impartial to biased, and superficial to deep. Various disciplines within the humanities, such as psychology, sociology, and political science, each claim to provide frameworks for describing and explaining this complex concept. Identity is not static; rather, it consists of multiple, layered components that can be combined in various ways. As new layers emerge, previous layers may be temporarily or permanently marginalized. Throughout history, individuals have contributed to the continuity and survival of their personal and social existence by reconstructing, transforming, and representing their identity components. In accordance with social conditions, individuals have drawn upon these identity layers through rational choices—decisions sometimes oriented merely toward survival and other times creating opportunities for new transformations. Identities are flexible and subject to change. Some can coexist harmoniously without contradiction, while others are in conflict with one another. From this perspective, identities can be examined either in parallel or at points of intersection. Ultimately, identity choices are shaped through comparisons: comparisons between the present and the past, between oneself and others, with reference to the surrounding world, and in light of individual and social expectations (Maqsoodi, 2001:210). It is noteworthy that in this study, we refrain from providing a singular, rigid definition of identity; instead, the research content proceeds based on the conceptual understanding outlined above.

3.1.2. Other

Within the constructivist framework, which is one of the major theories in international relations, the concept of the “Other” plays a pivotal role in shaping the identities of actors on the global stage. This perspective posits that identities, including national identities of states, are not fixed, inherent, or predetermined; rather, they are “constructed” through interactions and dialogue with others. In simpler terms, who we are and what we seek is largely defined in the mirror of the “Other’s” perception and definition. Consequently, this constitutes a dialectical relationship: the “Self” cannot be meaningfully understood without the existence of and contrast with the “Other.” This process of identity formation is clearly observable in international relations. States, as primary actors, articulate their understanding of the national “We” through interactions and, at times, confrontations with various “Others,” including neighbors, allies, competitors, or adversaries. Accordingly, a country’s foreign policy is not merely the product of rational calculations or the pursuit of material interests, such as security or wealth; it is also profoundly shaped by identity-related questions: Who are we? Who are they? What is our relationship with them? How a state defines the “Other”—whether it perceives them as a friend, a rival, or a threat—directly influences the orientation of its foreign policy and its patterns of interaction with the world. Therefore, a deeper understanding of a country’s behavior in the

international arena requires a systematic analysis of “othering” within its dominant discourse. Examining how the “Other” is constructed in political rhetoric, which symbols and markers are used to create distinctions, and how these distinctions are translated into concrete policies, is crucial for comprehending the logic underpinning that country’s international actions. Ultimately, the analysis of identity discourse and the process of othering provides a powerful analytical framework for understanding the reasons, modalities, and objectives of states’ foreign policies. This approach is particularly useful when explaining state behavior cannot be fully accounted for by material calculations of costs and benefits, as it highlights normative, cultural, and identity dimensions that are often overlooked in international relations (Nazari & Pourramazan, 2024:527). This study, refrains from providing a separate definition and proceed with the research content based on this framework.

3.1.3. Foreign Policy

Foreign policy serves as a country’s roadmap in the international arena. In essence, it comprises two fundamental components: first, objectives, which reflect a state’s goals and aspirations, and second, strategies, which encompass the tools and methods employed to achieve those objectives. These two components constitute the main pillars of any country’s foreign policy, regardless of its size or power. Put simply, foreign policy refers to the set of programs and actions that a government undertakes responsibly and within a defined framework on behalf of its people. Government representatives implement these actions to influence international conditions and other actors on the global stage, including foreign states and non-state entities, to advance the country’s national interests (Moshirzadeh, 1394:141). In this study, we refrain from providing a separate definition and proceed with the research content based on this framework.

3.1.4. Yemen Crisis

Yemen, in terms of its social structure, is considered a tribal society in which tribes play a fundamental role in the political sphere. The multiplicity and diversity of tribes, combined with cultural, political, and religious differences, as well as a history of inter-tribal conflicts, have exacerbated divisions among the ruling elites. During Ali Abdullah Saleh’s long tenure, tribes were effectively utilized as instruments for consolidating state power. Over time, the state gradually acquired a tribal character: tribal sheikhs were granted authority and special privileges and were formally integrated into the country’s administrative, legislative, and executive structures. In essence, during Saleh’s era, the sheikhs became representatives of the state within their respective tribes. This marked a significant transformation in the traditional role of tribes, as sheikhs had previously acted as representatives and advocates of their tribes’ interests vis-à-vis the state. With the outbreak of the 2011 revolution, the role of tribes entered a new phase. Their involvement as key actors in Yemen’s recent conflicts can be divided into three stages. Following Saleh’s resignation and the continuation of popular protests, it was widely assumed that, given Yemen’s tribal and sectarian composition, the country would descend into internal and factional conflicts, potentially causing the revolution to fail. In this revolutionary context, the Islah Party and the Houthis (as part of the Hashid tribal confederation) emerged as the main actors, with the Houthis ultimately prevailing in this power struggle. Developments during this

period demonstrate that tribes support the state when they perceive it as strong and protective of their interests; otherwise, they align with whichever faction can provide practical solutions and secure their financial and economic benefits. At the start of military operations in Yemen, Riyadh sought to rebuild its alliances with tribes with which it had strong pre-2011 ties, leveraging them against the Houthis. The 2017 rift between the Houthis and Ali Abdullah Saleh was also seen by Saudi Arabia as an opportunity to revive Saleh's tribal influence. Although the prior Houthi-Saleh alliance had yielded additional tribal gains, this conflict did not reverse the overall trend. With the entry of an external actor—the Saudi-led coalition—into the war, tribes recalibrated their political calculations. Many tribes in Sanaa abandoned Saleh, and even his own tribe adopted a neutral stance in his dispute with the Houthis. Following Saleh's death, the map of tribal alliances was once again redefined, enabling the Houthis to consolidate and expand their control. During this stage, the Houthis have sought to overcome tribal fragmentation and the dispersion of power by incorporating new elements, including prominent political actors, into governance. Meanwhile, sheikhs of major tribes in areas such as Marib, Shabwa, and Al-Jawf, who are fighting on the anti-Houthi front, believe that their tribes are being used as “cannon fodder” and have grown weary of the war and the free exploitation of their communities by the Saudi-led coalition, resulting in their marginalization. As a result of these rapid developments, many traditional foundations of the tribal system have been transformed. Longstanding enemies have become allies, historic alliances have ended, established powers have fallen, and new forces have emerged to become the main actors on Yemen's political stage (Safavi & Zamani, 2023:127–128).

3.2. Constructivist Theory

Theoretical contributions undoubtedly play a central role in the advancement of any scientific discipline or field of study. As John Vasquez rightly notes, “Theory organizes knowledge into a coherent and interconnected structure, providing meaning to the world by linking phenomena that at first glance appear unrelated or meaningless.” Theories not only play a fundamental role in guiding research and the process of meaning-making, but they are also shaped by the ontological foundations and epistemological frameworks prevailing within each field of study (Ayvazi et al., 2018:179). Discussing the idea of constructivism can sometimes seem difficult and complex. However, to summarize, ontologically, constructivism aligns with idealism and subjectivism, standing in opposition to materialism and objectivism. This perspective does not assume that the external world exists independently of human perception and cognition. Epistemologically, constructivism also rejects the notion that one can access an objective, inherent, and pre-existing truth. From this viewpoint, social realities are neither objective nor independent of the mind; rather, they are constructed through interpretive processes, social interactions, and historical contexts that are collectively shaped. Consequently, our understanding of the social world is always mediated by the semantic frameworks and discourses that social actors employ in specific situations. It is precisely this ontological and epistemological stance that distinguishes constructivism from objectivist and essentialist theories (Motaqi et al., 2007:210). As a theoretical framework in political science and international relations, constructivism formally emerged in the late 1980s with the publication

of two key works. The first of these was Nicholas Onuf's *World of Our Making*, and the second was Friedrich Kratochwil's *Rules, Norms, and Decisions*. However, the expansion and institutionalization of constructivism as a distinct theory in international relations occurred primarily after the publication of Alexander Wendt's influential book *Social Theory of International Politics*. Although Wendt developed his theory nearly a decade after Onuf and Kratochwil, he became recognized as a leading figure in the school due to his systematic presentation of key concepts such as "identity," "agency-structure," and the "social construction of international realities." Consequently, the works of the earlier pioneers were somewhat overshadowed by Wendt's prominence, although their foundational role in the development of constructivism remains undeniable (Darj et al., 2020:269). It should be noted, however, that constructivism cannot be regarded as a fully integrated and coherent theory. Rather, it is better understood as a collection of theoretical approaches that, while sharing the fundamental principle of the "socially constructed nature of reality," differ significantly in many analytical aspects. These differences are evident both at the level of core concepts—such as identity, rules, institutions, language, and discourse—and in deeper epistemological and methodological debates. For instance, some constructivists emphasize the decisive role of discourse and linguistic relations in shaping social realities, whereas others may place greater importance on formal institutions and rules. Similarly, at the methodological level, there exists a spectrum of approaches ranging from strong interpretivism to mixed methods, all of which fall under the broad umbrella of constructivism. This internal diversity, on one hand, reflects the dynamism and richness of this theoretical tradition, and on the other, introduces complexity into its practical application in scholarly research (Moshirzadeh, 2005:174). This theory, by redefining a dialectical relationship between identity and interests and establishing an organic link between the two, considers identity as a fundamental basis for shaping and guiding interests. Such an approach challenges the core assumptions of the realist paradigm in international relations and invites critical reconsideration. From this perspective, an identity that is not connected to interests lacks the capacity to generate action and behavioral motivation. Conversely, interests without grounding in identity are devoid of a meaningful framework and clear direction. By emphasizing the reciprocal and constitutive relationship between these two elements, this view underscores the necessity of a holistic understanding of international political dynamics (Majidi et al., 2015:220). From Wendt's perspective, identity is defined as an intrinsic characteristic of actors who possess goals, serving as the source of motivational orientations and patterns of behavior. This implies that identity is fundamentally a subjective phenomenon, rooted in the actor's self-understanding. However, this understanding is typically contingent upon reciprocal reflection by other actors, which gives identity an intersubjective dimension. More precisely, identity emerges at the intersection of the concepts of "Self" and "Other," wherein internal structures (such as individual perceptions) and external structures (such as social recognition) interact dynamically to provide meaning and stability to identity. This perspective emphasizes the relational and reciprocal nature of identity, where acknowledgment and recognition by the "Other" constitute a key factor in the formation and consolidation of identity (Ramazan-Zadeh et al., 2010:139).

4. Representation of Identity in Iran's Foreign Policy during the Yemen Crisis: From Revolutionary Ideals to Pragmatism

The representation of Iran's identity in the Yemen file can be seen as a complex arena of interaction and tension between two central pillars of the country's foreign policy: idealistic revolutionary activism and pragmatic instrumentalism. These two elements do not operate as substitutes for one another; rather, they function in a dynamic and sometimes seemingly contradictory synthesis. The primary aim of this combination is to safeguard the "hard core of the Islamic Republic's identity," namely the preservation of territorial integrity, national security, and regime survival in a highly volatile environment (Barzegar, 2017:43).

In practice, this synthesis manifests in a dual approach. On one hand, Iran employs media and diplomatic tools to reinforce the discourse of "resistance" in the Yemen issue, presenting itself as the sole genuine defender of the Yemeni people against the "Saudi-led coalition aggression," thereby consolidating its leadership within the Axis of Resistance. On the other hand, operationally, Tehran avoids direct engagement in a costly war with Saudi Arabia, focusing instead on limited but effective support, such as the transfer of knowledge and equipment, while simultaneously pursuing diplomatic channels. This strategy enables Iran to exert significant pressure on its long-standing rival at minimal cost, entangle Saudi Arabia in a protracted crisis in Yemen, and keep negotiation channels open in other arenas, including the nuclear issue (Ahmadian, 2021:783).

At the revolutionary level, Iran positions itself as a supporter of the "resistance front" and an opponent of U.S. and Saudi domination. Its political, ideological, and to some extent logistical support for the Houthi movement is understood within this framework. This representation portrays Iran as a counter-hegemonic power and a defender of the oppressed—willing to bear costs for its ideals—thereby reinforcing its ideological legitimacy among its domestic base and regional allies (Sobelman, 2023:140).

Conversely, at the pragmatic level, Iran's Yemen policy is characterized by caution and calculated restraint. Unlike cases such as Syria and Iraq, Iran has refrained from full-scale direct involvement in Yemen. This approach reflects a cost-benefit calculus in which preserving national interests, including avoiding a broad war with Saudi Arabia and its Western allies, keeping negotiation avenues open, and minimizing heavy economic and military expenditures, takes precedence over unlimited regional influence. This logic has guided Iran toward a policy of "strategic deniability" and limited support, a strategy that maintains pressure on Saudi Arabia while preventing Iran from being drawn into a full-scale proxy war (Juneau, 2021:283).

This duality of identity has given rise to a form of "revolutionary realism" in Iran's foreign policy. In the Yemen crisis, revolutionary ideals are not treated as absolute objectives but as instruments for enhancing influence and increasing bargaining power. At the same time, whenever vital national interests are at stake, Iran is prepared to moderate its idealism and act according to the logic of balance-of-power considerations and crisis management. Therefore, Iran's policy in Yemen should not be understood merely as a shift from idealism to

pragmatism, but rather as a sophisticated combination of the two approaches aimed at maximizing security and influence in a turbulent environment.

Table 1. Dual-Track Strategy: Discourse and Practice Analysis of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Approach to the Yemen Crisis, since 2015

Component	Idealistic Revolutionary Sphere	Pragmatic Instrumentalist Sphere	Outcome = Revolutionary Realism
Objective	Strengthening ideological legitimacy, consolidating leadership within the “Axis of Resistance,” and projecting an image as an anti-hegemonic power and defender of the oppressed.	Preserving national interests (security, regime survival, prevention of large-scale war), managing costs, and keeping negotiation channels open in other arenas.	Safeguarding the “hard core of identity” national security, territorial integrity, and regime survival through the maximization of influence and security.
Tools and Strategies	Discourse: Reinforce the narrative of “resistance” against aggression. Public diplomacy: Present Iran as the defender of the Yemeni people. Support: Provide political and ideological backing for the Houthis; offer limited logistical support. Tools and Strategi	Avoidance of direct and full-scale military engagement. Limited and calculated support, emphasizing the transfer of knowledge and equipment rather than personnel. Pursuit of diplomatic channels. Maintaining plausible deniability to prevent escalation of tensions.	A combination of hard and soft instruments: the simultaneous use of normative-ideational discourse for legitimacy-building and pragmatic tools for cost and risk management.
Identity Representation	An ideological, assertive, and uncompromising power that is willing to incur costs in pursuit of its ideals.	A cautious, flexible, and calculating power that acts on the basis of rational cost-benefit assessment.	A dual and dynamic identity: the capacity to shift between the roles of “revolutionary” and “nation-state” depending on contextual needs and circumstances.
Interaction with Rivals	Explicit discursive confrontation and contestation with Saudi Arabia and the United States.	Avoiding direct warfare, engaging the rival in a low-cost war of attrition, and keeping the door to negotiations open.	Maximum pressure at minimal cost: trapping the rival in protracted attritional crises (such as Yemen) without becoming fully embroiled.
Limitations and Considerations	The risk of a constrained scope for action and the loss of diplomatic flexibility.	The risk of undermining the ideological narrative and facing criticism from allies and the domestic constituency.	Balancing: maintaining a delicate equilibrium between adherence to ideals (for legitimacy) and pragmatism (for interests) without fully sacrificing either for the other.
Outcome	Ideals serve as instruments to enhance influence and increase bargaining power.	Vital national interests act as a red line and take precedence over any ideals.	Iran’s foreign policy in Yemen is not a transition from idealism to pragmatism, but rather a nuanced and dynamic combination of both, aimed at survival and the expansion of influence in a turbulent environment.

Source: Authors

5. Representation of Identity in Turkey’s Foreign Policy Regarding the Yemen Crisis: From Security to Regional Influence

Turkey’s identity in its foreign policy toward the Yemen crisis can be analyzed within the broader framework of its foreign policy discourse. Within this framework, Turkey seeks to operate beyond the role of a purely security-focused actor in the Middle East, presenting itself as a power with both hard and soft capabilities in regional affairs. The Yemen crisis, considered one of the region’s most complex conflicts, has provided a platform for Turkey to display its identity across two dimensions: “security” and “regional influence.” This representation is simultaneously shaped by domestic developments in Turkey, regional rivalries with countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirate (UAE), as well as broader foreign policy considerations in relation to Western powers (Taş, 2022:731).

Historically and ideologically, Turkey’s identity representation vis-à-vis Yemen is also

meaningful. Turkish policymakers, drawing on the Ottoman legacy and emphasizing the country's civilizational and Islamic heritage, seek to establish a form of historical legitimacy for their engagement in the Arab world. This perspective positions Ankara not only as a modern regional power but also as the heir to "historical responsibilities." In the Yemen crisis, this has been expressed through humanitarian aid, political stances in international institutions, and support for diplomatic mechanisms aimed at ending the war. Through this approach, Turkey attempts to link its Ottoman past with its current mission in the Middle East, thereby consolidating its identity (Uca, 2024:2).

From a security standpoint, Turkey aims to project itself as a responsible actor in addressing Middle Eastern security threats. Concerns over the spread of terrorism, instability along southern borders, and the influence of non-state actors in Yemen have led Ankara to adopt a discourse emphasizing "regional stability" and "combating insecurity" in response to the crisis. This representation aligns Turkey, to some extent, with the Western security order and certain Arab states, while simultaneously striving to preserve strategic autonomy. In other words, by highlighting the security dimension in Yemen, Turkey seeks to legitimize its active role in the Middle East (Marwan, 2017:240).

In the realm of regional influence, the Yemen crisis has provided Turkey with an opportunity to support Islamic movements and present itself as a champion of "justice-oriented values." In this context, Turkey's identity representation leans toward "soft power," characterized by support for the Yemeni people amid a humanitarian catastrophe and the projection of Turkey as a representative of the "Islamic world" against the injustices of war. In contrast to the hardline approaches of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Yemen, this enables Ankara to offer a distinct identity and position itself as an ethical and political alternative for leadership within the Muslim world (Ekşi, 2018:32). Through instruments such as humanitarian aid, the activities of non-governmental organizations, and participation in international forums, Turkey has sought to portray itself as a concerned and responsible actor in addressing human suffering in Yemen. This policy not only enhances Ankara's regional and international legitimacy but also allows Turkey to compete with Saudi Arabia and the UAE through non-military tools, influencing public opinion in the Arab world. Consequently, the Yemen crisis has become a stage for displaying the humanitarian and ethical dimension of Turkey's foreign policy, complementing its security and strategic approaches.

Furthermore, this identity representation aligns with Turkey's broader strategy of positioning itself as a "mediating power" in Middle Eastern conflicts. Ankara emphasizes dialogue and political solutions, presenting itself as a neutral and reliable mediator in the Yemen crisis. This approach enables Turkey not only to secure a distinct position vis-à-vis other regional powers but also to strengthen its claim to a role in shaping the future regional order. By combining "soft power" and "active diplomacy" in its Yemen policy, Turkey seeks to elevate its identity representation beyond that of a reactive actor, establishing itself as a proactive and influential player in Middle Eastern affairs.

Importantly, by combining these two dimensions of identity—security and regional influence—Turkey has sought to craft a multifaceted identity in its foreign policy toward

Yemen: on one hand, as an actor aiming to prevent the spread of insecurity and extremism; on the other, as a power claiming a role that transcends national and even regional boundaries, positioning itself as a leading actor in the Middle East. Therefore, Turkey's identity representation in its foreign policy regarding the Yemen crisis is not merely a tactical response but part of a long-term strategy to consolidate its geopolitical and identity position within a transforming regional order.

Table 2. Dual-Track Strategy: Discourse and Practice Analysis of Turkey's Approach to the Yemen Crisis, since 2015

Component	Identity Representation
Overall Perspective	Turkey seeks to operate beyond the role of a purely security-focused actor, presenting itself as a power with both hard and soft capabilities in regional affairs.
Historical–Ideological	Relying on the Ottoman legacy and emphasizing Turkey's civilizational–Islamic status; presenting itself as the heir to “historical responsibilities” in the Arab world.
Security	Emphasis on the discourse of “maintaining regional stability” and “combating insecurity”; relative alignment with the Western security order and certain Arab states, while preserving strategic autonomy.
Regional Influence	Supporting Islamic movements and presenting itself as a champion of “justice and Islamic values”; projecting an identity distinct from Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
Humanitarian Approach	Humanitarian aid, activities of non-governmental organizations, and engagement in international forums to project the ethical and soft power dimension of Turkey.
Mediating Role	Efforts to play the role of a “mediating power” with an emphasis on dialogue and political solutions; strengthening the claim to a role in shaping the future Middle Eastern order.
Outcome	Integration of the two dimensions of “security” and “regional influence” to construct a multifaceted identity: a responsible actor against insecurity and a leading power in the Middle East.

Source: Authors

6. Identity Representation in Egypt's Foreign Policy Regarding the Yemen Crisis: From the Legitimacy Crisis After the Arab Spring (2011) to the Consolidation of Regional Leadership:

After the Arab Spring in 2011, Egypt's foreign policy faced profound challenges related to identity and legitimacy. The fall of Hosni Mubarak's regime, the brief rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the 2013 military coup led by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi severely undermined the domestic and regional credibility of the Egyptian political system. Under these circumstances, Egypt needed to redefine its national identity and regional role to bridge internal divisions and reclaim its historical position as one of the principal powers in the Middle East. The Yemen crisis, which had become a focal point of regional conflicts, provided a suitable platform for projecting this new identity (Piazza, 2018:420).

With the consolidation of the Sisi government, Egypt sought, relying on the discourse of “Arab collective security” and “countering foreign interference in the Arab world,” to position itself at the forefront of developments in Yemen. The strategic significance of the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab Strait—critical arteries for global trade and energy security—offered Egypt an opportunity to justify its presence as a legitimate and necessary actor for regional stability. This approach not only enabled Cairo to restore its international credibility but also strengthened its strategic relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Moreover, Egypt's stance on the Yemen crisis reflected a balance between its domestic and external interests. Domestically, the Cairo government needed to rebuild its image as a strong authority safeguarding national security. Externally, by joining the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, it sought to present itself as a counterweight to Iranian influence and a cooperative partner aligned with the order favored by the Gulf states. This duality between domestic and

regional objectives allowed Egypt’s foreign policy to elevate its identity from that of an “actor weakened by a legitimacy crisis” to a “potential leader of the Arab world.”

From an identity perspective, after 2013, Egypt endeavored to present itself as a “responsible actor” and “guardian of regional order.” Yemen held critical importance due to its connection to the Iran–Saudi rivalry and its geopolitical threats to the security of the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab. In its official discourse, Egypt framed its intervention in Yemen not merely as a military action but as a necessity for “protecting Arab security” and “preserving the territorial integrity of regional states.” This representation aimed to restore Egypt’s damaged image following domestic turmoil while consolidating its role as a stabilizing force in the Arab world.

In practice, by joining the Saudi-led military coalition in 2015, Egypt both strengthened its strategic relations with Riyadh and other GCC countries and positioned itself as a “maritime security guarantor.” Emphasizing the need to control the Bab al-Mandab Strait and counter Houthi threats to international shipping allowed Egypt to project its redefined identity beyond the Arab world in the context of global security. Consequently, the Yemen crisis became a platform for demonstrating Egypt’s “hard and soft power” and reviving its image as a traditional leader in the Arab world.

In conclusion, Egypt’s foreign policy toward Yemen can be seen as an effort to move beyond the “legitimacy crisis following the Arab Spring” toward the “consolidation of regional leadership.” Through participation in security coalitions, strengthening ties with Gulf allies, and projecting itself as a guardian of regional and international security, Egypt sought to construct a new identity. This process illustrates that identity in Egyptian foreign policy is not solely derived from domestic considerations but is reconstructed and represented in interaction with regional crises. Within this framework, the Yemen crisis marks a turning point in Egypt’s identity reconstruction since 2011.

Table 3. A Dual-Track Strategy—Discourse and Practice in Egypt’s Approach to the Yemen Crisis

Component	Identity Representation
Post–Arab Spring	The fall of Mubarak, the brief rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the 2013 military coup generated a profound legitimacy crisis and significantly eroded Egypt’s domestic and regional credibility.
The Need for Identity Redefinition	Reconstruction of Egypt’s historical status as a principal Middle Eastern power; utilizing the Yemen crisis as a platform for projecting its newly redefined identity.
Arab Collective Security Discourse	Emphasis on “countering foreign interventions” and “protecting Arab security”; justifying active engagement in Yemen.
Geopolitical Significance	The Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb as vital arteries of global trade; portraying Egypt as a legitimate and essential actor for regional stability.
Duality of Domestic and External Interests	Domestically: reconstructing the image of a strong state and guardian of national security Externally: aligning with the Saudi-led coalition and countering Iranian influence.
A Responsible Identity and Guardian of Regional Order	Portraying itself as a “responsible” actor and “guardian of stability”; framing action in Yemen as going beyond mere military intervention.
Practical Engagement (2015 onward)	The Saudi-led coalition; strengthening ties with the Gulf states; presenting itself as a “protector of maritime security” and guardian of global shipping.
Hard and Soft Power	Combining military engagement (hard power) with legitimacy- and security-oriented discourse (soft power) to consolidate its regional role.
Outcome	Transition from a legitimacy crisis to the consolidation of regional leadership; redefining Egypt’s identity through engagement with regional crises; Yemen as a pivotal point in the reconstruction of identity post- 2011.

Source: Authors

7. A Comparative Analysis of the Identity Discourse of Iran, Turkey, and Egypt in the Yemen Crisis

For Iran, Turkey, and Egypt, the Yemen crisis has gone beyond a mere geopolitical challenge, becoming a platform for the articulation and reinforcement of each country's distinct "identity discourse." Each actor, through its particular reading of the crisis, seeks to consolidate its desired identity within the region.

The Islamic Republic of Iran frames the Yemen crisis primarily within the discourse of "resistance" and "support for the oppressed." By emphasizing religious and ideological ties with the Ansarullah (Houthi) movement, Iran supports this group as a "popular anti-hegemonic movement" and characterizes the Saudi-led coalition's intervention as "foreign aggression" against Yemen's sovereignty. From this perspective, Yemen serves as a stage for reproducing Iran's anti-hegemonic identity and sustaining the regional policy of the "Resistance Axis." Iran leverages the crisis as a tool to strengthen its transnational discourse against domination while legitimizing its role as an independent power opposing foreign intervention.

Turkey has adopted a fluid approach toward the Yemen crisis, distinct from both Iran and Egypt. Ankara has sought to balance tactical alignment with the Saudi-led coalition while maintaining sufficient distance to protect its own position. Within Turkey's identity discourse, Yemen is considered a lower priority compared to crises in Syria and Libya. The country's approach rests on two pillars: "leadership within the Islamic world" and "support for legitimate governments." On one hand, Turkey seeks to present itself as a "moderate Islamic power" advocating stability and diplomatic resolution of conflicts; on the other hand, by avoiding costly direct intervention, it preserves the ability to focus on more critical fronts of its foreign policy.

Egypt, by contrast, interprets the Yemen crisis as an opportunity to reconstruct its regional identity following the domestic legitimacy crisis triggered by the Arab Spring. For Cairo, Yemen is not merely a regional issue but a matter vital to national security and the security of its maritime trade routes. Egypt's participation in the Saudi-led coalition is framed within the discourse of "defending Arab security" and "safeguarding critical global trade arteries." Through this crisis, Egypt sought both to redefine its historical identity as the "leader of the Arab world" and to strengthen its strategic ties with Gulf countries.

Comparatively, Iran's identity discourse is grounded in the "ideology of resistance and anti-hegemony." Turkey emphasizes "mediation and the soft leadership of the Islamic world," while Egypt focuses on "reconstructing its traditional identity as the protector of Arab security." All three countries have used the Yemen crisis as a stage for representing and consolidating their desired identities. However, differences in historical backgrounds, security priorities, and domestic imperatives have produced distinct and differentiated discourses

Table 4. Indicators of Identity Discourse of Iran, Turkey, and Egypt in the Yemen Crisis, since 2015

Identity Framework	Iran	Turkey	Egypt	Type of Relationship
Identity Perspective	Focus on Shia/Revolutionary Identity, Axis of Resistance	Nationalist and National Identity, Moderate Islamism	Arab and Islamic Identity, Conservative	Identity-Oriented
Security Discourse	External Threats (USA and Israel), Regional Security-Centric	Internal and Border Threats, National Security and NATO	Internal Threats and Regional Security, Peace and Stability	Security-Oriented
Political Operational Level	Engagement in Regional Politics, Axis of Resistance, Influence in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria	Active in Regional Politics, Presence in Syria and Libya, Economic Diplomacy	More Limited Regional Policy, Mediator Role, Focus on Domestic Stability	Functional/Operational
Civilizational and Religious Heritage	Shia and Persian-Islamic Identity, 1979 Revolution	Ottoman Heritage, Secular Islam, and Nationalism	Arab and Islamic Heritage, Role of Religious Institutions	Civilizational–Religious
Attitude Toward Foreign Actors	USA and Israel as Threats, Engagement with Russia and China	Engagement with the West and East, International Actor	Cooperation with the West and Arab States, Balance	Foreign/External
Concluding Discourse	Resistance and Independence, Islamic-Revolutionary Identity	Regional Power and National Identity	Stability and Arab Leadership	Identity as a Strategic Perspective

Source: Authors

8. Conclusion

The identity discourse in the foreign policies of Iran, Turkey, and Egypt regarding the Yemen crisis demonstrates that each country’s national and religious identity plays a fundamental role in shaping its priorities and diplomatic orientations. Iran, relying on its Shiite identity and an anti-Western approach, has sought to expand its influence in Yemen through aligned groups and non-state actors. In contrast, Turkey, emphasizing Sunni-Islamic identity and consolidating its regional role, has pursued a hybrid strategy combining diplomatic and humanitarian support for aligned movements. Egypt, guided by Arab and nationalist identity and concerned with the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, has adopted a conservative, security-oriented approach.

A comparative analysis of the identity discourses of these three countries indicates that religious and ideological identities have had the greatest impact on the selection of foreign policy tools. Both Iran and Turkey, drawing on religious narratives, have sought to legitimize their interventions in Yemen within the framework of “supporting the Islamic ummah,” whereas Egypt, by foregrounding Arab identity and security considerations, has primarily aimed at maintaining regional stability and countering cross-border threats. This comparison also highlights that even countries with shared religious backgrounds may pursue divergent strategies based on their specific identity structures.

The present analysis suggests that identity-based foreign policy presents both opportunities and constraints. For Iran and Turkey, the use of religious discourse allows for legitimization and the establishment of regional influence networks, but it also increases the risk of tension with regional rivals and international powers. Egypt, relying on a security-oriented and nationalist identity, has played a deterrent role in the Yemen crisis but faces limitations in exercising soft power and achieving regional legitimacy.

The findings underscore that analyzing identity discourse is a critical tool for understanding the causes and mechanisms behind the behavior of regional states in complex crises. Recognizing the national, religious, and ideological identities of states enhances the predictability of their foreign policy and informs the design of effective diplomatic solutions. In other words, without accounting for identity dimensions, analyses of foreign policy often remain incomplete and superficial.

Ultimately, a comparative review of the positions of Iran, Turkey, and Egypt toward the Yemen crisis demonstrates that national and religious identities function as discursive frameworks that decisively shape objectives, choice of instruments, and behavioral styles in foreign policy. Therefore, regional scholars and policymakers must pay careful attention to these dimensions to ensure that their policies are effective both in terms of security and regional legitimacy. Understanding these dynamics is essential not only for interpreting current regional conflicts but also for developing more informed and sustainable approaches to conflict management and diplomacy in the Middle East.

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