

## An emotional analysis of the crisis in the relations between Saudi Arabia and Qatar (2017-2021): The role of dignity and respect

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article                      Main Object: International Relations                      Scope: Saudi Arabia and Qatar</p> <p>Received: 06 December 2023                      Revised: 04 January 2024                      Accepted: 01 January 2024                      Published online: 15 January 2024</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b>                      Arabia, dignity, emotional analysis, pride, Qatar, respect.</p>	<p>Emotional analysis of international phenomena is a new approach in international relations, which is interpreted as an "emotional turn". This approach considers states as actors whose emotional motivations affect their actions and behaviors. The current research seeks to examine the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, focusing on the 2017-2021 crisis from an emotional perspective. Therefore, the question of the research is how Saudi emotional understanding of Qatar's regional behavior has affected the crisis in their relations in the period from 2017 to 2021. The authors present the answer to this question based on the assumption that Saudi Arabia has a special "dignity" and "credibility" for itself, and therefore expects "subordination" and "respect" from other Arab actors in the region. Based on this assumption, the article hypothesizes that the independent policies of Qatar and the change of Doha's policy from a subordinate actor to an active actor damaged Saudi Arabia's perception of itself as a state with high status and credibility and forced this country to adopt a policy punished against Qatar. In other words, Qatar's independent activism caused Saudi Arabia to see its status as an older brother in danger from a younger brother who violated his sanctity. As a result, this perception led to a crisis in the relations between the two countries in the mentioned period.</p>

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**Extended Abstract****Background**

Emotional analysis of foreign policy is considered a new approach in the international relations. This theoretical approach emphasizes the role of emotions, actions and emotional motivations in international developments. In fact, with the entry into the 21st century and the ideation of "reflective", "cultural" and "constructivist" theories in international relations, a new wave of "psychological" theories and ideas also entered the theoretical field of international relations. The emotional analysis of foreign policy appeared in opposition to the "rational choice" theory in international relations. This theoretical approach examines the relations of states with each other beyond the mainstream of international relations and does not limit itself to the rational and objective actions of state. The central point of the theory of emotions in international relations is that the rational decisions of states in the regional and international arena are not formed in a vacuum and motives such as "fear", "respect", "pride" and "empathy" affect them.

**Aims**

The aim of this theoretical approach is not to reject the rational decision-making based on cost-benefit of the states, but rather it focuses on the role of emotional motives as independent variables in the direction and policy of the states and the type of their decisions. The authors believe that the application of this theoretical approach can be a key point for understanding the politics and foreign relations of the two studied countries, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

**Findings**

Since the beginning of the 1970s, Qatar's policies were defined under the policies of Saudi Arabia, and from this point of view, Saudi Arabia, as the definer of regional policies in the Arab and southern parts of the Persian Gulf, has always considered weak and tiny actors like Qatar under its support. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the 1990s, Qatar has tried to counter the supremacy-seeking approach of Saudi Arabia. The escalation of tension and misrepresentations brought the relations between the two countries to a crisis point in 2017. The authors believe that the emotional factors in the background of the one-dimensional structure of Saudi foreign policy decision-making directly and without facing structural, institutional and organizational obstacles direct the actions of Saudi Arabia towards Qatar. In fact, the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia is more than anything affected by the will and desire of the political leaders of this country, and therefore factors such as the threat perception of the state or the conflict between the security interests of Qatar and Saudi Arabia should be understood in the light of the Saudi leaders' understanding of these categories.

**Research question**

How has Saudi emotional understanding of Qatar's regional behavior affected the emergence of a crisis in their relations between 2017 and 2021?

**Research hypothesis**

The root of the crisis in the relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia is the independent policies of Qatar and the change of Doha's approach from a subordinate actor to an active actor in such a way that as a result of these developments, Saudi Arabia sees its status as an older brother in danger from a younger brother who has violated his sanctity. All of these have forced Riyadh to try to restore its dignity and rebuild lost pride through sanctions and exerting political and economic pressure on Qatar to acknowledge the superiority of Saudi Arabia.

**Conceptual framework**

This article is written based on the emotional school in international relations. According to this theoretical school, to understand the foreign policy of states, one should pay attention to the role of feelings and emotions in its decisions. Therefore, understanding how identity affects foreign policy and relations between governments without considering the "emotional" component will be ambiguous at best. Based on this claim, the states have emotional perceptions in addition to rational actions. To examine the role of emotions in international relations, the analysis level of state should be brought closer to the level of society. Of course, this does not mean reductionism at the level of analysis.

**Results and Discussion**

The analysis of developments in the relations between Saudi Arabia and Qatar shows that the tense relations between these two countries in 2017-2021 were affected by emotional factors and motivations. Saudi Arabia has always tried to impose its status and prestige on its neighboring Arab countries due to its possession of material and spiritual components of power. The keyword "big brother", which is commonly used to describe Saudi Arabia's relationship with other Arab states in the Persian Gulf, reflects the same supremacist attitude that Saudi Arabia wants to maintain its respect and credibility by these states in their internal and external decisions. The result of such an attitude is creating an unequal relationship in the minds of the Saudi rulers, in which Saudi Arabia has a high position and other governments must respect this position. But this supremacist view has not been accepted by all small Arab states. In the meantime, Qatar's reaction specifically shows that this country has withdrawn its inferior position and is resisting being humiliated by an older brother. Qatar's

policies in the regional and international arenas since the mid-1990s and the country's efforts to become an active actor have all been in line with the goal of proving that Doha does not have to obey Riyadh. As a result, Qatar took advantage of its energy export wealth and by investing in the media and engaging in active diplomacy, played a role far beyond that of a younger brother. In the meantime, the shift from oil policy to gas policy and support for Islamist groups opposed to Saudi Arabia added to Saudi skepticism towards Qatar's intentions and strengthened the feeling of being ignored and reduced prestige and dignity in Riyadh. The damage to Saudi Arabia's pride eventually led the country to take punitive measures to put Qatar in its true position.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the conceptual framework of the research, it can be acknowledged that Saudi pride is an arrogant type of pride, which is opposed to genuine pride. In fact, the tension between Saudi Arabia and Qatar in 2017, and the threat of an economic embargo on Qatar, along with Riyadh's attempt to isolate Doha and encourage other Arab countries to follow Saudi policies, all stem from this country's arrogant pride. In fact, if this sense of pride was genuine, the relations between the two countries would be possible based on the respect and acceptance of Saudi Arabia's credibility by Qatar. But the imposition of arrogant pride by Saudi Arabia on Doha led Qatar to pursue independent policies from Saudi Arabia. In this way, Qatar used its power resources to push back the arrogant arrogance of Saudi Arabia, which in turn created a sense of encroachment in Riyadh. This situation eventually involved the two states in a competition that showed itself in the most severe form during the blockade of Qatar in 2017.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

### **Authors' contributions**

All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

### **Ethical considerations**

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

### **Data availability**

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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