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**(DE) LEGITIMATION STRATEGIES IN THE YEMENI PROXY  
WAR: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF IRANIAN IRNA MEDIA  
OUTLET**

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**Abstract:**

Since the onset of the Yemeni conflict, marked by the ousting of President Abdu Rabbuh Mansur Hadi's government following a Houthi militant takeover, Iran has emerged as a significant player. It is perceived as backing and supplying arms to the Houthi regime, while Saudi Arabia supports the ousted Yemeni government. This article aims to scrutinize how Iran's official newspaper outlet, IRNA, constructs the Yemeni proxy war and elucidates the strategies employed to legitimize Iran's involvement. To fulfill this objective, 19 IRNA articles published between April 2018 and March 2019 were collected and subjected to analysis using Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse analysis. The analysis comprised three layers: global macro structures, thematic analysis, and ideological schemata analysis. The findings unearth Iran's discourse on the Yemeni conflict, emphasizing its denial of direct involvement, portrayal as a mediator seeking peace, and characterization of the Saudi coalition as aggressors, terrorists, and invaders.

**Keywords:**

Discourse Analysis, Houthi, Iran, IRNA, Yemen War

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## Introduction

The Yemeni proxy war, one of the Middle East's most prolonged and complex conflicts, has persisted for nearly a decade, deeply shaping the region's political and security landscape. While initially rooted in internal political tensions, the conflict evolved into a broader regional proxy battle as external powers, primarily Iran and Saudi Arabia, became involved. Each nation has lent considerable support to opposing Yemeni factions: Iran supports the Houthi movement, while Saudi Arabia backs the internationally recognized, ousted Yemeni government. This external involvement has intensified the conflict, transforming Yemen into a battleground for competing regional interests and ideologies.

A prominent feature of the Yemeni conflict is the strategic use of media by both sides to shape perceptions, domestically and internationally. Through sustained media campaigns, each side seeks to legitimize its own involvement while casting the opposition as aggressors. This media warfare has become an essential instrument of proxy battles, allowing regional powers like Iran to influence public opinion, justify their actions, and propagate their ideological and geopolitical narratives. In Iran's case, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), its state-run media outlet, plays a critical role in constructing and disseminating a discourse that frames Iran's support for the Houthis as a legitimate and stabilizing force in Yemen. This framing is particularly significant as it seeks to counter international narratives that often portray Iran as a destabilizing actor in the region.

Despite Iran's impactful role in the conflict, academic inquiries into its media strategies and the specific discursive tactics it employs to legitimize its involvement remain relatively sparse (Abdi & Basarati, 2016; Akdoğan, Küpeli & Gürler, 2022; Naji Mohammed Haimed, Alrefaee & Alshageri, 2021; Walsh, 2023). Existing studies have largely focused on Iran's military and logistical support to the Houthis or its strategic interests in Yemen, with limited attention to the role of official media discourse as a tool for legitimization. This gap is noteworthy because state media narratives offer valuable insights into how Iran's foreign policy objectives and ideological stances are publicly framed to sustain domestic support and justify regional actions.

Understanding the role of media discourse in conflicts like Yemen is critical, particularly given the influence of media narratives on public perception and policy. Through techniques such as framing, selective reporting, and ideological appeals, media outlets can shape how conflicts are perceived, both domestically and internationally. In Iran's case, IRNA's discourse not only promotes the Iranian government's stance but also constructs an image of the Houthis that aligns with Iran's broader regional aspirations. By examining IRNA's portrayals, we gain insights into Iran's strategic messaging in the Yemeni conflict and the broader ideological underpinnings that inform its involvement in regional disputes.

This study aims to address the gap in the literature by analyzing IRNA's coverage of the Yemeni conflict, focusing specifically on the language and discursive strategies employed to legitimize Iran's role. This analysis will use Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to discourse analysis, which provides a nuanced framework for understanding how media narratives are constructed to serve strategic ends. Before examining the literature on Iran's media strategies in Yemen, it is essential to establish a broader understanding of the media's role in proxy conflicts and how discourse analysis can uncover the power dynamics embedded within these narratives.

### ***Media Discourse and Conflict***

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a widely used approach for studying media discourse in global conflicts, offering insights into the dynamics of such interactions. CDA interprets conflict as a form of social interaction expressed through discourse, and scholars have applied it across various international disputes. Researchers like Brusylovska and Maksymenko (2023) and Chiluya (2019) have used CDA to explore narratives around the Russia-Ukraine war and the Boko Haram crisis. Similar approaches have been applied to other armed conflicts, such as the Oromo-Somali clashes and policy discourses in the US and UK regarding Ukraine. This study contributes to this expanding field by focusing on Houthi discourse in the Yemeni conflict, addressing a notable gap in CDA literature on proxy warfare.

### ***Media and Middle Eastern Conflicts***

Within Middle Eastern conflict studies, CDA has been particularly effective in examining the region's complex geopolitical tensions. Researchers have applied linguistic methods, such as Van Dijk's ideological square and Fairclough's intertextual analysis, to understand ideological framing in media coverage of conflicts like the Syrian crisis, the Gulf conflict, and the Israeli-Palestinian struggle (Amin & Jalilifar, 2013; Shojaei, Youssefi & Hosseini, 2013; Thanaphokhai, 2015). From Aljazeera's coverage of Egypt's 2011 revolution (Alhumaidi, 2013) to US media's portrayal of sectarianism in Iraq (Abdullah, 2015), CDA reveals distinct perspectives and biases in conflict reporting. These diverse CDA applications underscore the method's relevance to Middle Eastern media and conflict analysis.

### ***Media and the Yemeni Conflict***

Specific CDA studies have also focused on the Yemeni conflict. For instance, Abdi and Basarati (2016) used Fairclough's model to analyze narrative divergences in newspaper portrayals of the conflict. They found that Arab and Western sources tended to frame the Houthis as rebels, while Iranian sources cast them as peace-seekers against foreign interference. Al Kharusi (2017) examined ideological motives in Aljazeera's coverage, identifying biases and gaps in journalistic integrity. These studies demonstrate the media's impact on shaping narratives around the Yemeni conflict, particularly through regional and ideological lenses.

### ***Iran and the Yemeni Conflict***

Iran's involvement in Yemen has been subject to substantial analysis, with studies exploring different facets of its role. Early studies (e.g., Terrill, 2014) assessed claims of Iranian support for the Houthis, while subsequent research (e.g., Zweiri, 2016; Ramadhan, 2020) linked Iran's activities in Yemen to its regional ambitions. Although valuable, these analyses generally overlook Iran's use of state media as a legitimizing tool. The existing literature thus lacks a detailed exploration of Iranian media's discursive strategies, particularly within IRNA, to shape public perception.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing IRNA articles to understand how Iran's media legitimizes its involvement in Yemen, applying Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to discourse analysis for a nuanced perspective. This paper is organized into four main sections: a review of existing literature, an outline of the research methodology, an analysis of IRNA's news content, and a conclusion that summarizes the study's findings and implications.

### **Framework of the Study**

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach encompasses various dimensions, including two key theories pertinent to this study: the theory of ideology and the theory of context (Van Dijk, 2013). Van Dijk theorizes in theory of ideology that comprehending attitudes and ideology relies on understanding the concept of knowledge within discourse. Knowledge represents a collective belief within epistemic social groups (Van Dijk, 2014). In contrast, attitude and ideology denote evaluative social beliefs held by specific groups (Van Dijk, 2009). Van Dijk's focus on ideology originates from the Marxist tradition (Althusser, 1976, 2014; Hirst, 1976). He suggests that differences in attitudes among groups arise from ideological variations. For instance, the Wahhabi and Twelver interpretations of Islam, while both addressing political leadership, diverge significantly in their attitudes toward loyalty and leadership. Attitudes are grounded in core ideologies, influencing the formation and alteration of smaller ideologies (Van Dijk, 2009). Ideologies are characterized by their broadness and abstraction, applied to situations, group dynamics, and processes, shaping knowledge and viewpoints (Van Dijk, 1998). Ideological characteristics play a vital role in shaping actors' discourses, influencing their understanding (mental model) of the Yemeni proxy war.

The second aspect of this framework is the theory of context. Van Dijk distinguishes between global and local context. Global context encompasses the social, political, cultural, and historical frameworks within which a communicative event unfolds (Van Dijk, 2001). Conversely, local context relates to immediate interactional circumstances (Van Dijk, 2001). Context involves considerations of who, when, where, and why something is communicated. Van Dijk's emphasis lies on the mental construction of context, highlighting the local perspective. To grasp the relationship between these contextual models, Van Dijk (2009) categorizes mental models into situation/event models (semantics) and context models (pragmatics). For instance, an article in a Saudi newspaper regarding the Yemeni war might be interpreted using a shared knowledge or situation model as merely a commentary on Iran's involvement. In contrast, a context model evaluates the appropriateness of the article, assessing whether it is perceived as threatening, accusatory, slanderous, or defamatory.

### **Design and Methodology**

The data for this study was sourced from the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), Iran's state-run news outlet, managed by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Established in 1934 as PARS Newspaper, it underwent several name changes until its current form. Initially under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it later shifted to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and finally the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance after the 1979 Islamic revolution. Operating in multiple languages including English, French, Russian, and Turkish, IRNA's editorial structure includes various news desks covering global regions and topics such as politics, economics, and sports. With 4.5 million daily hits and 1.2 million daily visits, IRNA is a significant news source, especially in the Middle East, pioneering online news since 1997. For this study, 19 news articles were selected from Al Masirah between April 2018 and March 2019, focusing on the Yemeni proxy war. Thematic analysis was employed to examine discourse structures, revealing ideological strategies such as legitimizing the ingroup and delegitimizing the outgroup. Van Dijk's six ideological schemata were utilized to analyze these strategies, uncovering how membership, activities, goals, norms and values, group positions, and resources were employed to shape discourse.

## Analysis and Findings

### *Global Macro Structures Discourse Analysis*

This section presents the global macro structures discourse analysis, a crucial element of Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA. Here, we delve into the topics and themes identified from the analysis of nineteen (19) news articles collected from IRNA, Table 1 below showcases the two themes namely defining ourselves and defining the enemy and the topics identified under each seven for defining ourselves and nine for defining the enemy.

**Table 1. Themes Identified from IRNA on the Yemeni Proxy War.**

<b>Defining Ourselves</b>	<b>Defining the Enemy</b>
1. Iran and allies are fighting for peace;	1. Evidence of Saudi sabotage and terrorism;
2. Iran stands for resistance against aggression;	2. Saudi-led coalition is the aggressor;
3. The winning Iran and its allies;	3. The criminal Saudi coalition;
4. Iran is fighting terrorism;	4. The inhuman Saudi coalition;
5. Iran is a peace seeker;	5. The terrorist Saudi coalition;
6. Iran pursues competitive regional strategies; and	6. Saudi Arabia is a liar and untrustworthy;
7. Houthi is capable of attacking SA's strategic locations.	7. The irrational Saudi attitude;
	8. Saudi Arabia is aided by the Zionist Israel; and
	9. Saudi Arabia is a threat to regional security.

The theme "Defining Ourselves" outlines Iran's self-perception, portraying itself as a peace advocate, resilient against aggression, victorious, anti-terrorism, peace-seeking, strategically competitive, and acknowledging Houthi capabilities. Conversely, Iran defines its enemies, highlighting evidence of Saudi sabotage and terrorism, depicting the Saudi-led coalition as aggressors, labeling them as "criminal," "inhuman," and "terrorist," criticizing Saudi Arabia's trustworthiness, rationality, alleging support from Israel, and viewing Saudi Arabia as a regional threat.

### *The Legitimization of Iran and Allies' Policies, Conducts and Actions in the Yemeni Proxy War*

The global analysis highlights two central themes: "defense against aggressors" and "threats posed by the aggressors," framing the conflict as an "Us" versus "Them" dichotomy. Iran and the Houthi faction align as "Us," while Saudi Arabia and its coalition are depicted as "Them." This polarization is influenced by religious, sectarian, ethnonationalist, and geopolitical dynamics. IRNA employs ideological strategies, portraying Iran positively and Saudi Arabia negatively, aiming to legitimize discriminatory attitudes and reinforce the differentiation between the two sides. Saudi Arabia is consistently associated with negative attributes like aggression, terrorism, and alignment with the US and Israel to discredit their stance and invalidate their position. This polarized narrative legitimizes Iran's actions while undermining the credibility of the opposing side, shaping perceptions of the Yemeni conflict.

## Use of Ideological Schemata

In this section, our aim is to analyze the overarching strategy of positive self-representation and negative portrayal of others. We seek to evaluate how these strategies influence both the local semantic forms and linguistic structures in news articles discussing the Yemeni proxy war. By undertaking this analysis, our goal is to identify ideological semantic forms and linguistic structures embedded within the discourse. Van Dijk's six ideological schemata - membership, activities, goals, norms and values, group positions, and resources - serve as our framework for this examination.

## Membership

The concept of membership as an ideological framework distinguishes between in-groups and out-groups based on inherent or acquired characteristics. Inherent traits include age, ethnicity, gender, language, race, and nationality, while acquired traits might include affiliations, beliefs, or behaviors. IRNA news outlets frequently employ this membership schema, as demonstrated in their portrayal of Saudi Arabia and its coalition as aggressors. This label, attributed to Muhammad Ali Al Houthi, President of the Supreme Revolutionary Council of Yemen, exemplifies this approach:

“The aggressor Saudi-led coalition has not been able to win on any warfront. Despite inviting the US-Saudi coalition to political talks, we urge the UN’s new envoy to act impartially in stopping military aggression on Yemen,” Ali al-Houthi stated. (IRNA, 11)

In this excerpt, aggression defines membership, casting the Saudi-led coalition as aggressors, with the intent of discrediting their role in the Yemeni conflict. Their alignment with the US further impacts credibility among Muslim audiences. Another strategy in Article 12 brands the coalition as "invaders," using hyperbole to emphasize alleged war crimes and deepen negative perceptions.

The head of the Yemeni Supreme Revolutionary Committee accused the US of collaborating in the aggression on the Arab country and killing Yemeni people. The presence of US forces in a Saudi Arabian region bordering Yemen shows that it is the US that is killing Yemeni people. The US has never taken the right side in any conflict throughout history and has always opposed the nations and their will. (IRNA, 13)

This passage emphasizes key points in the ideological narrative: the out-group, here including the US, is cast as the aggressor, while the in-group (Iran and the Houthis) is positioned as the victim. By associating the coalition with the US and Israel, IRNA further seeks to undermine its legitimacy in the eyes of Muslim audiences. Additionally, another prominent characteristic used to delegitimize the Saudi coalition is sponsorship of terrorism, labeling Saudi Arabia as a principal supporter, which aims to damage the out-group’s reputation.

Iran’s representative to the United Nations General Assembly dismissed Saudi Arabia's accusations against Iran, saying that everyone knows Saudis are the leading sponsors of terrorism and major destabilizers in the region and world. (IRNA, 15)

The term "terrorism" is wielded strategically by both sides in the Yemeni proxy war due to its potent, negative connotation. Iran seeks to convince the international community that Saudi Arabia is the principal sponsor of terrorism. In this context, "terrorism" has become highly politicized, with accusations often aimed at influencing public opinion rather than confirming validity. The UN General Assembly serves as a significant platform for such allegations. Another statement reinforces this depiction by labeling Saudi Arabia as a leading supporter of terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and Daesh (ISIS):

Who may not know that Saudi Arabia is the major sponsor of terrorism, ranging from Al-Qaeda to Daesh? Who may not know that the impoverished people of Yemen are being massacred by Saudi Arabia? (IRNA, 15)

This passage explicitly associates Saudi Arabia, the out-group, with sponsorship of some of the most notorious terrorist groups of the 21st century. In a global forum like the United Nations, this tactic is a calculated effort to undermine the out-group's standing before the international community. Such portrayals aim to delegitimize not only Saudi Arabia but the entire coalition and its actions in Yemen and the broader Middle East.

Throughout IRNA articles, the "Saudi-led coalition" is consistently framed negatively, as demonstrated below:

Yemeni sources announced in a recent report that the number of victims of the Saudi-led coalition's attack on a hospital and fish market in Al-Hudaydah Port reached 52. Concurrent with the coalition's attack on Al-Thawra Hospital, the fish market was also bombed, resulting in 40 wounded civilians. (IRNA, 18)  
Yemen's defenseless people have been under massive attacks by the coalition for the past three years, but Riyadh has reached none of its objectives in Yemen so far. (IRNA, 18)

Since March 2015, Saudi Arabia and some of its Arab allies have been carrying out deadly airstrikes against the Houthi Ansarullah movement in an attempt to restore power to the fugitive former president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, a close ally of Riyadh. (IRNA, 18)

These examples reinforce the negative portrayal of the out-group, casting their actions as violent and undesirable within the Yemeni proxy war. This consistent pattern strengthens the ideological narrative, emphasizing a clear division between the in-group (Iran and its allies) and the out-group (Saudi-led coalition). Articles 18 and 2 associate the Saudi-led coalition with oppression, align it with the West—often perceived as adversarial to Islam—and depict Yemeni civilians as defenseless victims of the coalition's "massive attacks" and "deadly airstrikes," reinforcing a narrative of Saudi aggression and Yemeni suffering.

Overall, IRNA's discourse seeks to legitimize the in-group's actions while discrediting the out-group's role, shaping reader perceptions within the context of the Yemeni proxy war.

### **Activities**

The ideological framework in the discourse defines the in-group's identity and actions while discrediting the out-group. In this case, Iran legitimizes its own and the Houthi faction's activities in Yemen, while delegitimizing those of Saudi Arabia and its coalition, including the Yemeni government. Actions by the Saudi-led coalition are depicted as "aggressive" and

“criminal,” tarnishing their reputation, whereas Iran and the Houthi faction are portrayed defensively, as fighting for freedom. This strategy of positive self-representation and negative other-representation aims to influence readers’ perceptions of the Yemeni war and support the ideological framework. The following sections will outline how the discourse criminalizes and demoralizes coalition actions, showcasing the ideological framework in action.

### **Criminalization of Saudi-led Coalition Actions**

To delegitimize the actions of the Saudi-led coalition, their efforts are often labeled “criminal.” This criminalization is evident throughout IRNA news articles. For instance, in Article 12, the coalition’s activity is framed as follows: “Saudi Arabia and its regional allies attacked Yemen in March 2015 to bring back to power the deposed President of Yemen Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi” (IRNA, 12).

This excerpt portrays the Saudi-led coalition (the out-group) as violently “attacking” Yemenis, depicting them as adversaries to peace. The suggestion is that they engage in such aggression for political gains, contrasting with the in-group, which avoids such actions. The coalition is further labeled “invaders”: “Since then, the invaders have committed horrible war crimes against Yemeni civilians” (IRNA, 12). Such phrasing suggests the coalition’s acts are both aggressive and illegitimate, portraying them as attempts to impose their political will, especially in reinstating Hadi as Yemen’s leader.

This theme recurs throughout the dataset. For example, Article 13 accuses the US of complicity: “Head of the Yemeni Supreme Revolutionary Committee accused the US of collaborating in the aggression on the Arab country and killing Yemeni people” (IRNA, 13). “The US has never taken the right side of any conflict throughout history and has always confronted the nations and their will” (IRNA, 13). Here, “killing” is repeated to highlight the out-group’s violence, generalizing the U.S. as historically oppositional. This attribution of aggression frames the coalition and its supporters as morally deficient and reinforces a negative portrayal of the out-group.

Another example from **Article 13** includes:

A military intervention in Yemen was launched in 2015 by Saudi Arabia, accompanied by a number of other Arab states and supported by the West, particularly the US. The bombings have claimed lives of thousands of Yemeni civilians, including hundreds of children. (IRNA, 13)

By labeling this as “military intervention,” the narrative suggests a violation of Yemeni sovereignty and accuses the coalition of harming civilians, particularly children, thus framing the out-group as deeply immoral.

### **Demoralization of Saudi-led Coalition Actions**

Another tactic in Iran's discourse is the demoralization of coalition actions, casting them as devoid of moral integrity. Article 15 offers an illustration: “Stressing that Saudi Arabia is deliberately killing Yemeni children, Golroo added that it is Daesh and Saudis that consider attack on a bus carrying children legitimate” (IRNA, 15). Here, the language implies Saudi Arabia not only participates in aggression but aligns with terrorist practices, tarnishing its image further. Article 16 intensifies this portrayal by stating:



Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating military campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the aim of bringing the government of Hadi back to power and crushing the country's Houthi Ansarullah movement. Some 15,000 Yemenis have been killed and thousands more injured since the onset of the Saudi-led aggression. More than 2,200 others have died of cholera, and the crisis has triggered what the United Nations has described as the world's worst humanitarian disaster. (IRNA, 16)

The figures and language here amplify the scale of the violence, suggesting an indiscriminate impact on Yemen as a whole, not merely on specific factions.

**Article 18** further accuses the coalition of violating fundamental humanitarian principles:

Earlier, Yemeni local resources announced that Al-Hudaydah Hospital in west of Yemen came under attack by the Saudi fighters, which killed 26 and wounded 35.

Yemeni Health Ministry spokesman Yousof al-Hazeri said that ambulances and rescue and relief automobiles were deliberately targeted by the Saudi fighters. (IRNA, 18)

Here, the coalition is accused of attacking critical public spaces, amplifying its criminality and immorality. Terms like "deliberately targeted" suggest intentional harm to non-combatants and rescue efforts, aligning with Van Dijk's ideological schemata.

In analyzing activities within this ideological framework, Iran aims to portray the Saudi-led coalition's actions in Yemen as criminal, aggressive, and indifferent to human suffering. Discursive tactics such as dramatization, hyperbole, and emotionally charged language consistently present the out-group as perpetrating severe offenses, while the in-group is positioned as striving for justice. Through such framing, the discourse seeks to delegitimize the coalition's presence in Yemen while promoting Iran's own ideological stance, reinforcing a stark divide between the "righteous" in-group and the "immoral" out-group.

### Goals

The preceding analysis has illuminated how the ideological schema of activities scrutinizes the actions and behaviors of the involved actors. In contrast, the ideological schema of goals delves into the aspirations of the in-group and the perceived objectives of the out-group. The goals attributed to Iran align with its actions and membership, mirroring the portrayal of the Saudi coalition. This alignment underscores the coherence within Iran's ideological framework, shaping perceptions of both the in-group and out-group in the Yemeni proxy war.

"Tehran believes in the establishment of a ceasefire in Yemen and is trying to pave the way for sending humanitarian aid and holding intra-Yemeni talks" (IRNA, 12). This excerpt positions Iran not as a participant in the conflict but as a mediator striving for a ceasefire, aiming to legitimize its involvement by framing its objectives as constructive, including providing humanitarian aid and facilitating dialogue for peace and stability.

In Article 17, Iran's broader goals in the region are conveyed through President Rouhani's remarks:

Iran's main goal in Syria was to demolish Daesh and in spite of wide support of the Zionist regime and the US for the terrorist group, Iran managed to defeat Daesh, and will stand by the Syrian people in the fight against other terrorist groups until they win the final victory. (IRNA, 17)

This excerpt highlights Iran's stance as an opponent of terrorism, suggesting that its regional objectives in Syria align with its alleged goals in Yemen to counter extremism. By casting Saudi Arabia and coalition partners as supporting terrorism, Iran portrays itself as a stabilizing force against regional destabilization, reinforcing the ideological narrative of Iran as a defender against hostility.

### **Norms and Values**

Norms and values form the backbone of social structures, guiding behaviors and interactions within hierarchical systems. These frameworks regulate actions and shape the social standing of in-groups and out-groups. According to Van Dijk (1998), norms and values help justify or contest a group's position relative to others (Van Dijk, 1998: 258). By appealing to universally accepted values, groups can legitimize or challenge specific actions, policies, or stances.

In Article 18, Iran's Ambassador to the UK criticizes the coalition's actions: "Referring to the new crime of the coalition led by Saudi Arabia in Yemen, the Ambassador said the weapon-exporting countries should boycott the military coalition of Saudi Arabia to stop the killing immediately" (IRNA, 18).

This excerpt adopts a critical tone, portraying the coalition's actions as morally reprehensible and calling for accountability. The term "crime" underscores ethical violations, aligning with the ideological schema of "Norms and Values," which emphasizes the moral dimension of the conflict and advocates for accountability.

Another IRNA article emphasizes this stance:

The spokesman, expressing deep regret about the continued silence and indifference of the international community regarding the crimes of the aggressors, added, 'Those countries that by arm supporting of the aggressors of Yemen, have caused human tragedy in this country, are partners in these crimes and must be accountable for their support' (IRNA, 8).

This quote frames the coalition as morally culpable, condemning the aggression and encouraging international accountability for supporting states. By emphasizing norms of justice and ethical behavior, this approach advocates for moral integrity and calls for an end to perceived transgressions.

Finally, in Article 4, Iran's diplomatic efforts under President Rouhani are depicted as promoting peace and reducing tensions: "Under President Hassan Rouhani, Iran's diplomatic engagement aligns with the values of promoting peace and reducing regional tensions, reinforcing the normative significance of diplomacy and peaceful coexistence" (IRNA, 4).

This extract aligns with the "Norms and Values" schema, portraying Iran's commitment to peaceful engagement and diplomacy, which seeks to emphasize Iran's role as a proponent of regional stability.

In this analysis, Iran's ideological framework emphasizes goals of peace and stability while portraying the Saudi coalition's goals as aggressive. Through strategic use of norms and values, Iran's discourse aims to position itself favorably, drawing on universal ethical standards to reinforce its ideological stance in the Yemeni conflict.

### **Group Positions**

Group position refers to how one group perceives and interacts with another, including dynamics of allies versus adversaries, dominance, and competition. In the Yemeni proxy war discourse, the group relations depict Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni government as adversaries to Iran, framing the conflict as an "Us" (Iran and allies) versus "Them" (Arab Sunni states) dichotomy. This portrayal aims to discredit Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni government by associating them with opposition to what Iran frames as progressive Islam. Categorizing entities as "Us" and "Them" strengthens ideological divisions and discredits the out-group by linking it to principles opposed by Iran's in-group. This narrative seeks to position "Us" as champions of progressive Islam, painting "Them" as adversaries.

“Human rights groups have frequently accused Saudi Arabia of violating basic rights of the people of Yemen, as the coalition has bombarded many civilian places, including schools and hospitals” (IRNA, 13). This excerpt reveals contrasting views on human rights in the conflict, portraying Saudi Arabia and its coalition as violators accused of targeting civilians, while Iran and its allies are depicted as defenders of human rights. By aligning with humanitarian values and leveling accusations of terrorism, the discourse delegitimizes the out-group's actions and policies, aiming to bolster Iran's legitimacy.

In another instance: “The statement read out by Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir accused Tehran of ignoring international regulations, urging it to stop sending missiles for Houthis in Yemen” (IRNA, 16). Here, Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of breaching international law by allegedly supplying arms to Houthi forces. Iran counters this accusation: “Tehran has denied sending arms or missiles to the Yemeni people, arguing that the impoverished country is under siege by Saudi Arabia and its allies from land, sea, and air, making it impossible to send anything” (IRNA, 16).

Iran's denial not only refutes accusations but also shifts blame to Saudi Arabia and its allies for allegedly imposing a blockade on Yemen, thereby hindering aid. This portrayal deepens the division between Iran (in-group) and Saudi Arabia (out-group), delegitimizing the latter's role in Yemen. Iran's strategic use of counter-allegations seeks to undermine the out-group's credibility while reinforcing its narrative as a victim of aggression, positioning Iran as a steadfast defender of its stance and as a victim rather than an aggressor.

### **Resources**

Resources include both material and non-material assets, with Iran aiming to safeguard its territorial integrity and sovereignty. An earlier excerpt highlights Iran's stance on three disputed islands, demonstrating its commitment to preserving its territorial claims:

“The statement once again supported the United Arab Emirates’ claim to ownership of three Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf and urged Tehran to give an affirmative response to a UAE demand for holding negotiations on the islands or agree to refer the case to international courts” (IRNA, 16).

The disputed islands carry material significance as physical territory and non-material value in terms of Iran’s sovereignty. Defending these islands becomes a matter of protecting national integrity, with implications for Iran’s ideological stance in the Yemeni war. By encouraging Iran to respond “affirmatively” to the UAE’s demands, the out-group’s narrative attempts to present UAE’s claim as legitimate, framing Iran’s acquiescence as necessary. Terms like “affirmative response” and “agree to refer” imply pressure for compliance, reinforcing the UAE's stance as valid.

Iran, however, reasserts its unwavering stance: “The Islamic Republic of Iran has time and again announced that the three Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, Greater and Lesser Tunbs are integral parts of its territory and are not negotiable” (IRNA, 16).

This excerpt demonstrates Iran’s discursive strategy in line with Van Dijk's ideological schema of Resources, reinforcing its commitment to maintaining control over the islands. By stating that the islands are "not negotiable," Iran emphasizes its resolve, rejecting any possibility of discussion or compromise. This positioning asserts Iran’s authority and control, reinforcing the portrayal of the islands as an inherent, indivisible part of its territory.

In sum, Iran’s discourse on group positions and resources highlights a strategic approach that seeks to discredit the Saudi coalition and uphold Iran’s legitimacy. Through narratives emphasizing human rights, territorial integrity, and ideological principles, Iran frames itself as a defender of sovereignty and stability against an antagonistic out-group. This ideological framing is crucial in shaping perceptions of the Yemeni conflict, revealing the power of narratives in international discourse.

### Conclusion

This article aimed to explore self-positive representation and negative-other representation in Iran's official newspaper outlet, IRNA. The findings highlight that Iran’s discourse on the Yemeni war revolves around two primary themes: defining ourselves and defining the enemy. These themes encompass various topics that either commend and justify Iran’s involvement in the conflict or portray the opposing side (Saudi coalition) in a negative light, seeking to delegitimize their role. By employing the ideological schemata proposed by Van Dijk, the article demonstrates how Iran utilizes several local semantic strategies to achieve its objectives. In doing so, this study addresses a significant gap in the existing literature, which has received limited attention.

The findings of this study carry practical implications for policymakers, media analysts, and conflict resolution specialists. Understanding the ways in which official narratives shape public perceptions and justify state actions provides insight into the ideological mechanisms used to legitimize or delegitimize roles in regional conflicts. Policymakers can use this knowledge to anticipate and respond to media narratives that influence regional relations, particularly in polarized environments. Media analysts can further apply these insights to decode patterns in state-owned outlets, facilitating more nuanced interpretations of how discourse shapes

international perceptions. For conflict resolution practitioners, this study's insights into narrative construction offer a pathway for designing peace-building strategies that challenge divisive rhetoric, potentially fostering alternative, more constructive dialogues.

Future research could build on this study by exploring the impact of Iran's media discourse on regional and international audiences, examining how audiences perceive and respond to such representations. Additionally, comparative studies that analyze similar narratives across different state-owned media in the Middle East would provide a broader understanding of how ideological narratives vary by context, nation, or ideological leaning. Researchers could also investigate the potential shifts in Iran's discourse over time, particularly in response to changes in geopolitical alliances or regional conflicts, to understand how evolving regional dynamics shape media narratives. Lastly, examining the role of social media in reinforcing or counteracting official narratives may offer insights into how digital platforms are reshaping the dynamics of ideological representation in conflict contexts.

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