Classical Realism, Status, and Emotions: Understanding the Canada/Saudi Arabia Dispute and Its Implications for Global Politics

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This article draws on classical realism, status theory, and research on emotions to explain the Canada/Saudi Arabia diplomatic dispute (2018–) and its implications for global politics. These non-great powers should not be engaging in a protracted conflict according to most international relations (IR) theory. The article argues that status, in the form of political "struggle" over whose identity should be considered socially superior, is a necessary condition for the dispute and the principal reason why Canada and Saudi Arabia have not reconciled. Reflecting recent trajectories in IR and the renewed interest in classical realism, the article seeks to recover the full scope of classical realism's human nature aspect, broad definition of "interest," and openness to emotion. Its classical realism–status–emotions theory offers a fuller explanation of the dispute than neoclassical realism and constructivism, the most cognate rival approaches. Utilizing the process tracing method, the article distills its status–emotions model into a three-part status–emotions "mechanism" for use in the case study section.

Este artículo se basa en el realismo clásico, la teoría del estatus y la investigación sobre las emociones para explicar la disputa diplomática entre Canadá y Arabia Saudí (desde 2018) y sus repercusiones en la política mundial. Según muchas de las teorías de las relaciones internacionales, estas potencias no tan grandes no deberían participar en un conflicto prolongado. El artículo sostiene que el estatus, en forma de "lucha" política sobre la identidad de quién debe considerarse socialmente superior, es una condición necesaria para la disputa y el principal motivo por el que Canadá y Arabia Saudí aún no se han reconciliado. En respuesta a las recientes trayectorias de las relaciones internacionales y el renovado interés por el realismo clásico, el artículo trata de recuperar todo el alcance de la vertiente de naturaleza humana del realismo clásico, la amplia definición de "interés" y la apertura a la emoción. Su teoría sobre realismo clásico, estatus y emociones ofrece una explicación más completa de la disputa que el realismo neoclásico y el constructivismo, los enfoques antagónico más conocidos. Mediante el método de rastreo de procesos, el artículo desglosa su modelo de estatus y emociones en un "mecanismo" de estatus y emociones de tres partes para utilizarlo posteriormente en la sección de estudio de casos.

Cet article s'inspire du réalisme classique, de la théorie du statut et des recherches sur les émotions pour expliquer le conflit diplomatique entre le Canada et l'Arabie Saoudite (2018–) et ses implications pour la politique mondiale. Ces puissances qui ne font pas partie des grandes puissances ne devraient pas s'engager dans un conflit prolongé selon la plupart des théories des relations internationales. Cet article soutient que le statut, sous la forme d'une « lutte » politique pour savoir quelle identité doit être considérée comme socialement supérieure, est une condition nécessaire au conflit et la principale raison pour laquelle le Canada et l'Arabie Saoudite ne se sont pas réconciliés. Il se livre à une réflexion sur les trajectoires récentes en relations internationales et le regain d'intérêt pour le réalisme classique et cherche à retrouver toute la portée de l'aspect nature humaine, de la définition large « d'intérêt » et de l'ouverture aux émotions du réalisme classique. Sa théorie Réalisme classique/statut/émotions offre une explication plus complète du conflit que le réalisme néoclassique et le constructivisme qui sont les approches rivales les plus apparentées. Cet article emploie une méthode de retracement du processus et distille son modèle Statut/émotions en un « mécanisme » de statut/émotions en trois parties à utiliser dans la section d'étude de cas.

Introduction

This article examines the protracted tension in relations between Canada and Saudi Arabia. It asks two questions: (1) why did Canada and Saudi Arabia, both small powers and rising regional powers, get into an intense diplomatic dispute in August 2018? and (2) why is this dispute still unresolved? Over three years later, there is no ambassador on either side, no diplomatic progress, and only incremental recovery of trade (Horak 2021). Canada still cannot openly and directly win new Saudi contracts. Though Saudi Arabia bought CAD$74 million of military goods in a 2020 deal brokered by Canada, the goods were supplied by France, giving the Saudis and Canadians cover enough that the deal was not really with Canada (Horak 2021; Paez 2021). The dispute is surprising and unexpected because neither is a great power. Canada and Saudi Arabia should not be having this sustained conflict according to most international relations (IR) theory. China can gain power and status by quarrelling with a western state. The United Kingdom can gain power and status by intervening in Libya (Dawson 2021, 1–2). It is not clear how Saudi Arabia and Canada can gain power and status by clashing with each other.

Several explanations suggest themselves in the IR discipline. Scholars might focus on different identities (constructivists) and the role of values-based foreign policy (foreign policy analysis). Another approach would be to highlight international stimuli, and how the response to this by ambitious leaders in both countries is filtered through their eagerness to strengthen their holds over foreign policy and domestic politics (neoclassical realists). Some scholars might say that status is a plausible explanation. There is an enduring "overemphasis" in IR on great power status (realists, liberals) (Renshon 2017, 17). Status theorists tend to emphasize cooperation when they examine small powers (de Carvalho and Neumann 2015, 1–2; Wohlforth et al. 2018, 529). Few would focus on the role of status, or the role of emotions in self-perceptions and constructions of

status, in small power and rising regional power conflict. It is necessary to use this perspective to frame the dispute. This article argues that status, in the form of political "struggle" over whose identity should be considered socially superior, is a necessary condition for the Canada/Saudi Arabia dispute and the principal reason why the states have not reconciled.

The article makes three interventions. First is a novel discussion of the Canada/Saudi Arabia dispute, emphasizing status as the independent variable. The second is the role status and emotions play not just in great power competition and conflict, but also in international interactions between small and rising regional powers. The third intervention reflects current trajectories in IR. As social constructions gain acceptance, Michael C. Williams notes, realists "have sought to incorporate questions of identity into their theories, opening up connections to broadened understandings of the place of such issues in classical realism" ([2010](#), 8–9). This article integrates status and emotions into classical realism. The third intervention is also a synergistic explanation of the other two. A broadened classical realism can offer an explanation of the article's interlinked concerns: the role of status in Canada/Saudi Arabia diplomatic dispute, and the role of emotions in status.

Before delving deeper, the article will define some core concepts. First, Canada's and Saudi Arabia's power position needs to be discussed. To distinguish Canada from other small powers, its foreign policy makers promote the concept of "middle powerhood." However, "Canada's status as a middle power is a myth," one that is "crafted to justify the attainment of disproportionate influence in international affairs," such as G7 membership, owing to it being a big fish in the small pool of western countries. The article does not use the concept to define Canada because it is a nationalist self-assertion and does not reflect Canada's relatively limited power capabilities and importance (notwithstanding the size of its economy) ([Chapnick 2000](#), 188, 191). Power is "the ability—or lack of it—to prevail in conflicts of interest with other states" ([Nossal 1997](#), 67); by that measure, Canada is a small power. Saudi Arabia is a rising regional power; it has made major power gains relative to Persian Gulf and Middle East states. Saudi Arabia is not in the same league as rising great powers; it is roughly the level of Turkey or Iran, in that its capabilities and influence in the Islamic and Arab spheres are significant, but regional. Saudi Arabia's rise is taking place as "the global economic center of gravity moves east and Asia and the Middle East draw closer together" ([Fulton 2019b](#)). The Saudis now have more room to hedge against overreliance on the United States by turning to China and India as alternative patrons and new providers of public goods ([Fulton 2019b](#), [2000](#); [Cooley and Nexon 2020](#), 9–10, 17).

Second, Canada's/Saudi Arabia's status groups must be briefly defined because their status competition is not simply about self-assertions; the states are also asserting collective social identities of which they are part. Canada's is the US-led "the West," a coherent group comprised of states that adhere to the Euro-American narrative of liberty traceable to the Enlightenment ([Kimmage 2020](#), 14–16). This understanding, which has inspired most US Presidents since 1945, did not accord with the president at the start of the dispute, Donald Trump, whose ethnoreligious-nationalist idea of "the West" made him the first non-western leader of the United States ([Kimmage 2020](#), 18–19, 303; [Tharoor 2021](#)). The rising power group is defined by their common interest in a more equal distribution of power and position, and in new rules covering legitimacy, justice, and world order ([Kirshner 2010](#), 58; [Kupchan 2012](#), x). Rising powers

feel *entitled* to change international dynamics ([Paul, Welch Larson, and Wohlforth 2014](#), 25). For example, "the idea that the international system should have 'Chinese characteristics,' with more of a leadership role for the country[,] is now the guiding diplomatic doctrine of China" ([Palmer 2021](#)).

Third and last, given that the Canada/Saudi Arabia dispute is enmeshed in contestation over "order," the existing liberal world order merits explanation. "The West's" order is defined generally as liberal democracy (including rule of law and human rights), capitalism (including open markets), multilateral institutions, and secular nationalism. The world is not taking a new center of gravity or dominant political model, fragmenting into regions or "moving inexorably toward a seamless globality"; it is becoming multipolar and politically pluralist ([Kupchan 2012](#), ix–x, 8–10; [Acharya 2014](#), 650). The contestation is driven by rising powers and a host of non-western states. It is exposing global dissensus over values, norms, and position, and broad dynamics of geopolitical and social conflict not limited to the great powers ([Menon 2016](#), 10–11, 75–76; [Klassen and Engler 2018](#), 66).

The rest of this article has three main sections. The second section looks at the status literature, with a focus on small and rising powers. The third section discusses the article's classical realism–status–emotions theory and how it elevates the article's explanation above constructivism and neoclassical realism (NCR), the most cognate rival approaches. It also discusses the article's status–emotions model and the model's distillation, as part of the process tracing method, into a three-part status–emotions "mechanism." In the fourth section, the case study, the mechanism is used to answer the article's questions by establishing how the dispute developed over time. The conclusion recapitulates the main findings and makes suggestions for further research.

Status Literature

Before discussing the status research on small and rising powers, the article briefly reviews the three main branches of status literature in IR. During the 1980s and 1990s, status was neglected because it did not fit into IR's "paradigm wars" or topics like norms, regimes, interdependence, and transnational non-state actors. Classical realist and neorealist scholars rarely discussed status, and when they did, they treated status as instrumental to great power military capability ([Paul, Welch Larson, and Wohlforth 2014](#), 4–6). According to Jonathan Renshon, the more recent IR literature has three branches: "strategic approaches" that are sensitive to the instrumentalist and dyadic aspects of status; "constructivist approaches," attuned to the social and community aspects; and "realist approaches," incorporating the interplay between power and status ([Renshon 2017](#), 9). Elias Götz, in his up-to-date review of the status literature, argues slightly differently that the status schools are "rationalist-instrumentalist," "constructivist," and "social identity theory," which comes from social psychology ([Götz 2021](#), 228–29). This article incorporates aspects of Götz's "constructivist" and "social identity theory" schools within its classical realism framework. It subscribes to the former's ontological security explanation as to why states want status and the latter's focus on intrinsic motivations for competitive status-seeking ([Götz 2021](#), 239).

The status literature on rising powers is limited but growing, and Saudi Arabia is one of the rising states to have received attention. Several scholarly teams involving Thomas

J. Volgy have explored major powers' status attributes, how rising major powers can be identified, the prospect of major powers entering great power "clubs," and what kind of status they could expect to receive (Cline et al. 2011, 151; Volgy et al. 2011, 7; Volgy et al. 2014, 59). Scholars including F. Gregory Gause, Marc Lynch, and May Darwich have been examining the role of status in Saudi foreign policy. Power transition inside the Kingdom has installed leaders hungry for power and status and willing to take massive gambles to obtain them, argues Gause, notably Mohammed bin Salman (known as MBS), de facto leader since 2015 and Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister since 2017 (2018a, 1–11; 2018b, 4). MBS is bent on increasing the status Saudi Arabia and he himself as leader enjoy (Gause 2018a, 5–6). Darwich and Lynch shed light on regional dynamics. The Iraq War (2003) and Arab Spring (2011) destabilized the former regional pillars—Iraq, Syria, and Egypt—now barely functional states, and bolstered Iran and the Arab Persian Gulf states, creating for them "new opportunities for competition and intervention" (Lynch 2018). For the Saudis, this "status mismatch is at the origin of what many observers qualify as a shift from a traditionally cautious foreign policy toward more assertive, aggressive behavior" (Darwich 2018, 133).

Scholars argue small powers also want and seek status but tend to rely on cooperative and status quo strategies to obtain it. Benjamin de Carvalho and Iver B. Neumann argue that status is an everyday driver for small powers, and that they are most likely to get it by being useful to great powers (2015, 1–2). Rasmus Brun Pedersen finds that Norway and Denmark, both stalwart supporters of United Nations peacekeeping, have embraced a more militarized foreign policy to enhance their usefulness to the United States (2018, 218). Caroline Dunton argues that Canada tends to call for small power inclusion in the distribution of power, without challenging the dominant imperial and great power hierarchies (2020, 538–39). Wohlforth et al. show that small powers often seek to confirm status by being "conspicuously good or moral actors" (2018, 529). These states adopt "different status-seeking rationales than those commonly recognized in the literature" (Long and Urdinez 2021, 1). For example, Paraguay's elites value the sustained attention of Taiwan over macroeconomic benefits from a fickler China, and Canada pursues status as "good international citizen" when material rewards are few and economic interests could be set back (Wylie 2009, 114; Long and Urdinez 2021, 2, 5).

Theory, Methodology, and Method

Classical Realism–Status–Emotions Theory

This review of status literature reveals strong foundations on which to build as well as promising areas for future research. The article seeks to perform both tasks by proposing a theory based on the classical realism of Hans Morgenthau and Jonathan Mercer's cognate work on neorealism. Morgenthau's contested idea that international conflict is "biopsychologically" rooted in humanity is not used. Rather, the article takes the idea from Morgenthau that conflict is an extension of human nature in action (1948, 4, 17), and from Mercer that states are a priori self-regarding, and need, as a consequence of interstate and intergroup relations, to assert their social identity (1995, 251). The crux is that all states are constituted and led by humans who have an emotional need for recognition and satisfaction of their desire for positive (if not high) social status. Like individuals, states and status groups cannot be satisfied with and of themselves;

they need and must seek external referent(s) to compare with and assert themselves over. Social groups form strong unifying bonds based on common identity and/or interests that cumulate in assertions of collective pride and transmute group identity into nationalism and groupism (Moore 2020, 56–57).

This theory is not a recipe for endless war, it is merely making certain assumptions and predictions about the operation of emotions and status needs in international power politics. To elaborate, it is necessary to first refer back to the foundations of realism. Neorealist Robert G. Gilpin sets out the three core assumptions that realism has about political and social life: groups are the essence of social reality, reality is conflictual in nature, and security and power are the prime motivations (1986, 304–5). Morgenthau argues that wherever you look "there exists a multiplicity of autonomous social units that want to preserve their autonomy." Since states and status groups are autonomous social entities, with no superior above them, they live in social conflict in which each has the intent to subvert the autonomy of the other while protecting their own (Lang 2004, 26–27). This expression of the will to power[1] is inherent to entities at all levels of social interaction and it has emotional and psychological factors at the base. One aspect of that political will is to manifest power; in other words, he argues, to "establish, in their own eyes and in the eyes of those other members of the social group to which they belong, the entire expanse of their sphere of influence in order to thus assert the success of their will to power and to renew the satisfaction felt when this will is realized" (Morgenthau 2012, 106–7).

Mercer is part of a tradition traceable to Morgenthau that believes social recognition, a cognate for status, is as essential as the struggle for power. Mercer argues that social entities from the time they come into existence are propelled by egoism to compete and discriminate against the other. Their "cognitions and desire for a positive social identity" exist before states meet in anarchy for the first time and predispose them to competition and conflict. This egoist drive comes before identity, interests, and acts of social construction (Mercer 1995, 246–47, 251). Likewise, Jennifer Sterling-Folker argues that even when autonomous entities have social practices in common, such as capitalism, outgroup antagonism as an unowned process with no identifiable author exists. States and status groups use it to reify intergroup distinctions and resource competition (2002, 75, 85–87). This inherently conflictual view of politics reflects Morgenthau's (1948, 4, 16–18; Mercer 1995, 247). Morgenthau argues that power and existence are the "raw material" of the political world, but the tribute others accord us "is as important as what we actually are" (1948, 50–51). "Politics"—and thus social conflict—in classical realism refers to humanity's quest to answer basic needs and the related imperative to assert and impose ourselves on others (Scheuerman 2009, 52).

Classical Realism's Richness

Ontologically and epistemologically, classical realism is ideally suited to this article's theory and method. Classical realist ontology accepts a reality separate from subjective opinion but does not deny the role of unobservables, such as emotions and status. Its epistemology rejects the solving of political problems through reason alone, accepts the

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[1] "Will to power" is a concept Morgenthau has drawn from the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. This article engages with different concepts and debates. For more on Morgenthau and Nietzsche, see Petersen (1999).

importance of ideas and social constructions, and insists that historical context matters (Barkin 2003, 331–32). The article's methodology is inspired by ongoing debates in IR—Michael C. Williams, J. Samual Barkin, and William E. Scheuerman are key contributors—that aim to recover classical realism's richness and multiplicity from neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz and other critics. The article will answer its questions by recovering the full scope of classical realism's human nature aspect, its broad definition of "interest," and openness to emotion. After justifying its classical realism methodology in this way, the article will build on this discussion by creating a status–emotions model to use with its process tracing "mechanism."

For Morgenthau, politics is an autonomous social realm or "sphere of contest over the determination of values and wills" that becomes perceptible to researchers through observation of the evolving practices of actors (Buzan, Jones, and Little 1993, 3; Williams 2005, 110, 115). The immediate aim of politics is power, defined as control over the minds and actions of other people (Morgenthau 1948, 13–14, 17). Morgenthau says "politics" can be described as "a characteristic, quality, or coloration which any substance can take on" (cited in Scheuerman 2010, 62). Disagreements and differences of opinion are not unusual in the social realm; what distinguishes instances as "political" conflict is intense enmity, intense struggle between people over symbolic objects, values, and meanings. In classical realism, "political conflicts are by definition 'passionate'" (Scheuerman 1999, 232). According to Morgenthau, the political quality of interstate relations "is to be seen in the particularly close relation that rulers assert from time to time between the state and certain goods or values that they hold indispensable to its security or greatness" (cited in Scheuerman 1999, 231–32).

In the political sphere, the intense contestation or struggle over the meaning of social reality is "pure"—without fixed content or interest. Power in itself is the interest (Morgenthau 1948, 5–6, 13–14; Williams 2005, 114–15, 117). The definition of "interest" in classical realism incorporates social constructions such as norms, morality, and public opinion—in short, not only the material aspects humans can see (Morgenthau 2000, 288–89). Rather than marginalizing ideas and social constructions, Morgenthau puts forward a fluid, multiple, and relational conception of interest (Williams 2005, 83, 110). Interest in the classical realism conception is socially variable, meaning that it is subject to historical contingency, flux, and the flow of time. When interests change that are the symbolic object of power, the nature of social reality also changes (Walker 1987, 70, 72).

Classical realism's long-standing openness to emotion also merits renewed attention. The IR discipline has taken an "emotional turn" in the past decade. Emotions are now seen as intrinsic to the social realm and world politics (Hutchison and Bleiker 2014, 492). Classical realism's engagement with emotion extends well beyond fear, the feeling normally associated with realism and liberalism in IR. Morgenthau, for example, recognizes that psychological and emotional beliefs—such as nationalism, power, and status—strongly influence state foreign policy decision-making (1948, 14, 55, 77). He believes researchers should grapple with human emotions and accept, Scheuerman argues, that answers to political questions are "necessarily incomplete" (2009, 43).

Status–Emotions Model

The discussion so far feeds into the article's status–emotions model and use of the process tracing method. The article defines "status" by drawing on the existing literature. Researchers using process tracing, which will be defined below, must think carefully about the theoretical proposition and "distinguish between what is included and not included in the concept" (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 46, 51). It is not enough for the article to ask, "what is status and why is it relevant?"; it must also ask, "relevant to whom?" (Renshon 2017, 33). Status is "omnipresent" in IR, Richard Ned Lebow argues, and "gives rise to the universal drive for self-esteem, which finds expression in the quest for honor or standing" (2010, 16). Status is relative, subjective, and voluntarily conferred. It refers to the "collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes." Status manifests itself in two ways: as membership in a defined social group and as position in that group. This idea of "ranking" is what distinguishes status from "prestige" (Paul, Welch Larson, and Wohlforth 2014, 7–9, 16). Status is also distinct from "respect," for respect is "owed" from "wider society" (Wolf 2011, 106, 115–16).

Status groups have strategic and emotional significance to states, which is why they are so important to Canada and Saudi Arabia and play such a prominent role in their dispute. The most common groupings are by power rank, region, or a mix of both (e.g., the G7). Status symbols and hierarchies are not global; saliency is primarily among peers. States will "group themselves into 'status communities' of peer competitors" with whom they identify based on common salient attributes and more frequent interaction (Renshon 2016, 515, 528–29). The object of the status competition is dynamic and "depend[s] upon the particular international society to which the state belongs." Group behavioral norms determine the way states view status and the mechanics of their status competition (Markey 1999, 169–70). Status is valuable to states and their groups for "coordinating expectations of dominance and deference in strategic interactions" (Renshon 2017, 33). This requires assertions of positive social identity, which are also essential to the psychological and emotional satisfaction of each state and each group as a collectivity.

Political leaders use strategic "signaling" to project to international actors the preferred social standing of their state and status group (Pu 2019, 8–9, 10–11). Leaders are almost obsessed with status; members of the public live vicariously through their state and feel good when it has high standing. Status-dissatisfied states may take dramatic action to convey new information to alter collective beliefs, such as initiating a dispute or militarized conflict they think they can win (Renshon 2016, 515, 522–23, 526). Status assertions and emotional conditions have a consistent relationship. When status expectations are not met, cognitive dissonance and strong emotion (e.g., anger) result. This is depicted in figure 1. As in the Canada/Saudi Arabia dispute, this process can trigger and prolong interstate conflict.

States are likely to feel anger when "treated in a manner demeaning to their understanding of their status" (Lebow 2010, 74). States engage in emotional diplomacy to indicate not only that a normatively significant boundary has been crossed, but also that the transgression was morally wrong and ought not to have happened (Hall 2015, 4–6, 47). "Diplomacy of anger," argues Todd H. Hall, is one such foreign policy strategy designed "to maintain and protect what actors value." It has a specific trajectory, one that can be seen in the Canada/Saudi Arabia dispute: an "immediate aggressive and punitive reaction to a perceived wrong," such as a slight to "deserved" status. The anger dissipates quickly or slowly, depending on the target's response (2015, 46–47). Public displays of official anger are not "normal"; they have a negative connotation in the contemporary
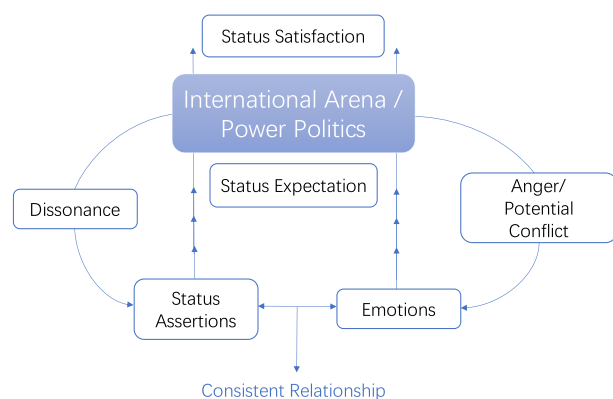
Figure 1. Status-emotions model.

international arena, which has come to value self-restraint. However, Andrew Linklater notes, "it would be wrong to think that anger's time has passed or to conclude that its significance is confined to 'barbaric' peoples" (2014, 576–77).

Constructivism and Neoclassical Realism

Classical realism accounts for emotions such as anger in international interactions, both in the past and today. Despite this, after his death in 1980 and until recently, IR scholars have tended to neglect Morgenthau's ideas and caricature classical realism as a narrow, materialist, cynical, rationalist, and power-obsessed dogma. With a closer look, it is plain to see that the approach remains relevant to understanding international politics; it enables scholars to look not just at power, but also at social constructions, identities, norms, rules, status, and emotions. This is not to imply a theory hierarchy, with classical realism "superior" to other explanations, merely that it offers some meaningful, relevant accounts. With classical realism, we have a rich and malleable framework capable of offering convincing explanations of international affairs. Classical realism, by covering status and emotions while not losing sight of power, allows the article to explain the Canada/Saudi Arabia dispute more convincingly than the other most relevant and cognate approaches that stress international structures (NCR) or the ideational (constructivism).

Classical realism incorporates social interaction, plus other factors, notably emotion, that constructivism does not. Constructivism is not ill-equipped to handle emotion, but, at least in mainstream Wendtian constructivist scholarship in the United States, it has not been a major theme (Moore 2021). Jeffrey T. Checkel is one of the only constructivist theorists who pays some attention to emotions and acknowledges they can be a factor. But as Checkel says, his is not mainstream constructivism (Checkel and Moravcsik 2001, 220–22). Neta Crawford also looks at emotions in "The Passion of World Politics" (2000) and *Argument and Change in World Politics* (2002). Emotions play a central role in Elisabeth Jean Wood's *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (2003), a book that closely resembles constructivist scholarship. Constructivists contend that rational persuasion "depends on argument, debate, evidence, logic"—but it "also depends on emotion." They do not acknowledge that "rational people use emotion as evidence," and that rational decisions depend on emotion. Emotions strengthen and constitute political beliefs and are a part of political processes, such as status-seeking, not only outcomes (Mercer 2010, 2–3, 19–21). Since constructivists do not study

emotion, their understanding of status is incomplete, particular, and different from the one in this article.

The constructivist focus on social constructions and subjectivity leads them to liberal-idealist positions that neglect power in international politics. Pioneer Alexander Wendt and most US-based constructivists claim to accept the centrality of power, but in the end they do not. Most are liberal idealists who believe ideas without power can change the world (Barkin 2003, 334–35). Since the 1990s, constructivism has tended to marginalize other ways of thinking, leaving the IR discipline open to the charge that it has little to say "about a world in which power still remains unequally distributed and where policymakers themselves continue to think about the international system largely in realist terms" (Cox 2007, 187). Nothing about constructivism necessitates a liberal worldview, but in practice most of the research falls within liberalism, broadly defined. Liberal norms such as human rights and the states and civil society actors spreading them are accepted largely uncritically by constructivist theorists (Barkin 2003, 325, 335). However, liberal idealism and liberalism accord neither with the case nor with recent trends in world politics. Most noticeable is heightened rivalry between "the West" and rising power status groups, or, using President Joe Biden's terminology in 2021, "battle" pitting US-led "democracies" against "autocracies" such as China (Sanger 2021).

NCR is another useful approach for the study of foreign policy, combining focus on international system constraints (independent variable) from neorealism and domestic politics factors (intervening variable) from classical realism. NCR is currently "a theoretically informed toolkit for analyzing foreign policy," though over the past two decades there has been a push to make it a major approach on the level of, for example, constructivism (Smith 2018, 747). There are three "types" of NCR. It can be argued that type I scholars are structural realists looking to explain foreign policy anomalies. Type II scholars are classical realists looking for a systemic explanation to outcomes. Type III theorists want a better synthesis of international and domestic variables and to broaden the approach beyond specific foreign policy conundrums so that it can explain change in international politics (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 12). The last type represents the potential of NCR.

However, NCR's engagement with emotion and related cognitions and perceptions is lacking. NCR theorists have identified leader perceptions as a key variable, but this has not been properly followed up (Smith 2018, 746). Nothing prevents them from adding emotion, yet their analyses "remain resolutely rationalist" (Williams 2005, 12–13). Emotions can be operationalized in a type II framework, but no extant literature exists. Since this has not been tried, there is ground for saying NCR is less useful than classical realism for understanding the Canada/Saudi Arabia case. So far, NCR has not shown that it can do everything classical realism can. Engagement with classical realism "involves more than just the explanatory integration of domestic politics into an essentially neorealist theoretical edifice," argues Michael C. Williams, "within which it has tended to remain" (2004, 660).

Process Tracing

Having discussed theory and methodology, the article now turns to its process tracing method. Process tracing can be used to trace causality, but not necessarily; it can also be used to establish how a situation has changed or developed over time. The method can be defined "as the analysis of

Table 1. Status–emotions mechanism

	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3
Timing	Pre-dispute	August 2018	After August 2018
Part	Status matters to Canadians/Saudis	Status a necessary factor for triggering the dispute	Continuation of dispute due to status
Detail	Ample scholarship and historical evidence of deep Canadian/Saudi status concern.	Canada and Saudi Arabia assert themselves and their status group. Official anger expressed after perceived slight to "deserved" status.	Canada/Saudi Arabia tensions persist. Canada cannot step back; Saudi Arabia wants apology Canada will not give.

evidence on processes, sequences, and conjectures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case" (Bennett and Checkel 2016, 7). Process tracing was chosen for this article because of its advantages over other social sciences methods. It enables inferences as to the validity of a theorized "mechanism" in one case. Scholars can use this method to eliminate factors from consideration, but the aim here is to support the status–emotions explanation (Mahoney 2009, 365; Beach and Pedersen 2013, 2–4). There are two main approaches to process tracing: deductive theory testing and inductive theory development. This article employs the latter, which uses within-case diagnostic evidence to develop hypotheses that could explain the case (Bennett and Checkel 2016, 7–8).

The above status–emotions model is the basis for the mechanism in the Canada/Saudi Arabia dispute. The inference is that status is necessary for the conflict and the principal reason why the conflict develops the way it has and not some other way (e.g., the two sides could have reconciled). The mechanism traces the dispute's development in three parts. Each part is composed of status-driven actors conducting actions; actions are the key because they leave signs that enable researchers to track the flow of events through the mechanism from start to finish. Table 1 operationalizes the mechanism, converting the article's theoretical expectations into case-specific predictions with empirical manifestations.

The case study evidence is collected strategically (not systematically), with weight given to evidence considered a priori less probable. The amount considered sufficient was low given the probability of finding the desired evidence on such a specific and recent event (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 83, 122, 130). Initially, Saudi Arabia was expected to be the most status-driven since it was the party that lashed out. Proof of Canadian official anger due to the Saudi attack was not anticipated because its response seems so controlled. Intense and prolonged status–emotions conflict was not counted on since neither state is a great power.

Case Study

Part 1 of Mechanism—States Say Status Matters

The article first presents the idea of status for both Canada and Saudi Arabia; second, it traces the status–emotions mechanism through the case study of the dispute. Canadian foreign policy elites and scholars care deeply about status, but their attention is directed inward. "The debate," Michael Hart argues, "is all about how Canadians feel about themselves and how they want others to perceive them." Upholding a larger "middle power" role is the "default view," reflecting the "dominant sentiments" of Canada's current generation of foreign policy elites (Hart 2008, 3, 12, 17). A

path-breaking 1990 article by Maureen Apple Molot argues that the foreign policy community is so preoccupied with status they are "rarely posing questions about implications of paradigm choice and paradigm debate for its endeavors" (Molot 1990, 78). Canada's status is explored by J.L. Granatstein (1973), David B. Dewitt and John J. Kirton (1983), John English and Norman Hillmer (1992), Norman Hillmer and Maureen Appel Molot (2002), Andrew Cohen (2004), and Jerome Klassen (2014), to name a few. After publishing *At Home in the World* (2004), reviewed as "refreshingly confident" (Whitaker 2005, 574), Jennifer Welsh was asked to help draft the *Overview* to Canada's international policy statement, *A Role of Pride and Influence in the World* (Welsh 2006, 909). According to the *Overview*, Canada's "success is intimately tied to a stable international order," and with new investment and refocused foreign policies and instruments, Canada can "honour its historical achievements in international affairs, and make a difference to greater security and prosperity in the 21st century" (Canada 2005, 5, 30).

Asserting "the West's" liberal world order is extremely important to Canada. As Lloyd Axworthy observes, "we win in a stable, equitable, cooperative world." Concepts like human security can address threats to the order, such as widening inequality (2003, 1, 5). During Axworthy's time as foreign minister in the late 1990s, "human security came to dominate the rhetoric and flavor of policy in a manner unprecedented in the Canadian experience" (Hillmer and Chapnick 2001, 68). Before the dispute, human rights, and particularly feminism, had become Canada's "new global persona." Launching the policy in 2017, Foreign Minister Chyrstia Freeland told the House of Commons that "we are safer and more prosperous" when Canadian values are widely shared (Freeland 2017, 12087; Chapnick 2019, 193). Canada believes "the West" needs to rally behind the order. "We know that we need to stand together as a world and ensure that democracy, and freedom of the press are protected," Prime Minister Trudeau said on US TV in 2021. Trudeau was alluding in part to *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi, whose killing MBS had ordered, to strike a chord on Saudi Arabia with the Biden administration. "We're going to continue to work alongside our allies, because we all need to stand together on issues like this" (Trudeau 2021).

Trudeau declared "We're back" after winning office in 2015; in other words, he wanted Canada to take a more active and constructive role on the world stage. His "Trudeau Doctrine" would focus pragmatically on interests while using renewed foreign relationships to promote core values. Canada's traditional engagement with multilateral institutions and activities, such as United Nations peacekeeping, was going to be revived (Browne 2019). The election of Donald Trump as US President presented Trudeau with new challenges and opportunities for leadership. Instead of

celebrating "the West," Trump advocated "America First." He alienated close US allies and attacked the multilateral pillars of "the West's" liberal order. This was, for Canada, a difficult environment, but it gave Trudeau the chance to take the mantle of liberal norms champion that Trump had dropped by willingly withdrawing the United States from international commitments and leadership. Trudeau's Canada could fill the vacuum and be seen as a leader of the liberal order. Freeland's speech makes clear Canada's determination to pursue its interest in "the renewal, indeed the strengthening, of the post-war multilateral order," with or without the United States (Freeland 2017, 12087).

Saudi Arabia has been sending dramatic signals about its status. This began before MBS took power in 2015, suggesting that Saudi status-seeking did not originate and does not stem only from him. They claimed Islamic leadership until the Iran Revolution (1979) and claim Sunni Islamic leadership despite the rise of Islamic movements in the Middle East since 2011. The ground for distinctiveness around Salafi Wahhabism, which is a specific movement within Sunni Islam, is insufficient to Saudi aspirations for regional leadership and power, so the Saudis have been affirming that they are the sole true defender of Sunni Islam and upholder of the strict Wahhabi interpretation (Darwich 2014, 18–20). In the material and social domains, Saudi Arabia's defense spending increased 72 percent from 2009–2015 to third-most globally in 2018 (three times Canada's total) (SIPRI 2019, 2, 9); financial muscle was flexed in Syria, Egypt, Sudan, and Jordan—and outside the Middle East, for example, in Canada; state media promoted its regional leadership; additionally, it served as the first Arab state chair of the G20 in 2020, a move Riyadh touted as reflecting the Kingdom's "role and influence on the global stage" (Al Omran 2020).

More provocatively, Saudi social reforms coincided with brutal crackdowns and the use of armed force. Human rights activists and dissident journalists have been arrested or killed. The Saudi Arabian Armed Forces were deployed to Bahrain and Libya in 2011. The Kingdom planned an intervention in Yemen in Fall 2014 and intervened in Spring 2015 (Darwich 2020, 104–6, 126); Qatar was blockaded from 2017 to 2021. Victory in Yemen is unlikely, May Darwich argues, but MBS refuses to withdraw for fear of losing status (2020, 106; 2018, 126–27). Egoist drive to assert status as a rising regional power carried the Saudis into the dispute. "We have to start with saying that what the Saudis have done is largely not about Canada. Yes, there was an accumulation of frustration," Thomas Juneau observes, "but this was really Saudi Arabia being consistent with a pattern of impulsiveness, of assertiveness, of a much greater level of ambition, and frankly of recklessness throughout the region" (2018a).

Part 2 of Mechanism—Status a Necessary Condition

The article now seeks to confirm that unmet status expectations were a necessary but not sufficient or principal reason for the dispute. Process tracing seeks to track how a process developed over time; like cogwheels, each part of the status–emotions mechanism turns the next through to the end. The dispute can be traced to Saudi Arabia using its financial means to gain influence and awarding Canada a CAD$15 billion contract for light armored vehicles in 2015. This deal, the largest advanced manufacturing contract in Canadian history, was awarded, said Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Canada, Naif bin Bandar Al-Sudairi, to cement friendship with Canada (Chase 2017). The Trudeau government issued export permits for the

military combat vehicles in 2016 but did not upgrade bilateral ties; they decided Saudi Arabia with its human rights issues was a political liability. The perceived broken promise offended the Saudis, Juneau argues, "the dispute did not occur in a vacuum. Tension had in fact been accumulating beneath the surface" (2018b, 2–4; 2019, 317).

The trigger and immediate cause of the Canada/Saudi Arabia dispute was Foreign Minister Freeland's tweet in August 2018, in English and Arabic, demanding that Saudi Arabia "immediately release" jailed activists, some of whom had connections with Canada. The full August 3 tweet is as follows: "Canada is gravely concerned about additional arrests of civil society and women's rights activists in #SaudiArabia, including Samar Badawi. We urge the Saudi authorities to immediately release them and all other peaceful #human-rights activists" (Canada 2018). The Saudis responded by effectively terminating bilateral ties except existing trade and commerce contracts, with oil sales exempted. What stung Canada more than the curtailment of what have been weak political and economic ties was the dramatic, public, and embarrassing denial of the legitimacy of Canada's human rights advocacy.

The Saudi attack was not just an attack on the indelicate phrasing of Canada's tweet, it was also an immediate and aggressive rejection of a status attribute that defined the positive standing of Canada and "the West." Ottawa expressed pained surprise: "we are champions of human rights, in fact not only Canadians expect us to do that but the world expects more of Canada," said Omar Alghabra, Parliamentary Secretary to the Foreign Affairs Minister, on August 9. "I can tell you, it surprised us …," he added. "So, the reaction, and the magnitude of the reaction, surprised us" (Tasker 2018). The Saudis were asserting their identity and contesting whose identity should be considered socially superior. They compelled Canada to defend its outgroup assertions: "I will say Canada is very comfortable with our position," was Freeland's response. "We are always going to speak up for human rights; we're always going to speak up for women's rights; and that is not going to change" (CBC News 2018a).

Apparently, Canada was above retaliation. "We're not considering any responses," said Finance Minister Bill Morneau (Chase 2018a). Canada did exact a form of diplomatic revenge against Saudi Arabia. Publicly Canada did not lift a finger to improve bilateral tensions or reduce the awkwardness created by the Saudi response. Canada would wait for the Saudis to come to them with an explanation; otherwise, they would carry on as normal, leaving bilateral relations in the destroyed condition. Alghabra noted: "We maintain channels open. That's what I think we can do. We not only maintain channels open, we maintain our desire to use these channels. The Saudis made this decision, the Saudis hopefully want to come to the table and engage us in a positive, constructive way, that we're interested in" (Tasker 2018).

Once the dispute erupted, Canada found it had to engage in political "struggle" on its own behalf. To Ottawa's surprise, none of the other members of its group, including the United States and United Kingdom, rushed to Canada's side. Roland Paris argues that Canada learned from the dispute with Saudi Arabia and prioritized building international support in its next dispute with China (2019, 153, 156). What these two cases also show is that, on China, the Trump administration believed US national interests were consistent with teaming up with Canada, whereas on Saudi Arabia, the United States was not willing to backstop the Canadian values promotion, and so status and emotions became more significant for Canada. In contrast, as will be shown, another great power, Russia, and many regional

states supported Saudi Arabia. Praise from any credible party was appreciated by the Trudeau government during the dispute. "It seems to me the applause the government has gotten from Amnesty International and other organizations is something that's welcomed by the government," said Dennis Horak in October 2018, "perhaps that's what's driving it" (CBC News 2018b). Horak was Canada's ambassador in Riyadh until the Saudis expelled him in August. The absence of US leadership on this issue, the fact that it did not come to Canada's aid, gives credence to the view that status–emotions became decisive for Canada once the dispute was underway. The dispute was a low-cost way for Canada to assert leadership on liberal norms and bolster "the West."

For the Saudis, Canada's tweet was the trigger for the diplomatic dispute, but status–emotional concerns for the impulsive MBS were a secondary and necessary factor. The Arabic translation was an accurate reflection of the English tweet. But the Saudis were upset it was translated into Arabic at all, even if Canada's Embassy/Global Affairs Canada always did. Had it been in English only, the Saudis might not have reacted the way they did (Horak 2021). The Saudis saw the tweet as an opportunity to send a message to others to stay out of their internal affairs. Condemning it as "an affront to the Kingdom that requires a sharp response to prevent any party from attempting to meddle with Saudi sovereignty," the Saudis marked out the "reprehensible and unacceptable use of language" (Saudi Arabia 2018). MBS seems to have regarded the dispute, and the related Rahaf Mohammed episode to follow in January 2019, as an opportunity to rile up nationalists, assert regional dominance, and look tough in the face of domestic pressure (Momani 2018).

That explains the severity of the response in part, but it was also about MBS. He was angry and lashed out—which has been typical of his behavior (Horak 2021). "One can hardly escape the conclusion that Saudi policy here was based more on personal pique than national interest," F. Gregory Gause argues. MBS "seems to think that Saudi Arabia is a great power and can act with the kind of impunity that [Vladimir] Putin's Russia and Xi [Jinping]'s China do on the international stage' (2018a, 5–6). Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Adel bin Ahmed al-Jubeir said, "You can criticize us about human rights, women's rights … others do and that's your right. You can sit down and talk about it, but demand the 'immediate release'? What are we, a banana republic?" he added, using the pejorative for a weak state. "Would any country accept it? No! We don't" (CBC News 2018c). Freeland could have employed quiet diplomacy to voice concerns to her Saudi counterpart by asking for a meeting to resolve the issue. Instead, Canada publicly shamed the Kingdom on Twitter, pushing the Saudis into a corner. Regional diplomats not inclined to back Saudi Arabia say this was a mistake that did not leave Canadian diplomats much room for maneuver (Fulton 2019a).

It would have been plain to both sides that different views can and do exist on human rights; what angered the Saudis was the Canadians' presumption that their views were superior and holding them Canada could judge Saudi Arabia. That was the line crossed, and sharp anger was triggered because for the Saudis the transgression encompassed a moral quality. It was wrong of Canada to imply what it did: "Canada and all other nations need to know that they can't claim to be more concerned than the Kingdom over its own citizens," the Saudi Foreign Ministry said in a tweet (Saudi Arabia 2018). Al-Sudairi, the Saudi ambassador, said the phrase "immediately release" is particularly galling because it implies Canada can judge the Kingdom's legal system

(Chase 2018a). The Trudeau government can be taken as insinuating the Saudis "do not have a real legal system" and "senior officials could simply release the detained if they picked up the phone" (Jones 2018). The Saudi Arabia Foreign Ministry replied that the activists referenced in Canada's tweet had been "lawfully detained" for "crimes punished by applicable law" and accorded "due process" (Saudi Arabia 2018). Canadian leaders rejected this not only because they believe legitimate law has no justification jailing people for demanding human rights, but also because this emotional belief and cognition is integral to the liberal order that asserts and elevates their political system above outgroup states.

Much variation exists among Saudi Arabia and other regional states, for example, in terms of power and wealth. A characteristic that many of them have in common is a different perception of status attributes than "the West." Bessma Momani notes that Middle East states might welcome "getting tough on Canada" if they view Canadian foreign policy to be led by human rights concerns (CBC News 2018a). This is apparent from the support the Saudis receive in and beyond the region after closing relations with Canada. The backing implies that "the West" lacks the standing to criticize others on human rights and illustrates the broad global struggle over the meaning of world order that Canada and non-western small powers are as enmeshed in as the great powers. The Saudis got support from Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan (putative ally of Canada), Mauritania, the Palestinian Authority, and United Arab Emirates (Chase 2018c; Kassam 2018; Samuel 2018). Russia chided Canada, saying "What one probably needs in this situation is constructive advice and assistance rather than criticism from a 'moral superior'" (Campion-Smith 2018). Egypt and Russia told the Trudeau government that lecturing Saudi Arabia on human rights is unacceptable (Kassam 2018). The rise of states like China and erosion of US hegemony is creating openings for states to oppose "the West's" status assertions. This provides Saudi Arabia's threat of revenge with credibility. Failure to observe diplomatic norms in outgroup competition can go both ways: Riyadh pointed to "our right to interfere in the Canadian domestic affairs" if Canada behaved that way again (Chase 2018b).

Part 3 of Mechanism—Dispute Prolonged by Status

The Canada/Saudi Arabia dispute continues in late 2021, even though its finer points are fading into history, and the principal reason for this is their status–emotions concern. The Trudeau government believes that the standing of Canada's and "the West's" social identity requires constant and determined struggle. "We will continue to stand up for Canadian values and human rights," the prime minister said in August 2018. "People around the world expect that kind of leadership from Canada. We will remain firm" (Tasker 2018). The government did not let passions cool quickly; they stoked Saudi anger once more, in January 2019. Following an expedited process, Canada granted asylum as a "resettled refugee" to Rahaf Mohammed (formally known as Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun), a Saudi woman fleeing Saudi Arabia because of gender discrimination. Foreign Minister Freeland's greeting Mohammed at the Lester B. Pearson International Airport (Toronto) arrival gate was widely seen as another jab at Saudi Arabia (Cecco 2019). Canada has not reconsidered its deliberate casting of Saudi Arabia in the role of social inferior. Prime Minister Trudeau noted in 2021 that Saudi Arabia is not Canada's ally—"No." Canadians have "engaged" and "do business" with them, for

example, at the G20 that was chaired by the Saudis in 2020. "But I also directly brought up the issue of human rights," Trudeau said, "and will always do that when I engage with people around the world who need to be, who need to have that highlighted" (Trudeau 2021).

The Saudis' diplomacy of anger could not quickly de-escalate. They believed they were entitled to an apology from Canada in the light of Saudi Arabia's rise and the challenge being posed to the liberal order in global politics. MBS referred to this in October 2018: "They have to know they have made a mistake. I believe they know that they have made a mistake, but we will see how we can get things back again" (Arsenault 2018). Ottawa did not want to offer Riyadh an apology. The Trudeau government choose to interpret the Saudis as demanding an apology for the tweet's human rights content. This emotional belief is so central to Canada's nationalism and groupism that an apology is easy to refuse. Horak noted that other human rights champions, "Sweden and Germany in particular, ran into problems with the Saudis in the past and were able to find a way out—crafting 'non-apology apologies'—which gave both sides what they needed" (Horak 2020). However, the dispute has lingered because Canada and Saudi Arabia lack the interest and willingness to compromise—the Canadian government sees continuing to not deal with Saudi Arabia as politically beneficial; Saudi leaders still want an apology and see no reason to covet better relations with Canada (Horak 2021).

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia and Canada have been enmeshed in a diplomatic dispute since 2018, but not over security or economic gain, which are normally seen as the priorities by IR scholars. The dispute cost over CAD$2 billion in trade in the first year alone (Chase 2019). This article argues that unmet status expectations and related emotions are a necessary factor behind the Canada/Saudi Arabia dispute and the principal reason why it has continued so long. Saudi Arabia's rising regional power status is based on military, financial, and religious attributes, and bolstered by a regional geopolitical shift that appears to be hastening the "exit to hegemony" of the US-led "the West" (Cooley and Nexon 2020). Canada, vigorous champion of "the West's" liberal order, considers itself one of the world's most human rights respecting and compassionate countries. Their political "struggle" played out as competitive assertions over whose conception of social identity should be deemed superior.

Classical realism offers a rich, textured explanation of the dispute. Morgenthau argues that international conflict stems from human nature in action. Autonomous social entities exist in social conflict and need to assert and impose themselves over others. Mercer supports this, while making an argument reinforcing neorealism. Mercer argues that the egoist desire comes before constitution of identity and social constructions. The incorporation of status–emotions into classical realism's understanding of "politics" gives the article's explanation a strength that constructivism and NCR currently lack. Both approaches miss how status and emotions have been, if not the causes, among the key forces that still fuel the Canada/Saudi Arabia tension. This article's theory offers possible different avenues for dispute resolution. With more case study research, policy recommendations can be developed to help states to reframe and move beyond this type of international crisis.

Both Canada/Saudi Arabia sought to assert themselves and their status group over outsiders. Status is voluntarily conferred rank in a social hierarchy; egoism gives rise to states' desire for status that manifests in need for self-esteem and praise. When "deserved" status is not recognized, intense official anger can be aroused, potentially leading to diplomacy of anger. Canada and Saudi Arabica both experience anger in the dispute. Saudi Arabia expresses its anger in a dramatic public display designed to change minds about the status and treatment expected from out-group states in future. Canada is colder but no less intense: angry at the Saudis for rejecting their attempt to assert the social standing of Canada and "the West," the Trudeau government refuses to apologize and embarrasses Saudi Arabia a second time.

Neither Canada nor Saudi Arabia are great powers—they are not the states we expect to see fighting for status and in whose foreign policies global political "struggle" is assumed to play out on the international stage. From the case study, it is clear status rivalry and conflict can affect great and non-great powers alike. It is equally clear that small-scale status disputes with potentially disruptive international implications can exist for prolonged periods, and yet remain largely unexplored. This article makes a modest contribution, showing status-related conflict to be as intense and ruthless between rising regional and small powers as between great powers. The former may draw in great powers, much like Russia on the Saudi side in the Canada/Saudi Arabia dispute, complicating an already unsettled and changing world that once again appears headed toward bipolar great power tension, this time between China and the United States. More study of non-great power status conflict is warranted.

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