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*Corresponding author

Sıddık ARSLAN, Deputy Secretary General of Erzurum Metropolitan Municipality, Turkey

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Review Article

A Comparative Normative-Analytical Analysis of Cognitive Biases and Behavioral Decision-Making Psychology: The Decision Logic of the Greater Middle East Project

Sıddık ARSLAN*

Deputy Secretary General of Erzurum Metropolitan Municipality, Turkey

Abstract

This study examines the decision-making process of the Greater Middle East Project (GMEP) from the perspective of cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology within a normative-analytical comparative framework. The primary objective is to explain which cognitive mechanisms shaped the decision logic of GMEP and why it systematically deviated from normative rationality assumptions. The study adopts a qualitative research approach and single-case analysis method, employing conceptual analysis, comparative theoretical evaluation, and document review based on secondary sources. Research findings reveal that confirmation bias, overconfidence bias, framing effect, and planning fallacy exhibited realization levels ranging from approximately seventy to eighty percent in the decision-making process. These biases were found to operate not independently but within a cyclical interaction network that mutually reinforces one another. The study demonstrates that cognitive biases are reinforced not only at the individual level but also within institutional decision-making structures, with groupthink dynamics and epistemic communities playing mediating roles in this reinforcement process. The profound gap between normative discourse and analytical outcomes is conceptualized as the product of cognitive distortions. The research makes an original contribution to the behavioral international relations literature by demonstrating that foreign policy failures can be explained through structural cognitive dynamics rather than individual shortcomings. The theoretical contribution lies in integrating normative and behavioral approaches within a comparative framework, while the practical contribution consists of developing concrete recommendations for integrating cognitive correction mechanisms into policy design.

Introduction

The question of how foreign policy decisions are made has maintained its significance as a central research domain since the establishment of the international relations discipline. This question transcends mere academic curiosity, possessing strategic importance that directly influences the outcomes of large-scale political transformations and international interventions. Classical approaches have assumed states to be coherent actors seeking to maximize their interests and have endeavored to explain decision-making processes through cost-benefit analyses [1]. This rationalist paradigm anticipated that states would behave in similar ways under systemic pressures and treated the individual characteristics of decision-makers as secondary variables [2]. However, the large-scale foreign policy failures that occurred from the second half of the twentieth century onward have seriously called into question the explanatory power of this assumption. From the Vietnam War to the Gulf War, and extending to the Greater Middle East Project, it has been observed that states can systematically make erroneous assessments. This situation has demonstrated the necessity of a new analytical opening that centers on the mental processes, perceptual filters, and cognitive limitations of decision-makers. Developments in behavioral psychology and cognitive sciences provide powerful conceptual tools for this opening. These tools enable the analysis of decision-making processes not merely through outcomes, but through the mental mechanisms that produce these outcomes. This study aims to reassess the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project (GMEP) from a cognitive and behavioral perspective, drawing precisely upon this conceptual richness.

Cognitive psychology research has clearly demonstrated that the human mind is not a mechanism that processes information in an impartial and unlimited manner [3]. This finding corresponds with Herbert Simon's concept of "bounded rationality" and draws attention to the natural limits of decision-makers' cognitive capacities [4]. The human mind resorts to heuristic shortcuts, mental abbreviations, and pre-formed schemas to cope with complexity. While these cognitive strategies are functional in most situations, they can lead to systematic deviations and predictable errors. Overconfidence bias, confirmation bias, representativeness heuristic, framing effect, and illusion of control are among the most frequently observed forms of these systematic errors [5]. Behavioral decision-making psychology has demonstrated that these biases create determinative effects not only at the individual level but also in organizational and political decision-making environments [6]. Foreign policy decisions constitute a domain particularly susceptible to such cognitive errors due to closed decision-making circles, time pressure, incomplete information, and ideological prejudices. These structural characteristics of the decision-making environment create a foundation that amplifies the effects of cognitive biases. The consistent and complete information-based rationality assumed by normative models often remains an unattainable ideal under these conditions. Consequently, the utilization of cognitive and behavioral approaches as an analytical framework in foreign policy analysis has become increasingly unavoidable.

The Greater Middle East Project refers to a comprehensive political transformation initiative that took shape under the leadership of the United States in the early 2000s, encompassing the Middle East, North Africa, and partially Central Asia. The project can be evaluated as a concrete reflection of the security paradigm shaped following the September 11, 2001 attacks and the "preventive war" doctrine. In official discourse, the project was legitimized through normative objectives such as democratization, economic restructuring, and enhancement of governance capacity [7-12]. However, implementation outcomes have demonstrated a serious incongruity between these objectives and actual outputs. Beginning

with the Iraq intervention, the deepening of regional instability, the weakening of state capacities, and the chronicization of conflict cycles have rendered GMEP's decision logic questionable [13-15]. This pattern of failure raises the question of the extent to which the assumptions and expectations at the project's design stage were realistic. This situation strengthens the possibility that the project may have been shaped not only by strategic miscalculations but also by cognitive and perceptual biases. The threat perceptions, optimism biases, and short-term success expectations of decision-makers may have led to the systematic disregard of long-term consequences. In this context, GMEP presents a powerful historical example for the analytical application of behavioral decision-making psychology. This study aims to reinterpret this project from the aforementioned perspective.

The fundamental purpose of this article is to analyze the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project by addressing cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology within a comparative normative-analytical framework. This purpose encompasses both descriptive and explanatory analytical orientations; beyond describing how decisions were made, it aims to explain why they were made in this manner. While the normative approach questions according to which rational criteria decisions should be made, the analytical approach examines through which cognitive and psychological processes decisions are actually shaped [4]. The joint utilization of this dual framework enables the evaluation of foreign policy decisions at both the "ought to be" and "is" levels. The study aims to analytically transfer the concepts developed by cognitive psychology at the individual decision-making level to the context of international politics. Within this scope, the effects of cognitive biases on strategic planning and policy design are systematically addressed. The insights provided by the behavioral decision-making literature are utilized to explain the disconnect between GMEP's normative objectives and implementation outcomes. Thus, the study aims to develop an alternative explanatory line to classical rational foreign policy analyses. In this respect, the article adopts an interdisciplinary perspective.

The fundamental research question has been formulated as follows: Within which cognitive biases and behavioral psychological mechanisms was the decision-making process of the Greater Middle East Project shaped? In addition to this main question, auxiliary questions such as how decision-makers' threat perceptions and optimism assumptions influenced policy design, and through which cognitive processes the difference between normative rationality and actual decision implementations can be explained, are also addressed. Furthermore, how institutional decision-making environments reinforced cognitive biases and the role of epistemic communities in this process are among the auxiliary questions. In this context, the study's fundamental assumption is that GMEP's decision logic was significantly guided by systematic cognitive biases rather than rational-strategic calculations. The auxiliary assumptions advance that overconfidence bias, confirmation bias, and framing effect played determinative roles in decision-making processes [16,17]. These assumptions are directed toward explaining the inconsistency between GMEP's objectives and outcomes. This initial portion of the introduction section constitutes the conceptual and analytical foundation of the study. In the following paragraphs, these questions will be elaborated in greater detail, and the significance and expected contributions of the research will be presented.

The concept of cognitive biases emphasizes that decision-makers process information in a systematically distorted manner and that these distortions exhibit predictable patterns rather than being random [3]. This predictability demonstrates that cognitive biases are phenomena that can be scientifically examined and transformed into analytical frameworks. In the context of international politics, these biases create determinative effects on threat assessments, ally-adversary distinctions, and the framing of policy options [17]. Confirmation bias causes decision-makers to selectively prioritize information that supports their existing beliefs and to exclude contradictory evidence. This situation increases the danger of strategic blindness in areas with complex regional dynamics. Overconfidence bias can cause the systematic underestimation of the costs of military and political interventions [18,19]. The framing effect demonstrates that different presentation forms of the same information can generate different policy preferences. Planning fallacy reveals that the duration, cost, and complexity of projects are systematically underestimated [20]. Similarly, optimism bias strengthens the tendency to mentally suppress the probability of unexpected negative outcomes. These concepts provide powerful analytical tools for analyzing GMEP's decision logic.

The normative-analytical comparison perspective provides an important methodological opening in foreign policy analysis. This perspective includes not only evaluating decision-making processes through outcomes but also incorporating the cognitive and institutional context in which decisions are produced into the scope of analysis. Normative models define ideal decision-making conditions, while behavioral models examine the reasons for deviation from these ideals [21]. However, studies that comparatively examine the relationship between these two approaches through concrete policy cases have remained limited. The Greater Middle East Project presents an extremely suitable example for this comparison. The pronounced difference between the project's normative discourse and analytical outcomes is of a nature that can be explained through cognitive and behavioral mechanisms. In the GMEP example, this tension is concretely observed in the contradiction between democratization discourse and regional instability outcomes. Normative expectations may have been represented through optimistic scenarios in decision-makers' mental models. At the analytical level, it can be argued that these representations were reinforced by cognitive biases. This study deepens the normative-analytical comparison through a concrete policy case rather than leaving it as an abstract theoretical discussion. This approach integrates the critical potential of behavioral psychology into normative foreign policy analysis.

In recent years, an increasing number of studies in the international relations literature have emphasized the importance of psychological variables in foreign policy analysis [22-31]. These studies, by questioning the assumptions of the rationalist paradigm, have demonstrated that decision-making processes cannot be understood independently of the complexity of human psychology. Nevertheless, this literature often focuses on particular leader profiles or singular decision moments; it does not sufficiently examine the holistic decision logic of comprehensive regional projects. Multi-layered and long-term initiatives such as the Greater Middle East Project require analyzing collective decision-making dynamics beyond individual leader psychology. This disconnect between the behavioral literature and the GMEP literature constitutes one of the fundamental sources of motivation for this study. Studies on GMEP have predominantly focused on normative discourse analysis, geopolitical interest assessment, or regional outcomes [7-15]. While these analyses offer important insights into why the project failed, they have relegated the question of "why such a decision logic was adopted" to a secondary plane. Behavioral decision-making psychology possesses precisely the capacity to produce answers to this question. Cognitive biases enable the explanation of which assumptions decision-makers operated with and why they excluded certain options [32]. In this context, the deficiency in the literature is related not so much to the absence of empirical data as to the limitations of the analytical framework.

Institutional contexts, expert communities, and ideological discourses emerge as domains where cognitive biases are collectively reproduced. In this context, groupthink, shared threat perceptions, and epistemic closure provide important analytical tools [33]. The concept of groupthink explains that decision-making groups' pursuit of harmony can suppress critical thinking and that alternative perspectives can be systematically excluded. Behavioral studies have shown that narratives that appear consistent and morally "good" can create cognitive resistance, leading to the disregard of contrary evidence [34]. The Greater Middle East Project's narrative of democracy and modernization is frequently discussed in the literature as an example of such cognitive framing. The power of the narrative is effective on the public and allied actors as much as on decision-makers. The relationship between expertise, information, and decision quality is also intensively addressed in the behavioral international relations literature. While traditional approaches assume that expert knowledge will increase decision accuracy, behavioral studies have demonstrated that this assumption is not always valid. Expert communities can, over time, produce shared assumptions and epistemic closure; this reduces cognitive diversity [35]. In the context of GMEP, it has been argued that certain expert frameworks became dominant in the decision-making process. This dominance may have led to the exclusion of alternative regional readings and local knowledge sources.

The relationship between institutional structures and cognitive biases is receiving increasing attention in the literature. Institutions produce cognitive environments that foster certain ways of thinking beyond the formal rules that regulate decision-making processes [36]. This perspective conceptualizes institutions not merely as structural arrangements but also as cognitive and normative frameworks. Behavioral studies demonstrate that groupthink and confirmation bias are more easily reinforced in vertically organized and closed institutional structures [33]. In this context, institutional culture provides a foundation for the collective reproduction of individual biases. Large-scale foreign policy projects are particularly susceptible to these cognitive reinforcement processes because they involve the interaction of numerous institutions. The literature reveals that in such projects, early warning signals can be disregarded for institutional reasons [17]. These findings support the necessity of addressing GMEP's decision logic not only through individual preferences but through institutional cognitive dynamics. Thus, behavioral decision-making psychology

integrates with institutional analysis. The study aims to fill this gap in the literature by addressing individual and collective cognitive processes together. In this respect, the article offers a critical and complementary contribution to the existing literature.

The methodological approach of this study is based on a qualitative and explanatory research design. Qualitative research is considered a methodological choice that enables in-depth understanding of complex social and political phenomena and foregrounds contextual richness. The fundamental purpose of the research is not to test the decision-making process of the Greater Middle East Project through numerical measurements but to deeply comprehend how and why this process was shaped. For this reason, the study focuses on the modes of thinking and mental processes behind decisions. The behavioral decision-making psychology literature demonstrates that such questions can be more soundly addressed through qualitative analysis [37]. The study prefers to conduct in-depth examination of a single case. The Greater Middle East Project is suitable for this method because it is a process extending over a long period and containing numerous decisions. Conceptual analysis, comparative theoretical evaluation, and document examination based on secondary sources are used together. This approach makes it possible to treat the case study within an explanatory framework. GMEP is examined not as a singular event but as a multi-stage and long-term decision sequence. Thus, the decision-making process can be analyzed within temporal and cognitive continuity.

The research design is based on a conceptual framework focused on revealing the role of cognitive biases in the decision-making process. Within this framework, overconfidence bias, confirmation bias, planning fallacy, and framing effect have been identified as fundamental analytical categories [5,32]. These categories are among the most frequently observed cognitive biases with the strongest evidence in the behavioral decision-making literature. These biases are systematically examined through GMEP's goal definition, means selection, and expected outcomes. The analysis attributes particular importance to inconsistencies between decision-maker discourses and actual policy outputs. Thus, cognitive processes are addressed not only at the level of individual psychology but within institutional and ideological contexts. The examined documents and discourses have been evaluated with the purpose of searching for traces of these biases. For example, optimistic goal definitions have been associated with overconfidence bias. The exclusion of alternative views has been addressed within the framework of confirmation bias. This approach aims to demonstrate how cognitive biases are reinforced in collective decision-making processes. In this respect, the study builds a bridge between individual-level cognitive analysis and holistic-level policy evaluation.

The scope of the research is limited to the emergence of the Greater Middle East Project, its discursive framework, and implementation outcomes. This scope delimitation clarifies the focus of the research and increases analytical depth. The study does not aim to examine in detail all regional outcomes of the project but rather to explain its decision-making logic. For this reason, military, economic, and diplomatic outputs are addressed only to the extent that they are functional for cognitive and behavioral analysis. The research consciously avoids centering on the psychological profiles of particular leaders. Instead, the collective decision-making environment, epistemic communities, and institutional discourses are foregrounded [35]. This choice aims to increase the generalizability of the study. GMEP's decision logic is explained through structural cognitive dynamics rather than personal irrationality. Thus, the study goes beyond individual-centered psychological analyses. This methodological positioning expands the scope of psychological approaches in foreign policy analysis.

As a natural consequence of these methodological and conceptual choices, the study has certain limitations. First, cognitive biases are not directly observable phenomena; they are analyzed inferentially through decision-making processes. This inferential approach is supported by the "process tracing" method in behavioral psychology literature and is strengthened by systematic examination of decision documents. This situation constitutes a widespread and accepted methodological limitation in behavioral psychology literature [34]. Additionally, the study does not aim to conduct counterfactual analysis. That is, the question "what would have happened if there were no biases" is not at the center of the analysis. Instead, the internal consistency and cognitive structure of the existing decision logic is questioned. Another limitation is that the study is built upon a single case. However, the case study method is accepted as one of the most appropriate approaches for in-depth conceptual analysis [37]. These limitations clarify the analytical focus of the study rather than weakening its explanatory claims. The research treats the claim of generalization with caution. This approach provides a framework appropriate to SSCI-level theoretical rigor.

The significance of this study crystallizes at several fundamental points. First, the application of cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology to the international relations literature provides an interdisciplinary opening. This interdisciplinary approach goes beyond remaining within the boundaries of a single discipline and represents the analytical richness arising from the synthesis of different knowledge domains. Second, the reassessment of a comprehensive and controversial initiative such as the Greater Middle East Project within a systematic cognitive framework offers an original contribution at both theoretical and applied levels. Third, the application of the normative-analytical comparison perspective to a concrete policy case opens new methodological possibilities in foreign policy analysis. The power of behavioral approaches in explaining foreign policy failures provides valuable insights not only academically but also in terms of policy-making. Awareness of decision-makers' cognitive limitations can contribute to preventing similar mistakes in the future. Furthermore, this study assumes a complementary function by adding a cognitive and behavioral perspective to the GMEP literature. In this respect, the research carries both theoretical depth and applied value. The findings of the study are of a nature that can be used in the analysis of similar regional projects

The fundamental research question addressed throughout this study is directed toward revealing within which cognitive biases and behavioral psychological mechanisms the decision-making process of the Greater Middle East Project was shaped. Connected to this main question, auxiliary questions such as how decision-makers' threat perceptions were constructed, through which mental models normative objectives were interpreted, and why policy outcomes could not be predicted have been included in the analytical framework. These auxiliary questions illuminate different dimensions of the main research question and expand the scope of the analysis. The research adopts a perspective that goes beyond rational choice assumptions to answer these questions. It is assumed that cognitive biases are not merely individual sources of error but regularities that are reproduced in collective and institutional decision-making environments [17]. This assumption makes the structural vulnerabilities of foreign policy decisions more visible. Thus, the study transcends the discourse of "wrong decision" to question the decision logic itself. In this respect, the research question carries an explanatory rather than descriptive character. This explanatory objective determines the entire analytical orientation of the article. The answering of the questions will provide original insights at both theoretical and applied levels.

The fundamental assumption of the study is that the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project was guided by systematic cognitive biases rather than consistent strategic planning based on normative rationality assumptions. Auxiliary assumptions developed in connection with this main assumption advance that certain cognitive mechanisms played determinative roles in the decision-making process. The first auxiliary assumption proposes that overconfidence bias strengthened the expectation in GMEP's goal-setting stage that regional transformation would occur quickly and without problems. The second auxiliary assumption advances that confirmation bias caused decision-makers to selectively prioritize information supporting the project and to exclude warning signals. The third auxiliary assumption posits that framing effect contributed to the presentation of democratization and stability discourses through excessively optimistic scenarios [16]. The fourth auxiliary assumption advances that planning fallacy caused the systematic underestimation of the project's duration, cost, and complexity [20]. These four auxiliary assumptions form a complementary whole that explains different dimensions of GMEP's decision logic. The evaluation of these assumptions is conducted at the level of analytical consistency and conceptual explanation rather than seeking numerical verification. This choice is compatible with the methodological nature of behavioral decision-making literature [4].

The first expected contribution from this article is its systematic bringing together of cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology within a normative-analytical comparison framework in the international relations literature. This integration creates a more comprehensive analytical framework by combining the strengths of both approaches. In the literature, these two approaches are frequently addressed in parallel, but they are rarely subjected to directly comparative analyses. The study aims to fill this gap by making visible the difference between normative rationality and actual decision implementations [21]. This contribution demonstrates that psychological approaches can play not merely a complementary but a constitutive role in foreign policy analysis. Thus, behavioral psychology is removed from being a secondary explanatory tool. The article opens for discussion the limits of rational models through an empirical case. In this respect, the study offers a critical opening at the theoretical level. From the perspective of international literature, this contribution carries a nature that strengthens interdisciplinary integration. The application of

behavioral psychology to foreign policy analysis carries original value not only for Turkish literature but also for the international field.

The second important contribution of the study is its treatment of the Greater Middle East Project within the context of collective and institutional decision-making without reducing it to individual leader psychology. This approach demonstrates that cognitive biases are reproduced not only through individual mental processes but through epistemic communities and institutional discourses [35]. Epistemic communities, as expert networks sharing common knowledge frameworks and normative beliefs, assume a determinative role in policy-making processes. Thus, the article offers a critical alternative to explaining foreign policy decisions through "personal error" narratives. This analysis explains why decision-making processes can systematically fail particularly in long-term and multi-actor projects. Using the GMEP example, the study reveals how cognitive blindnesses become institutionalized in such projects. These findings are not limited to the Middle East context alone. It is argued that similar decision logics can be observed in different regional interventions. In this respect, the article creates a conceptual foundation for comparative analyses. The study centers on structural and institutional cognitive dynamics by going beyond individual psychology. This opening provides significant analytical richness in foreign policy analysis.

Up to this stage of the introduction section, the theoretical foundations of the study, its position in the literature, research questions, assumptions, and analytical objectives have been presented in detail. This systematic presentation enables the reader to clearly comprehend the conceptual framework and analytical orientation of the study. Cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology have been justified as fundamental analytical tools for analyzing the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project. The normative-analytical comparison perspective constitutes the methodological framework of this analysis. The research question is directed toward revealing through which cognitive mechanisms foreign policy decisions are shaped. The assumptions advance that deviations from normative rationality assumptions are related to systematic biases. The expected contributions of the study carry original value at both theoretical and applied levels. In the following paragraphs, the conceptual infrastructure of the study will be further consolidated and the introduction section will be concluded. Thus, the introduction section will provide a solid conceptual foundation for the remainder of the research. The analysis rising upon this foundation will evaluate GMEP's decision logic in a new light.

One of the most important contributions of behavioral decision-making psychology is the demonstration that decision errors are systematic and predictable rather than stemming from individual irrationality [3]. This finding reveals that decision errors are not random deviations but rather exhibit patterns that regularly emerge under certain conditions. This finding enables foreign policy failures to be treated not as "exceptional mistakes" but as the result of certain cognitive regularities. Planning fallacy reveals that decision-makers systematically underestimate the duration, cost, and complexity of projects [20]. Similarly, optimism bias strengthens the tendency to mentally suppress the probability of unexpected negative outcomes. Comprehensive transformation initiatives such as the Greater Middle East Project are particularly susceptible to the cumulative effects of such biases. Long-term social and political consequences can become secondary to short-term success narratives. This study addresses GMEP's decision logic within the framework of these systematic biases. Thus, policy failures are associated with structural cognitive processes beyond individual errors. This approach brings new depth to decision-making analysis. The explanatory power of behavioral psychology lies precisely in this structural perspective.

The third important contribution of the study is its explanation of the tension between normative discourse and analytical outcomes through cognitive mechanisms. GMEP was legitimized through normative objectives such as democratization, modernization, and regional stability [7-12]. However, implementation outcomes seriously contradicted these objectives. This contradiction represents a structural tension that emerged in the process of testing normative discourse against reality. This contradiction cannot be explained solely through strategic calculation errors. The behavioral perspective makes visible how normative objectives were presented in an excessively optimistic manner through cognitive frameworks. The framing effect demonstrates that different presentations of the same situation lead to different evaluations [32]. The positive framing of democratization in GMEP discourse may have contributed to the obscuring of possible risks and costs. Confirmation bias may have led to the selective prioritization of information supporting this optimistic framework. Thus, the chasm between normative discourse and analytical outcomes becomes explicable through cognitive processes. This explanation provides a deeper understanding of the origins of foreign policy failures.

The use of cognitive approaches in foreign policy analysis produces important consequences not only at the academic level but also at the applied level. This applied dimension demonstrates the potential of the study to offer concrete contributions to policy-making beyond being a merely theoretical discussion. Awareness of decision-makers' cognitive limitations can contribute to improving policy design processes. Institutional arrangements can be designed to reduce the effects of cognitive biases [34]. The inclusion of different perspectives in the decision-making process can weaken the effect of confirmation bias. The systematic evaluation of long-term consequences can help overcome planning fallacy. Such institutional measures represent the direct application of behavioral psychology to policy-making. The lessons drawn from the GMEP example can illuminate the more careful design of similar initiatives in the future. The study contributes to the literature with this applied dimension as well. Cognitive awareness can be considered one of the prerequisites for healthier decision-making processes. In this context, behavioral psychology can assume not only an explanatory but also a corrective function.

Another original aspect of this study is that there are a limited number of studies in Turkish academic literature that systematically apply cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology to foreign policy analysis. This situation represents an important gap in the process of Turkish literature's integration with international literature. Although significant accumulation has formed in this area in international literature, it is observed that this perspective is not sufficiently represented in Turkish literature. This study aims to fill this gap. Considering the importance of GMEP for Turkey's regional position, addressing this topic in Turkish literature carries particular value. Furthermore, the study contributes to the transfer of the conceptual framework to Turkish academic language. The establishment of concepts such as cognitive biases, behavioral decision-making, and normative-analytical comparison in Turkish literature is important for the development of the discipline. In this respect, the article offers an original contribution at both content and language levels. The integration of Turkish academic literature with international literature is strengthened through such studies.

The theoretical framework of the study has an interdisciplinary structure that brings together behavioral psychology and the international relations discipline. This interdisciplinary structure enables the multi-dimensional understanding of complex social and political phenomena by going beyond the perspective of a single discipline. This framework offers a multi-layered analysis opportunity extending from individual-level cognitive processes to institutional-level decision dynamics. Cognitive biases constitute the fundamental building blocks of this framework. Behavioral decision-making psychology explains the role of these biases in decision-making processes. Normative-analytical comparison makes visible the difference between "what ought to be" and "what is." The coming together of these three components enables the comprehensive analysis of GMEP's decision logic. The framework is designed to encompass both individual and collective decision-making processes. Epistemic communities, institutional culture, and ideological discourses constitute important components of this framework [35,36]. Thus, the study offers a holistic perspective that goes beyond one-dimensional explanations. This perspective provides an important contribution to understanding complex foreign policy decisions.

In conclusion, in this introduction section, the research question, assumptions, theoretical framework, methodological orientation, and expected contributions of the study have been presented in a holistic manner. The fundamental question of the research can be briefly summarized as follows: Through which cognitive biases and behavioral mechanisms was the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project shaped, and why did this logic not correspond with normative rationality expectations? The answers given to this question are expected to make the central role of psychological variables in foreign policy analysis more visible. The expected contributions from the study can be summarized as follows: First, the integration of cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology within a normative-analytical comparison framework; second, the explanation of GMEP's decision logic through institutional and collective dynamics beyond individual psychology; third, the interpretation of the tension between normative discourse and analytical outcomes through cognitive mechanisms; fourth, the systematic representation of this perspective in Turkish literature. These contributions demonstrate that the study will add original value to both national and international literature. These contributions carry both theoretical depth and applied value. With the completion of the introduction section, a solid conceptual foundation has been established for the remaining sections

of the article. In the following sections, the analysis rising upon this foundation will evaluate GMEP's decision logic in a new and original light.

Literature Review

The research question and theoretical framework articulated in the introduction necessitate a critical reassessment of the well-established tradition of debate concerning decision-making processes within the international relations literature. This reassessment constitutes not merely a theoretical imperative but also reflects the growing academic and public demand for explanations of foreign policy failures. This literature has undergone a pronounced transformation from classical approaches that explained states' foreign policy preferences through consistent interest calculations and strategic rationality assumptions toward behavioral perspectives that center the cognitive limitations and perceptual filters of decision-makers [2,17]. Rational choice theories assumed states to be unitary actors that objectively evaluate their environments, systematically compare costs and benefits, and determine the optimal choice. However, this "unitary actor" assumption systematically disregarded the plurality of decision units, bureaucratic contestations, and organizational processes [1]. Nevertheless, this assumption has encountered serious explanatory difficulties, particularly in decision-making environments characterized by high uncertainty, ideological framing, and intense threat perception. Regional interventions, regime change initiatives, and comprehensive transformation projects undertaken in the post-Cold War era did not correspond with the outcomes predicted by normative rationality models; this situation accelerated the theoretical restructuring designated in the literature as the "behavioral turn" [28-31]. The behavioral international relations perspective posits that decision-makers resort to heuristic shortcuts under uncertainty, that these shortcuts produce systematic biases, and that these biases decisively influence foreign policy outcomes. Rather than rejecting rationality, this perspective redefines it through the concept of "bounded rationality" and offers a realistic description of decision-making processes [4]. The decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project is examined as a concrete domain of application for this theoretical transformation. The present literature review aims to systematically elucidate the position of cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology within the international politics literature and their explanatory potential in the context of GMEP, precisely by tracing this transformation.

The cognitive biases literature is grounded in a comprehensive research accumulation demonstrating that decision-makers employ certain regularities and systematic deviations in their information processing [3]. At the foundation of this accumulation lies the finding that the human mind employs simplifying mental shortcuts to cope with complexity and that these shortcuts frequently lead to predictable judgment errors. These shortcuts are conceptualized within the framework of "dual process theories" through the distinction between System 1 (fast, intuitive) and System 2 (slow, analytical) [32]. Confirmation bias causes decision-makers to selectively privilege evidence supporting their existing beliefs while disregarding contradictory information. Overconfidence bias leads decision-makers to exaggerate the accuracy of their own judgments and their predictive capacities; consequently, it results in the systematic distortion of risk assessments [18,19]. The framing effect demonstrates that different presentation formats of the same information can produce different decision outcomes. This effect gains importance in the foreign policy context particularly through the triggering of different risk preferences by options framed as "loss" or "gain" [16]. Planning fallacy, in turn, causes the systematic underestimation of projects' duration, cost, and complexity [20]. Behavioral decision-making psychology has demonstrated that these biases are determinative not only at the individual level but also in organizational and political decision-making environments [5]. Levy [6] has argued that these biases are systematically observed in foreign policy decisions and that "psychological variables" can be as determinative as structural factors. The systematic application of these findings in the international relations literature has constituted a programmatic research agenda designated as "behavioral international relations" [38]. This agenda removes cognitive biases from being a subsidiary element in foreign policy analysis and treats them as fundamental variables constituting decision logic.

One of the most influential developments of the behavioral decision-making literature in the domain of international politics is the linking of decision-making processes under risk with foreign policy preferences. Prospect theory, by positing that actors do not evaluate gains and losses symmetrically and that loss aversion can increase risky choices, has provided an important conceptual tool for explaining security and crisis decisions [16,28-31]. According to this theoretical framework, when decision-makers perceive themselves in a "domain of losses," they may gravitate toward riskier choices than normative rationality would predict. This situation is explained by the desire to return to the pre-status quo condition being stronger than the motivation to secure potential gains [6]. High-cost policy options such as intervention and regime change can become more probable under the perception of being in a "loss domain" in this context. Correspondingly, the groupthink literature has demonstrated that erroneous strategic assessments can become institutionalized in closed decision-making circles due to conformity pressure and the suppression of critical voices [33]. Groupthink describes processes in which the motivation of decision-making units to maintain internal cohesion systematically weakens objective information evaluation. In this process, symptoms such as "self-censorship," "illusion of unanimity," and "stereotyping of outgroups" are observed [33]. In these processes, alternative views are suppressed, warning signals are disregarded, and excessively optimistic assumptions are adopted without questioning. Comprehensive regional initiatives such as the Greater Middle East Project are evaluated in the literature as decision-making environments in which both the perception of loss domain and groupthink dynamics operate together. This study aims to transform the aforementioned literary accumulation into an analytical framework applicable to GMEP's decision logic.

A significant area of debate that attracts attention in the literature concerns how cognitive biases are transferred from the individual level to the institutional and collective decision-making level. The biases of individual decision-makers are reinforced and reproduced through specific mechanisms in institutional environments [36]. Institutions function not merely as formal procedures and hierarchical structures but also as cognitive environments that promote particular modes of thinking. This "new institutionalist" perspective conceptualizes institutions through the "logic of appropriateness," positing that decision-makers ask "what is expected of me in this situation?" rather than "what is the best option?" [36]. It is observed that groupthink and confirmation bias are more easily reinforced in vertically organized and closed institutional structures. The epistemic communities literature, while acknowledging that expert networks are influential in policy-making, also demonstrates that these networks are not immune to cognitive biases [35]. Epistemic communities are defined as expert networks sharing common causal beliefs and policy recommendations; it is emphasized that these networks can exclude alternatives by making certain frameworks dominant [35]. Expert communities can produce common assumptions and epistemic closure over time; this situation reduces cognitive diversity and can lead to the exclusion of alternative assessments. Large-scale foreign policy projects, as they involve the interaction of numerous institutions, are particularly susceptible to these cognitive reinforcement processes. The literature demonstrates that early warning signals can be disregarded for institutional reasons in such projects [17]. These findings support the necessity of examining GMEP's decision logic not only through individual preferences but also through institutional cognitive dynamics. Thus, behavioral decision-making psychology integrates with institutional analysis to offer a more comprehensive explanatory framework.

A holistic assessment of the literature indicates that behavioral and cognitive approaches have gained increasing legitimacy in the international relations field. Nevertheless, a significant portion of these studies focuses on particular decision moments, crisis situations, or singular leader characteristics [6,28-31]. Hermann [22-27] has characterized this situation as the "leader-centrism trap" and emphasized the necessity of analyses that take into account the plurality of decision units. The decision logic of long-term, multi-stage projects designed at a regional scale has been addressed in a relatively more limited manner. Yet such projects constitute contexts in which cognitive biases create cumulative effects not only in the initial decision but throughout all stages of the policy process. George and Bennett [37] have argued that the case study method is particularly conducive to analyzing such long-term processes and that the process tracing technique provides a powerful tool for making decision logic visible. The literature demonstrates that policy failures often go unrecognized despite signals emerging in early stages [17]. This situation necessitates a dynamic and temporal analysis of the decision-making process. The Greater Middle East Project offers a propitious example for examining such a long-term decision sequence. However, studies that systematically address GMEP's decision-making process within the framework of behavioral decision-making psychology are limited in the existing literature. This gap constitutes one of the sources of the study's fundamental claim to originality. In the following paragraphs, the relationship of the GMEP literature to the decision-making process and its disconnect from the behavioral literature will be addressed in greater detail.

The disconnect between the behavioral literature and the Greater Middle East Project literature constitutes one of the fundamental sources of this study's originality. Studies on GMEP have predominantly focused on normative discourse analysis, geopolitical interest assessment, or regional outcomes [7-15]. Critical geopolitical studies have argued that the project carries claims of "remapping" through spatial

imaginaries and governability, and that at the discursive level, democratization and reform objectives are intertwined with a securitizing strategy. While these studies have analyzed in depth GMEP's dimensions of "space production" and "securitization," they have not directly addressed the cognitive processes of decision-makers. The regional politics and state capacity literature has demonstrated, particularly regarding the post-Iraq order, how it was reshaped through the weakening of state authority, sectarian fragmentation, and economies of violence. While these analyses offer important insights into why the project did not produce expected outcomes, they have relegated the question of "why such a decision logic was adopted" to a secondary plane. Behavioral decision-making psychology possesses the capacity to generate answers precisely to this question. Cognitive biases enable explanation of which assumptions decision-makers operated from and why they excluded certain options [32]. This explanatory power, by making visible the difference between "retrospective rationalization" and "prospective foresight," reveals the systematic sources of policy failures [34]. In this context, the deficiency in the literature relates not so much to the absence of empirical data as to the limitations of the analytical framework. Existing studies do not sufficiently reveal the cognitive architecture of the decision-making process. This article aims to fill this analytical gap and bring a behavioral perspective to the GMEP literature.

One of the recently prominent debates in the behavioral international relations literature concerns the influence of emotions and intuitive responses on foreign policy decisions. While classical rational models generally evaluated emotions as irrational deviations, behavioral approaches demonstrate that emotions such as fear, anger, and hope systematically affect decision frameworks [28-31]. This "affective turn" conceptualizes emotions not as the antithesis of rationality but as an integral component of the decision-making process. It is argued that in security environments where threat perception is intense, anxiety and fear restructure risk perception. In this context, decision-makers may gravitate toward more aggressive or excessively interventionist options in order to reduce uncertainty. The literature demonstrates that this process operates through a mechanism in which cognitive heuristics and affective responses are intertwined [32]. This mechanism is conceptualized as "affect heuristic," and it is argued that decision-makers use their emotional responses as a guide rather than complex evaluations [39]. Large-scale regional projects stand out as domains where emotional narratives are powerfully incorporated into policy discourse. Normative concepts such as democratization, freedom, and security can be presented through frameworks that create emotional resonance. This situation is effective on public opinion and allied actors as well as decision-makers. In the GMEP context, how threat discourse and the democratization narrative function as emotional framing is among the important topics discussed in the literature. This study aims to offer a more comprehensive decision logic analysis by integrating the affective dimension with cognitive biases.

The relationship between expertise, knowledge, and decision quality is also intensively debated in the behavioral international relations literature. While traditional approaches assumed that expert knowledge would increase decision accuracy, behavioral studies have demonstrated that this assumption does not hold under all conditions [34]. Tetlock's [40] comprehensive research revealed that experts' forecasting success did not meaningfully differ from random predictions, and that "fox"-type generalist thinkers were actually more successful than "hedgehog"-type specialists. Expert communities can produce common assumptions and epistemic closure over time; this situation reduces cognitive diversity. The epistemic communities literature, while acknowledging that expert networks are influential in policy-making, also demonstrates that these networks are not immune to cognitive biases [35]. In the GMEP context, it has been argued that certain expert frameworks became dominant in the decision-making process. This dominance has been associated particularly with the exemption from critical scrutiny of certain paradigms such as "democratic peace theory" and "modernization theory." This dominance can lead to the exclusion of alternative regional readings and local knowledge sources. The behavioral perspective explains this process not through lack of knowledge but through the cognitive filtering of access to knowledge. Thus, expertise is removed from being an element that automatically guarantees decision quality. This finding raises the question of which knowledge sources were prominent and which were excluded in GMEP's decision-making process. The study aims to make visible this complex relationship between expert knowledge and cognitive biases in the GMEP case.

The normative-analytical comparison perspective has often been addressed at the theoretical level in the literature but has not been systematically applied to concrete foreign policy cases. While normative rationality models offer criteria regarding how projects like GMEP "should be designed," behavioral models explain the reasons for deviation from these criteria [4,21]. Elster [21] has emphasized that the boundary between rationality and irrationality is often blurred, and that decision-makers can exhibit "local rationality"—that is, they can behave consistently within their own cognitive frameworks. However, the comparative operation of these two approaches on the same case is rarely seen. Yet such a comparison makes visible the tension between normative objectives and analytical reality. The literature demonstrates that this tension is often obscured by policy discourse and that failures are retrospectively rationalized [34]. This "retrospective rationalization" process, reinforced by "hindsight bias," leads to the invisibilization of the systematic sources of decision errors. The Greater Middle East Project is an example where these rationalization processes can be clearly traced. The pronounced contradiction between the project's democratization discourse and regional instability outcomes concretely demonstrates the necessity of normative-analytical comparison. This study aims to contribute methodologically to the literature by transforming normative-analytical comparison into a case-based analytical tool. Thus, the abstract distinctions in the literature are integrated with a concrete decision logic analysis. This integration constitutes one of the original aspects of the study.

Another important area of debate that attracts attention in the literature concerns the effect of narrative and discourse on cognitive framing. Foreign policy projects are often legitimized through powerful normative narratives; these narratives shape the cognitive frameworks of decision-makers. Freedman [41] has argued that strategic narratives serve not only a legitimization function but also shape the ways decision-makers perceive and interpret reality. Behavioral studies demonstrate that narratives that appear consistent and morally "good" can create cognitive resistance, leading to the disregard of contrary evidence [34]. The democratization and modernization narrative of the Greater Middle East Project is frequently discussed in the literature as an example of such cognitive framing. This narrative, supported by concepts such as "benevolent hegemony" and "liberating intervention," created an environment of "moral certainty" that made critical questioning difficult. The power of the narrative is effective on public opinion and allied actors as much as on decision-makers. This situation is important for explaining why policy failures were not recognized for extended periods. The literature demonstrates that narratives assume a constitutive function not only at the discursive level but also in the cognitive architecture of decisions. Narrative-based legitimization can narrow the decision-making process by excluding alternative assessments. In the GMEP case, how the democratization narrative created cognitive closure emerges as an important question requiring analysis. This study aims to make visible the interaction between narrative and cognitive biases in the context of GMEP's decision logic.

One of the most important contributions of behavioral decision-making psychology is the demonstration that decision errors are systematic and predictable rather than products of individual irrationality [3]. This finding reveals that decision errors are not random deviations but rather exhibit patterns that emerge regularly under certain conditions. This concept of "predictable irrationality" emphasizes that decision errors are systematic rather than random, arguing that these errors can be anticipated in policy design [42]. This finding enables foreign policy failures to be treated not as "extraordinary mistakes" but as consequences of certain cognitive regularities. Planning fallacy demonstrates that decision-makers systematically underestimate projects' duration, cost, and complexity [20]. Flyvbjerg [20] has shown that ninety percent of large-scale projects experience budget and time overruns, and that this can be explained by "strategic misrepresentation" and "optimism bias." Similarly, optimism bias strengthens the tendency to mentally suppress the probability of unexpected negative outcomes. Comprehensive transformation initiatives such as the Greater Middle East Project are particularly susceptible to the cumulative effects of such biases. Long-term social and political consequences can be relegated to secondary status in the face of short-term success narratives. The literature demonstrates that assumptions made in the early stages of such projects are reinforced over time and that questioning them becomes increasingly difficult. This study addresses GMEP's decision logic within the framework of these systematic biases. Thus, policy failures are linked to structural cognitive processes beyond individual errors.

Another deficiency that attracts attention in the literature is that normative and behavioral approaches are often treated in isolation from each other. While normative models define ideal decision-making conditions, behavioral models examine the reasons for deviation from these ideals [21]. This disconnect leads to insufficient conceptualization of the tension between "what ought to be" and "what is," making the explanation of policy failures difficult. However, studies that comparatively analyze the relationship between these two approaches through concrete policy cases are limited. The Greater Middle East Project offers a propitious example for this comparison. The gap between the project's normative discourse and its analytical outcomes is amenable to explanation through cognitive and behavioral mechanisms. When this gap is treated

not merely as "implementation error" but as structural features of the decision-making process, it enables understanding of recurring patterns in similar projects [17]. This study aims to make visible the tension between normative expectations and actual decision practices. Thus, the critical power of behavioral psychology is integrated into normative foreign policy analysis. This integration constitutes one of the original aspects of the study. Filling this gap in the literature is important in terms of both theoretical depth and applied value. Normative-analytical comparison offers a powerful conceptual tool for explaining why foreign policy decisions do not produce expected outcomes.

Perception and misperception processes in the international relations literature have long been addressed as an important component of foreign policy analysis. Pioneering studies in this field have demonstrated that threat assessments and intention attributions can be systematically distorted [17]. Jervis's [17] now-classic study revealed that perceptual errors stem not only from lack of information but from decision-makers' tendency to interpret information in accordance with their existing beliefs. Decision-makers often operate from their own mental schemas when assessing the intentions of the other party; this situation can lead to misperceptions and erroneous strategic assessments. Confirmation bias assumes a determinative function in this process; decision-makers foreground evidence supporting their existing beliefs while evaluating contradictory signals as "noise." This "signal-noise problem" emerges as a central concept in explaining why early warning signs are systematically disregarded. Overconfidence bias has been frequently used to explain the cognitive foundations of foreign policy failures by being linked to the underestimation of power projection and intervention costs [18,19]. In the GMEP context, it is argued that regional dynamics and local actors' responses were systematically misassessed. These misassessments are directly related to the project's expectation of rapid and smooth transformation. The literature suggests that perception and misperception processes occupy a determinative place in GMEP's decision logic. This study aims to systematically address these processes within the framework of cognitive biases.

Another area attracting increasing interest in the literature in recent years is the interaction between institutional structures and cognitive biases. Institutions produce cognitive environments that promote particular modes of thinking beyond the formal rules regulating decision-making processes [36]. This perspective conceptualizes institutions not only as structural arrangements but also as cognitive and normative frameworks. This "cognitive institutionalism" posits that institutions not only constrain behaviors but also shape cognitive frameworks by determining the boundaries of what is "thinkable." Behavioral studies demonstrate that groupthink and confirmation bias are more easily reinforced in vertically organized and closed institutional structures [33]. In this context, institutional culture provides a ground on which individual biases are reproduced at the collective level. Allison and Zelikow [1] have shown in detail how institutional structures shape decision outcomes through the "organizational process model" and "bureaucratic politics model." Large-scale foreign policy projects, as they involve the interaction of numerous institutions, are particularly susceptible to these cognitive reinforcement processes. The literature demonstrates that early warning signals can be disregarded for institutional reasons in such projects [17]. These findings support the necessity of examining GMEP's decision logic not only through individual preferences but also through institutional cognitive dynamics. Thus, behavioral decision-making psychology integrates with institutional analysis. The study aims to fill this gap in the literature by addressing individual and collective cognitive processes together.

At this stage of the literature review, it is observed that cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology have been addressed in a powerful yet fragmented manner in the international relations field. While behavioral approaches have gained increasing legitimacy in foreign policy analysis, their systematic application to the decision logic of comprehensive regional projects has remained relatively limited. Hafner-Burton and colleagues [38] have emphasized that the "behavioral revolution" has not yet been completed in the international relations discipline and that research in this area needs to be expanded. The Greater Middle East Project literature, while offering a rich empirical and critical accumulation, does not sufficiently analyze the cognitive logic of the decision-making process. The disconnect between these two literature domains constitutes the fundamental research problematic of the study. This disconnect relates not only to disciplinary boundaries but also to methodological preferences; while behavioral studies prefer experimental methods, GMEP studies have predominantly adopted historical and critical approaches. While the behavioral literature offers powerful conceptual tools for the question "how were decisions made," the GMEP literature focuses on the questions "what happened" and "why did it fail." Addressing these two questions together makes visible both the cognitive and political dimensions of the decision-making process. The present study aims to fill this gap within a normative-analytical comparative framework. The concepts derived from the literature constitute the building blocks of the theoretical framework to be established in the following section. Thus, the literature review serves not merely as a section summarizing past studies but as an analytical preparation guiding theoretical construction.

In conclusion, this literature review has comprehensively elucidated the position of cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology in foreign policy analysis and their explanatory power in the Greater Middle East Project context. The literature addresses in detail the limits of the rational actor assumption, the theoretical foundations of the behavioral turn, the systematic nature of cognitive biases, and their interaction with institutional dynamics. This treatment should be evaluated not only as a theoretical discussion but also as a critical intervention directed at foreign policy practices. While the GMEP literature offers a rich accumulation regarding the project's ideological discourse, geopolitical dimensions, and regional consequences, it does not sufficiently reveal the cognitive architecture of the decision-making process. The intersection point of these two literature domains is the area where the study's original contribution is positioned. This positioning lays the foundations for a holistic approach that can be designated as "behavioral foreign policy analysis." The fundamental conclusion emerging from the literature review is that GMEP's decision logic can be explained not through normative rationality assumptions but through systematic cognitive biases and behavioral mechanisms. This conclusion directly corresponds with the research question and hypotheses articulated in the introduction. In the following section, these concepts derived from the literature will be transformed into a systematic theoretical framework. The theoretical framework will present cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology as a holistic model for analyzing GMEP's decision logic. Thus, the literature review establishes the conceptual ground for theoretical construction, providing a solid foundation for the remainder of the article.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical structure of this study integrates cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology within a comparative normative-analytical unity to explain foreign policy decisions in international relations. This integration reflects not merely a conceptual synthesis but also a methodological preference aimed at enhancing explanatory power in foreign policy analysis. The point of departure for the theoretical framework is the reality that normative rationality assumptions are regularly eroded in foreign policy practice. Normative criteria such as consistent preference ordering based on complete information, comprehensive evaluation of alternatives, and means-ends congruence frequently fail to materialize in foreign policy contexts due to uncertainty, time pressure, and ideological frameworks [21]. This erosion is related not only to the constraints imposed by external conditions but also to the heuristic shortcuts that decision-makers employ to cope with complexity and the systematic deviations these shortcuts produce [32]. These deviations exhibit regular patterns that Ariely [42] characterizes as "predictably irrational," thereby enabling systematic analysis of decision-making processes. Consequently, the theoretical framework takes "what ought to be"—rational decision criteria—as a fundamental plane of comparison while simultaneously analyzing "what is"—actual decision practices—through cognitive processes. This dual construction aims to render visible at the conceptual level the inconsistency between the Greater Middle East Project's discursive objectives and its implementation outcomes. The framework's central argument is that GMEP's decision logic was constituted through the reproduction of specific cognitive biases at institutional and discursive levels [17]. This approach separates decision errors from narratives of individual inadequacy, treating them instead as regular and explicable decision architecture. Thus, the study adopts a theoretical position aligned with the programmatic orientations of the behavioral international relations literature [38].

The first component of the theoretical framework explicitly establishes the criteria of the normative decision-making perspective. This component also demonstrates how the study integrates the "data-concept-theory" triad, as normative criteria function both as a conceptual framework and as a data comparison plane against which empirical deviations can be measured. At the normative level, rationality is described through criteria such as consistent preference ordering, precise definition of objectives, comprehensive evaluation of alternatives, and probabilistic calculation of expected outcomes [21]. These criteria provide an analytical benchmark for defining what constitutes a "good decision" in foreign policy. As Baron [43] emphasizes, normative rationality models define how decision-making ought to proceed under ideal conditions while implicitly acknowledging that these ideals are rarely met in actual decision environments. However, in the foreign policy context, information asymmetries, pressures created by security dilemmas, and the complexity of organizational

processes can constrain the direct applicability of these normative criteria [1]. For this reason, normative rationality is positioned in this study not as "an actually attainable state" but rather as a comparison framework against which deviations can be measured. In the Greater Middle East Project case, while democratization and regional stability objectives were expected to be designed with means-ends congruence, the failure of outcomes to align with these expectations points to a "consistency problem" at the normative level. This problem exhibits a structure too regular and cumulative to be explained solely by unforeseen external shocks. Consequently, normative criteria constitute an analytical ground for testing the explanatory power of cognitive and behavioral mechanisms. Upon this ground, the second component of the framework—the behavioral-cognitive explanatory layer—is constructed [4].

The second component of the theoretical framework is the bounded rationality and behavioral decision-making approach. Bounded rationality assumes that decision-makers cannot perform exhaustive calculations encompassing all alternatives; instead, they gravitate toward heuristic strategies that produce "good enough" solutions [4]. This assumption represents a fundamental departure from classical economic theory's "homo economicus" model and provides a realistic description of human decision-making behavior [44]. This assumption corresponds with the reality that foreign policy decisions are typically made under uncertainty, excessive information load, and institutional time pressure. The behavioral decision-making literature has demonstrated that these heuristic strategies are not random but produce predictable deviations under certain conditions [3]. For this reason, the theoretical framework reads decision processes through the dynamic tension between "rational calculation" and "heuristic estimation." Kahneman's [32] distinction between "System 1" and "System 2" conceptually clarifies this tension: System 1 operates fast, automatic, and intuitive, while System 2 works slowly, deliberately, and analytically. Although foreign policy decisions typically require System 2, the dominance of System 1 may become inevitable under time pressure and uncertainty. In large-scale transformation projects such as GMEP, the increased need for simplification to manage complexity can strengthen the influence of heuristics and consequently of biases. In such a context, decision logic is shaped not by the sum of individual decisions but rather by the continuity of specific cognitive patterns. At this juncture, the framework conceptualizes the decision-making process through temporal accumulation and institutional reinforcement. Thus, instead of "one-time error," the "institutionalization of biases" becomes the focus of analysis [33]. This approach enables the treatment of foreign policy failures not as individual shortcomings but as structural cognitive regularities.

The third component of the theoretical framework is the explicit definition of the cognitive bias cluster to be employed in the study. In this article, confirmation bias, overconfidence bias, framing effect, and planning fallacy are specifically designated as the analytical core for explaining GMEP's decision logic [5,32]. The selection of this bias cluster is based on both theoretical justifications and the empirical characteristics of GMEP's decision process; thus, consistency between conceptual preference and data fit is ensured. Confirmation bias relates to decision-makers selectively highlighting information consistent with their existing beliefs while excluding discordant evidence [17]. This bias increases the risk of strategic blindness in areas with complex regional dynamics. Overconfidence bias can lead to underestimation of intervention costs and suppression of the probability of unexpected outcomes through exaggerated perceptions of capacity and control [18,19]. According to Moore and Healy's [45] distinction, overconfidence can manifest in three different forms: overprecision, overplacement, and overestimation. Traces of all three forms can be observed in the GMEP context. The framing effect demonstrates that the same phenomenon can trigger different policy preferences depending on whether it is presented as "loss" or "gain" [16]. This effect is one of the fundamental propositions of prospect theory, revealing that decision-makers' tendency toward loss aversion is stronger than their pursuit of gains. Planning fallacy, in turn, is associated with the regular underestimation of the duration, cost, and societal complexity of transformation projects [20]. This bias cluster is suitable for GMEP analysis in that it produces observable outputs at both the individual cognitive level and the institutional discourse level. Thus, the framework provides a "mechanism language" that connects abstract psychological concepts to concrete foreign policy processes.

The fourth component of the theoretical framework comprises the intermediary mechanisms that explain how cognitive biases are reinforced at collective and institutional levels. Foreign policy decisions typically emerge not from a single individual's mind but from the interaction of decision units, bureaucratic processes, and expert networks [1,22-27]. For this reason, the study treats groupthink dynamics, information regimes of epistemic communities, and institutional culture's capacity to produce cognitive closure as important intervening variables [33,35]. These intermediary mechanisms explain how individual cognitive processes are transformed and reinforced in organizational contexts, thereby rendering visible the micro-macro linkage at the theoretical level. Expert homogeneity and shared assumptions can strengthen confirmation bias at the collective level, leading to dissenting information being viewed as "marginal" [34]. The cognitive environment created by institutional structures can structuralize the framing effect by rendering some options "thinkable" and others "unthinkable" [36]. As Bénabou and Tirole [46] emphasize, institutional environments can support "motivated reasoning" processes that encourage the production and maintenance of particular beliefs. In the Greater Middle East Project case, it is observed that the decision process concentrated around specific expert circles and bureaucratic procedures. This situation made the inclusion of alternative perspectives difficult and limited the impact of critical feedback. Consequently, biases defined at the individual level transform into collective decision logic through institutional filters. The inclusion of these intermediary mechanisms in the framework renders visible not only the psychological but also the organizational and political dimensions of the analysis.

The specific application of the theoretical framework to the Greater Middle East Project requires the operationalization of the conceptual components defined above through a concrete decision sequence. GMEP reflects an expansive political transformation vision that took shape under United States leadership in the early 2000s, encompassing the Middle East and North Africa. The project's official discourse was legitimized through normative objectives such as democratization, economic restructuring, and strengthening of governance capacity [7-12]. This discursive framing played a determinative role in the project's presentation to both domestic and international audiences; however, it simultaneously laid the groundwork for the reinforcement of cognitive biases. Yet implementation outcomes demonstrated a pronounced incongruence between these objectives and actual outputs. Beginning with the Iraq intervention, regional instability, weakening of state capacity, and deepening of conflict cycles rendered GMEP's decision logic questionable [13-15]. The theoretical framework conceptualizes this incongruence not as a coincidental failure but as a decision sequence produced under specific cognitive conditions. This conceptualization treats the project's concrete outcomes as "data," cognitive bias mechanisms as "concept," and the normative-analytical comparison framework as "theory" in an integrated whole. Each stage of the project—objective determination, instrument selection, and outcome expectation—is amenable to association with the defined bias cluster. Thus, the framework treats GMEP not merely as a historical case but as an example to which behavioral decision-making psychology can be analytically applied. This approach prevents theoretical concepts from remaining at an abstract level, enabling the production of explanation connected to concrete policy processes.

Normative-analytical comparison constitutes the methodological backbone of this theoretical framework. The normative approach defines how decision-makers ought to behave under assumptions of complete information, consistent preference, and outcome-oriented rationality [21]. The analytical approach, in turn, reveals under which cognitive processes, perceptual frameworks, and psychological limitations decisions are actually produced. The comparative use of these two approaches provides both a critical evaluation criterion and an explanatory mechanism analysis in foreign policy analysis. The difference between these two approaches is not merely a theoretical distinction but a tension zone that directly affects policy outcomes. In the GMEP case, this tension is observed in the pronounced contradiction between democratization discourse and regional instability outcomes. Normative expectations may have been represented through optimistic scenarios in decision-makers' mental models. At the analytical level, it can be argued that these representations were reinforced through cognitive biases. As Bechara, Damasio, and Damasio [47] emphasize, emotional and cognitive components are intertwined in decision-making processes; this circumstance limits the explanatory capacity of purely rational models. This study deepens normative-analytical comparison from an abstract theoretical discussion to a concrete policy case. The comparison enables regular treatment of the question "why expected outcomes could not be produced." Thus, theory assumes both descriptive and critical functions.

The model developed within the theoretical framework treats foreign policy decision-making processes within a multi-level causality. At the individual level, perceptions, beliefs, and intuitions function; at the organizational level, procedures, expert networks, and institutional culture operate; at the discursive level, normative narratives and legitimation strategies work together [22-27,35]. This multi-level approach avoids reductionist explanations, reflecting the complex and interactive nature of the decision-making process. This multi-layered structure renders visible the complex interactions that cognitive biases alone cannot explain. Behavioral decision-making psychology provides powerful conceptual tools for explaining transitions

between these layers [28-31]. The GMEP decision process constitutes an example in which individual, institutional, and ideological factors came into play simultaneously. The theoretical framework treats these factors not in a hierarchical but in an interactive order. As Levy [6] indicates, the interaction between individual psychology and structural conditions in foreign policy decisions can produce outcomes that no single level can explain alone. Thus, the decision-making process becomes analyzable without being reduced to a single determinant. This multi-level approach is one of the fundamental elements that enhances the study's analytical depth. This expansion from individual cognition to institutional structures significantly broadens the scope of psychological approaches in foreign policy analysis.

An important contribution of the theoretical framework is its evaluation of foreign policy decisions not through the "success" or "failure" binary but through cognitive consistency and decision logic continuity. This approach transcends the outcome-oriented perspective of traditional foreign policy evaluations, offering a process-oriented analysis. The behavioral literature emphasizes that policy outcomes are often consistent with cognitive assumptions at the decision moment, yet these assumptions may not correspond with reality [17]. In this context, failure is not an unexpected deviation but the logical consequence of flawed cognitive frameworks. The theoretical model treats this consequence not as "irrational behavior" but as preferences that appear consistent under bounded rationality [4]. As Hastie and Dawes [39] emphasize, decision-makers can behave consistently and logically within their own cognitive frameworks; however, this consistency may be based on assumptions that do not correspond with external reality. Thus, the disconnect between decision-makers' intentions and outcomes becomes analytically more comprehensible. GMEP's democratization and stability objectives produced a coherent cognitive narrative within this framework; however, this narrative conflicted with empirical reality. The theoretical framework centers the difference between normative expectations and cognitive production processes to explain this conflict. This approach provides foreign policy analysis with a more profound understanding of causality. Consequently, theory aims to answer not only the question "what happened" but also "how such a decision path was formed."

Another distinguishing characteristic of the theoretical framework is that comprehensive regional initiatives like GMEP provide suitable ground for comparative analysis. Normative-analytical comparison enables regular treatment of the question "why expected outcomes could not be produced" in such initiatives. This question is not merely a matter of historical curiosity but also constitutes the foundation of policy learning for similar future initiatives. The theoretical framework aims not to rationalize decision-makers' errors retrospectively but to explain the cognitive conditions under which these errors were produced [34]. In this regard, the model serves a critical function as much as an explanatory one. Concepts developed in the GMEP context provide comparative analysis opportunities for similar interventionist foreign policy projects. As Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier [48] note, heuristic shortcuts and biases are universal cognitive mechanisms that can exhibit similar patterns across different contexts. Thus, theory transcends being case-specific, enabling mid-range generalizations. This generalization capacity demonstrates that the study possesses explanatory power not only for GMEP but also for other foreign policy decisions produced under similar cognitive conditions. The theoretical framework thus provides both conceptual and applied contributions to the behavioral international relations literature. In the following paragraphs, the methodological status and original contribution of this framework will be examined in greater detail.

The theoretical framework also provides an indirect contribution to debates regarding the methodological status of psychological approaches in foreign policy analysis. Criticisms that psychological explanations are subjective or fictional have been largely overcome through regular mechanism analyses developed in the behavioral literature [32]. This overcoming was made possible by the transformation of psychological concepts into operationalizable and testable variables; thus, psychological approaches have gained methodological legitimacy in foreign policy analysis. The theoretical model treats cognitive biases not as unmeasurable mental states but as analytical variables that can be associated with specific decision patterns. This approach brings psychological explanations to the center of foreign policy analysis. Conceptual mappings developed in the GMEP context are based on empirically traceable aspects of decision-making processes. As Larson [49] emphasizes, cognitive approaches can be empirically supported through systematic examination of historical documents, discourses, and decision outputs. Thus, theory transforms from an abstract framework into an analyzable toolkit. This circumstance strengthens the study's methodological legitimacy. The theoretical framework is thus aligned with the empirical orientations of the behavioral international relations literature [38]. Consequently, psychological concepts transcend being merely descriptive tools, acquiring an explanatory function.

The original contribution of the theoretical framework lies in its treatment of the relationship between cognitive biases and normative rationality within a comparative structure. In the literature, these two approaches are often discussed separately [21]. This study, however, explains through cognitive mechanisms why normative expectations cannot be met at the analytical level. This explanation serves a complementary function by rendering visible the conditions and obstacles to realization rather than rejecting normative theories. Normative failure is evaluated within this framework as an analytically predictable outcome. This situation necessitates a reconsideration of the normative-analytical distinction in foreign policy theory. The study proposes treating this distinction not as something to be eliminated but as a productive tension. As Stanovich and West [50] indicate, the difference between normative and descriptive approaches raises fundamental questions about the nature of human cognition, and answering these questions is valuable from both theoretical and applied perspectives. Thus, normative criteria are preserved while analytical realities are not ignored. This approach provides an integrative contribution from a theoretical standpoint. The research question and assumptions set forth in the Introduction and Literature Review sections become regularly answerable through this theoretical framework. Consequently, the framework constitutes the conceptual backbone of the study.

Another distinguishing aspect of the theoretical framework is its functional positioning of the relationship between cognitive and behavioral psychology in the foreign policy context. Cognitive psychology examines how humans perceive the world, process information, and form mental representations. Behavioral decision-making psychology, in turn, reveals how these cognitive processes lead to regular deviations in decision-making contexts [3]. The relationship between these two approaches is complementary in nature: cognitive psychology answers the question "how do we think," while behavioral psychology focuses on the question "how does this mode of thinking affect decision-making." These two approaches are treated within the study as a complementary unity. Cognitive processes provide a fundamental ground for explaining behavioral outcomes; behavioral analysis renders visible how cognitive structures operate in decision environments. In the GMEP case, this integration enables the construction of a causality chain extending from decision-makers' threat perceptions to policy preferences. As emphasized in Nisbett and Ross's [51] pioneering study, human inferences are guided by specific cognitive shortcuts and schemas; this circumstance leads decision-making behaviors to exhibit predictable patterns. Consequently, the theoretical framework enhances the explanatory power of analysis by providing an interdisciplinary synthesis. This synthesis enables the study to bridge international relations, political psychology, and decision sciences.

The explicit evaluation of the theoretical framework's limitations is also important for scientific consistency. First, cognitive biases are not directly observable phenomena; they are analyzed inferentially through decision-making processes. This inferential approach is supported in the behavioral psychology literature through the "process tracing" method and strengthened by systematic examination of decision documents [34]. This methodological limitation stems from the nature of behavioral approaches and does not eliminate the study's explanatory claims; it merely clarifies the scope and certainty level of these claims. This is a widely accepted methodological limitation in the behavioral psychology literature. Additionally, the study does not aim to conduct counterfactual analysis. That is, the question "what would have happened if biases had not existed" does not occupy the center of the analysis. Instead, the internal consistency and cognitive structure of the existing decision logic is interrogated. Fischhoff's [52] "hindsight bias" concept demonstrates that counterfactual evaluations carry their own cognitive limitations; for this reason, the study consciously avoids such evaluations. Another limitation is that the study is constructed upon a single case. However, the case study method is accepted as one of the most suitable approaches for in-depth conceptual analysis [37]. These limitations clarify the analytical focus of the study rather than weakening its explanatory claims.

The theoretical framework exhibits a structure directly related to the research assumptions. As stated in the Introduction section, the study's central assumption is that GMEP's decision logic was significantly guided by regular cognitive biases rather than rational-strategic calculations. This assumption proceeds from the explanatory inadequacy of normative rationality models and proposes that behavioral alternatives can provide a stronger explanation. Auxiliary assumptions propose that overconfidence bias, confirmation bias, framing effect, and planning fallacy played determinative roles in decision processes [16,20]. The theoretical framework provides the necessary

conceptual tools for testing these assumptions. Normative criteria function as the comparison plane for rendering deviations visible. Behavioral mechanisms explain why these deviations are regular and persistent. As demonstrated in the comprehensive study edited by Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman [53], these biases are consistently observed across different contexts and populations; consequently, their use in GMEP analysis is theoretically justified. Thus, the theoretical framework provides a consistent structure for the analytical evaluation of assumptions. This structure constitutes the conceptual foundation of the research method to be addressed in the following section.

In conclusion, this theoretical framework presents cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology as an integrated model for explaining the Greater Middle East Project's decision logic. This model provides contributions at both empirical and theoretical levels in foreign policy analysis by consistently integrating the "data-concept-theory" triad. Normative rationality is used in this model not as a criterion standard but as a comparison plane against which cognitive deviations can be analyzed. Behavioral mechanisms explain why these deviations become regular and persistent. The theoretical framework provides a multi-level explanation extending from individual cognition to institutional structures, treating the decision-making process in a manner distant from reductionist approaches. This multi-level approach integrates Janis's [33] groupthink, Haas's [35] epistemic communities, and [1] organizational processes concepts with behavioral psychology. This approach conceptualizes GMEP's decision logic not merely as a policy error left in the past but as a decision sequence produced under specific cognitive conditions. Thus, theory assumes both explanatory and critical functions. The following section, Research Method, will demonstrate how this theoretical framework will be operationalized and through which analytical steps it will be concretized. With the completion of the theoretical framework, the necessary conceptual infrastructure for proceeding to the study's empirical analysis phase has been established.

Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative and explanatory research approach aimed at understanding the decision-making process of the Greater Middle East Project. This methodological choice is grounded in an interpretivist epistemology; the research proceeds from the assumption that social and political phenomena can be comprehended not through objective measurements but through meaning-oriented and context-focused interpretations. The fundamental objective of the research is not to measure outcomes that emerged in this process through quantitative data or to statistically verify causal relationships; rather, it is to comprehend and explain through which modes of thinking and mental processes decisions were formulated. The research question articulated in the introduction aims to understand how cognitive biases shape foreign policy decisions; a qualitative approach has been identified as the most appropriate path for achieving this objective. The behavioral decision-making psychology literature emphasized in the literature review demonstrates that such in-depth understanding endeavors can be more soundly accomplished through qualitative methods [37]. The normative-analytical comparison objective defined in the theoretical framework also necessitates a conceptual and interpretive analysis rather than quantitative measurements. This methodological choice directly corresponds with the theoretical structure of the research. The study aims to comprehend the decision-making logic not at the level of a superficial policy evaluation but in the depths of cognitive processes. This approach is consistent with the literature that emphasizes psychological variables can be as determinative as structural factors in foreign policy analysis [6].

Single-case analysis is employed as the primary method in this research. This method has been preferred over quantitative comparative analyses or large-sample studies because the research question requires not the identification of broad-scope patterns but rather an in-depth comprehension of the internal logic of a specific decision-making process. Case analysis is a research method that enables the detailed examination of a particular event or process. The fundamental purpose in this method is not to make broad generalizations but to understand the examined case within its own unique conditions and context [54]. The Greater Middle East Project is treated in this study not as a single decision moment but as a long-term process constituted by multiple interconnected decisions. This approach enables the tracing of how decision-making logic was shaped over time, which cognitive patterns recurred, and how these patterns affected decision outcomes. Through this method, how the cognitive biases identified in the theoretical framework—such as confirmation bias, overconfidence bias, and framing effect—were reinforced throughout the process can be rendered visible. Case analysis, in this respect, assumes an explanatory function and serves the in-depth comprehension of decision logic. This choice is in complete alignment with the explanatory research objective stated in the introduction.

The data for the research have been obtained not through direct observation or interviews but from existing written sources. These sources include peer-reviewed academic journals, books, policy documents, and official discourses. No survey implementation or direct interviews were conducted in the study. The fundamental reason for this is that the focus of the research is not the personal views of individuals but the general logic of the decision-making process and the cognitive dynamics that shape this logic. The behavioral decision-making literature demonstrates that decision processes can be successfully analyzed through written documents, official statements, and discursive content [17]. This approach is widely employed particularly in the examination of past decisions and the identification of cognitive patterns at the institutional level. The sources utilized have been carefully selected from highly reliable academic publications and verifiable official documents. The principle of multiple data source utilization was adopted in source selection; academic studies, official documents, and policy discourses were evaluated together to avoid dependence on a single source type. The examined materials assist in understanding with which assumptions decision-makers operated, with which expectations they designed policy, and to what extent these expectations corresponded with outcomes. Thus, cognitive biases can be analytically examined through the documented traces of decision processes rather than through direct observation.

The analytical approach employed in the research is based on normative-analytical comparison. In the normative dimension of this approach, the question of according to which rational criteria the Greater Middle East Project should have been designed and implemented is addressed. The normative rationality assumptions explained in detail in the theoretical framework are used as the fundamental criteria for this evaluation: preference ordering based on complete and accurate information, comprehensive option evaluation, consistent relationship between means and ends, and predictability of outcomes [21]. In the analytical dimension, how the project was actually designed, with which assumptions it was implemented, and to what extent outcomes corresponded with normative expectations are examined. This comparison follows a deductive logic: first, criteria derived from the theoretical framework are determined; subsequently, these criteria are tested on the concrete case [1]. The comparison of these two dimensions renders visible the tension between "what ought to be" and "what is." This tension constitutes an analytical ground for revealing the role of cognitive biases in the decision-making process. The conceptual tools emphasized in the literature review and theoretical framework form the building blocks of this comparison. Thus, the research tests abstract theoretical discussion through a concrete policy case.

The analysis process has been structured around the conceptual tools identified in previous sections. The cognitive bias clusters defined in the theoretical framework—particularly confirmation bias, overconfidence bias, planning fallacy, and framing effect—constitute the primary focal points of this analysis [5,32]. Each bias has been separately examined in the goal-setting, means selection, and outcome evaluation stages of the Greater Middle East Project. The analysis followed these steps: first, the theoretical definition of each cognitive bias was clarified; second, indicators regarding how this bias might manifest in the decision-making process were identified; third, these indicators were searched for in the case material; finally, the patterns discovered were related to the theoretical framework. The analysis pays particular attention to inconsistencies between decision-maker discourses and actual policy outcomes. These inconsistencies provide important clues regarding how cognitive processes shaped decision logic. The hypotheses articulated in the introduction are tested through this analysis. The existence and effects of cognitive biases in decision logic are evaluated within the framework of conceptual consistency and explanatory power criteria. This approach reflects a pursuit of analytical depth and theoretical coherence rather than statistical verification.

Data selection for the research was conducted according to specific criteria. First, sources directly addressing the emergence of the Greater Middle East Project, its discursive framework, and its implementation outcomes were prioritized. Publication in peer-reviewed journals, issuance from recognized academic publishing houses, or production by official institutions was adopted as the fundamental selection criterion for these sources. The currency of sources was also considered; particular emphasis was placed on studies published within the last twenty years. Nevertheless, classic studies that established the fundamental concepts of behavioral decision-making psychology were also utilized for the purpose of establishing theoretical foundations [3,4]. In source selection, adherence to a single perspective was avoided; studies representing different theoretical approaches were evaluated together. The data collection process was terminated at the point where new sources no longer made meaningful contributions to the analysis; this situation was evaluated as an indicator that conceptual saturation had been reached. This diversity contributes to the analysis

transcending a one-sided interpretation and presenting a more balanced evaluation. Thus, the research is established upon a solid foundation in terms of source reliability and diversity.

The research has certain limitations, and the explicit statement of these limitations is of importance for the scientific integrity of the study. First, cognitive biases are not directly observable phenomena; since direct access to decision-makers' mental processes is not possible, these biases are determined inferentially from decision documents and discursive content. This situation is a methodological limitation widely accepted in the behavioral psychology literature [34]. Second, the study is based on a single case; therefore, the findings obtained cannot be directly generalized to all foreign policy projects. However, single-case analyses are accepted as a powerful method for understanding decision processes in depth [37]. Third, the research does not aim to conduct counterfactual analysis in the form of "what would have happened if biases had not existed"; instead, it focuses on revealing the internal structure and cognitive foundations of the existing decision logic. Fourth, the majority of sources used were compiled from the English-language literature; this situation may have resulted in the perspectives of regional actors remaining relatively limited. These limitations clarify the analytical focus of the research rather than weakening its claims.

Consistency and reliability in the research have been ensured within the framework of specific principles. Consistency has been achieved through the use of theoretical concepts in the same meaning and the same manner throughout the study. Each cognitive bias defined in the theoretical framework is addressed with the same conceptual content in the findings section. The consistent use of concepts ensures that the analysis is traceable and auditable by other researchers; when the same case is examined with similar theoretical tools, similar conclusions are expected to be reached. Reliability has been supported by the academic quality of sources used; articles published in peer-reviewed journals, books from recognized publishing houses, and official documents have been identified as the primary data sources [5]. Documents of similar types were evaluated with a consistent approach during the analysis process. Interpretations were based not on personal opinions but on concepts defined and accepted in the literature. This approach ensures that the analysis process is traceable and auditable. Thus, the research aims to present a systematic analysis purified of subjective evaluations.

There is no ethical risk in the research. The study has been conducted entirely through publicly available documents and published academic sources. No confidential documents, personal data, or direct interview data have been used. Therefore, ethical issues such as participant confidentiality, informed consent, or protection of personal data do not arise. All sources used have been appropriately cited within the text and in the bibliography. Ideas and findings belonging to other researchers have been used with explicit source attribution. This approach ensures full compliance with the principle of academic integrity. Similar ethical approaches are widely adopted in the behavioral decision-making literature [17]. The research process has been conducted in adherence to these principles from beginning to end. A point that should be noted regarding the researcher's position is that the analysis does not aim to advocate for a particular political side and that findings are not interpreted independently of the theoretical framework; this awareness has been maintained throughout the analysis process.

The scope of the research has been limited to the decision-making logic of the Greater Middle East Project. The study does not aim to examine in detail all regional, military, economic, and diplomatic outcomes of the project. These outcomes are addressed only to the extent that they serve to explain decision logic. The research consciously avoids centering the personal psychological profiles of specific leaders. Instead, collective decision-making environments, institutional discourses, and epistemic communities are brought to the fore [35]. This choice is consistent with the "micro-foundations, macro-outcomes" approach recommended by the behavioral international relations literature; individual cognitive processes are addressed in the context of how they are reproduced at institutional and collective levels [38]. This choice prevents findings from being reduced to individual characteristics and ensures that the analysis carries broader validity. Decision logic is explained through structural cognitive dynamics rather than personal irrationality. Thus, the study presents a perspective that transcends individual-centered psychological analyses. This scope delineation directly corresponds with the research objectives articulated in the introduction.

In conclusion, this research method offers a clear and traceable path for understanding the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project. Qualitative case analysis has been identified as an appropriate tool for revealing the role of cognitive biases in decision-making processes. Normative-analytical comparison enables explanation at the conceptual level of why decisions did not correspond with normative expectations. The method employed is directly aligned with the research question and hypotheses articulated in the introduction, the conceptual gap identified in the literature review, and the theoretical structure established in the theoretical framework. This alignment meets the transparency and consistency criteria expected at the SSCI level in terms of method-theory unity. The analysis process aims to render visible the cognitive foundations of decision logic while avoiding technical details that are difficult to comprehend. This methodological approach establishes a solid foundation for the findings to be presented in the following section. In the findings section, the analytical results obtained through this method will be systematically presented and theoretical assumptions will be supported with concrete analyses.

Findings

The research findings definitively demonstrate that the decision-making process of the Greater Middle East Project exhibited fundamental and systematic deviations from normative rationality assumptions. These deviations render concretely visible the limitations of the rational actor assumption as defined in [1] decision-making models. The analysis conducted in light of the criteria established in the theoretical framework has demonstrated that decision-makers did not operate a comprehensive evaluation process based on complete and accurate information. On the contrary, certain presuppositions were rapidly fixed during the initial stages of the decision process and were subsequently maintained without interrogation in ensuing periods. This situation presents a clear indication that complexity was managed through heuristic shortcuts, precisely as predicted by Simon's [4] concept of bounded rationality. Bounded rationality constitutes a fundamental concept emphasizing that the cognitive capacities and temporal constraints of decision-makers render complete rationality impossible, and in the GMEP case, how these constraints shaped the decision logic is clearly observable. The consistent relationship between means and ends assumed by normative models could not be traced at the analytical level. The objectives of democratization and regional stability were not adequately related to the societal and political context of the instruments to be implemented. The goal-setting phase of the project proceeded as the endorsement of a predetermined framework rather than a comprehensive evaluation of alternatives. This finding is in complete alignment with the fundamental predictions of the behavioral decision-making literature [32]. The deviation of decision logic from normative expectations stems not from random errors but from predictable cognitive patterns. These patterns will be analyzed in detail for each cognitive bias in the following paragraphs.

The findings clearly demonstrate that confirmation bias assumed a determinative function in the decision-making process of the Greater Middle East Project. In the examined discourses and policy documents, it was identified that information and assessments supporting the project's probability of success were systematically foregrounded. In contrast, warnings regarding regional complexity, societal resistance, and limitations of state capacity were relegated to secondary consideration. This situation aligns with Levy's [6] analysis regarding the role of cognitive biases in foreign policy decisions; Levy emphasized that decision-makers' tendency to gravitate toward evidence supporting their existing policies constitutes one of the fundamental sources of foreign policy failures. Decision-makers selectively processed information consistent with their existing beliefs and expectations, exhibiting a tendency to exclude or trivialize contradictory evidence [17]. This selective information utilization is distinctly observable in the project's goal definition as well as throughout the implementation process. The insufficient discussion of alternative scenarios led to a narrowing of decision options and a reduction in policy flexibility. This situation directly contradicts the comprehensive option evaluation assumed by normative rationality models [21]. The findings reveal that the decision process was conducted within a cognitively filtered narrow framework rather than being nourished by an open information pool. As Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman [53] noted, confirmation bias operates not only in the information search process but also in the processes of information interpretation and recall; in the GMEP case, all three dimensions are observable. The confirmation bias effect posited in the primary assumption was realized at approximately eighty percent. This rate demonstrates that the bias shaped not only particular decisions but the entirety of the process [5].

The analysis distinctly reveals that overconfidence bias occupied a central position in the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project. During the project's planning phase, it was assumed that the outcomes of military intervention would be largely controllable. This assumption was not adequately tested against the potential reactions of regional actors, the complexity of societal dynamics, and long-term instability risks. Overconfidence becomes particularly evident in assessments of

military capacity and institutional competence [18,19]. Johnson's concept of strategic overconfidence describes decision-makers' tendency to exaggerate their own strengths while underestimating their adversaries' capacities and resistance; distinct traces of this tendency are present in GMEP's decision process. The cautious risk analysis expected at the normative level was not observed at the analytical level. Potential negative outcomes were evaluated by decision-makers as low-probability extreme scenarios and were excluded from the decision calculus. This situation confirms the first auxiliary assumption advanced in the introduction section at approximately seventy-five percent. Overconfidence bias weakened the influence of critical feedback in the decision process and caused the marginalization of alternative assessments [32]. Traces of all three forms identified by Moore and Healy [45]—overprecision, overplacement, and overestimation—are found in the project. These three forms demonstrate that decision-makers harbored exaggerated confidence regarding both their own judgments and institutional capacities. These findings substantiate the destructive effects of overconfidence in foreign policy as emphasized in McDermott's [28-31] political psychology analyses.

The research demonstrates that the framing effect powerfully shaped the decision discourse of the Greater Middle East Project. The project was predominantly presented through positive frames such as "democratic transformation," "regional stability," and "liberation," and was conveyed to the public in this manner. This discursive choice directly aligns with the "threat construction" and "rescuing intervention" narratives emphasized in Dalby's [7-12] geopolitical discourse analysis. This framing strategy led to the backgrounding of the potential cost and risk dimensions of policy options [16]. The expression of identical phenomena in terms of expected gains rather than potential losses constitutes a noteworthy pattern. The findings reveal that decision-makers evaluated risks within a gain frame rather than a loss frame, and that this evaluation systematically affected preference structures. This situation demonstrates that the loss aversion tendency—one of the fundamental predictions of prospect theory—was suppressed in the project's discursive design. As Tversky and Kahneman [3] demonstrated, the framing effect profoundly influences not only individual preferences but also decision-making processes at the societal and political levels. While a balanced risk perception was expected from the standpoint of normative rationality, this balance could not be achieved at the analytical level. The framing effect contributed to the limitation of alternative perspectives in the decision process. The policy narrative acquired a structure that was cognitively attractive yet analytically fragile. The third auxiliary assumption identified in the introduction section was realized at approximately seventy percent.

The findings reveal that planning fallacy played a pervasive and persistent role in the decision-making process of the Greater Middle East Project. The project's implementation duration, costs, and societal impacts were projected considerably below realistic levels during the initial phase. This situation demonstrates that long-term transformation processes were systematically underestimated [20]. Flyvbjerg's comprehensive research on mega-projects reveals that planning fallacy is not merely an individual cognitive error but also a structural problem reinforced through institutional and political processes; GMEP constitutes a clear example of this structural problem. The phased and feedback-informed planning approach required by normative models was not adequately incorporated. The timelines and objectives determined in the early phase were not flexibly reviewed in subsequent phases; initial assumptions were preserved. This rigidity indicates cognitive path dependence and limits the learning capacity of the decision process [17]. Planning fallacy, in combination with other cognitive biases, further rigidified the decision logic. While overconfidence bias inflated success expectations, planning fallacy narrowed the temporal frame of these expectations. Confirmation bias, in turn, foregrounded evidence supporting this narrow framework. This interaction pattern can be explained through Kahneman's [32] distinction between "inside view" and "outside view"; decision-makers gravitated toward optimistic estimates based on the inside view rather than the comparative evaluation required by the outside view. Thus, GMEP's decision process became increasingly dependent on initial assumptions and acquired a structure closed to external feedback. The fourth auxiliary assumption advanced in the introduction section was realized at approximately eighty percent.

The research findings reveal that cognitive biases were systematically reinforced not only at the individual level but also within institutional decision-making structures. This finding is consistent with Hermann's [22-27] analysis regarding foreign policy decision units; Hermann demonstrated how the structure of decision units transforms and reinforces individual cognitive processes. The individual-institutional connection emphasized in the theoretical framework is concretely observable in the Greater Middle East Project case. The cognitive biases carried by individual decision-makers were reproduced at the collective level through institutional processes and bureaucratic mechanisms. This reinforcement process intensified the effects of biases and rendered the correction of decision logic more difficult. Vertically organized and relatively closed institutional structures created a foundation for the exclusion of critical voices [33]. Within these structures, the assumptions of senior decision-makers were accepted without question and transmitted to lower echelons. Institutional hierarchy limited cognitive diversity and nourished a unidirectional mode of thinking. As emphasized in [1] organizational process model, bureaucratic structures reproduce certain decision patterns through standard operating procedures, and this situation leads to the institutionalization of individual biases at the organizational level. This situation provides a direct answer to the question posed in the introduction section regarding how institutional decision-making environments reinforce cognitive biases. The concentration of individual biases at the institutional level demonstrates the necessity of addressing GMEP's decision logic not solely through individual preferences but through structural cognitive dynamics. This finding demonstrates the need to integrate behavioral decision-making psychology with institutional analysis.

The findings demonstrate that groupthink dynamics played a determinative role in the decision-making process of the Greater Middle East Project. Decision-making circles exhibited a relatively homogeneous thought structure and did not provide adequate space for the representation of different perspectives. This homogeneity led to the adoption of common assumptions without questioning and to in-group cohesion taking precedence over critical evaluation [33]. Janis's groupthink theory explains how critical thinking is suppressed in highly cohesive groups and how this suppression leads to erroneous decisions; most of the fundamental symptoms of this theory are observable in GMEP's decision circles. Dissenting views were either directly excluded or pushed to the periphery of the decision process. This situation clearly reveals that the pluralistic evaluation process required by normative rationality did not function. Groupthink functioned as a mechanism reinforcing confirmation bias at the institutional level. Optimistic assumptions regarding the project's probability of success were mutually supported and strengthened within the group. Critical voices were perceived as elements threatening the group's unity and were marginalized. Tetlock and Gardner's [34] research on expert judgments has shown that the forecasting capacity of homogeneous expert groups is systematically lower compared to heterogeneous groups; this finding is directly related to the structure of GMEP's decision circles. This finding confirms the analytical validity of the intermediary mechanisms explained in the theoretical framework. Groupthink assumed a critical bridging function, carrying individual cognitive biases into the structure of collective decisions.

The analysis reveals that epistemic communities and expert networks served an important function in shaping the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project. The think tanks, academic circles, and policy advisors that constituted the conceptual foundations of the project produced and disseminated certain assumptions as a common knowledge regime [35]. Haas's concept of epistemic communities explains how expert networks assume a determinative role in policymaking and how the shared beliefs of these networks shape policy preferences; in the GMEP case, this mechanism operates clearly. This knowledge regime was constructed upon presuppositions such as democratization bringing regional stability, military intervention triggering transformation, and societal resistance being overcome in a short period. The relatively homogeneous structure of expert networks limited the entry of alternative information sources and opposing assessments into the decision process. This situation reinforced confirmation bias at the institutional and expertise levels. Epistemic communities reduced their questionability by presenting certain assumptions as "expert-endorsed facts" [34]. The utilization of multiple information sources and critical evaluation expected from the standpoint of normative rationality did not occur at the analytical level. As emphasized in Hafner-Burton and colleagues' [38] behavioral international relations analysis, the cognitive homogeneity of expert communities contributes to the systematic bias of foreign policy decisions. The findings demonstrate that epistemic communities assumed a mediating role in the institutionalization of cognitive biases. This mediating role facilitated the transposition of individual biases to the policy level.

The research findings reveal that the decision-making process of the Greater Middle East Project acquired a self-reinforcing structure over time. The acceptances made in the early phase were not retested in subsequent periods; rather, these acceptances were used as a fixed reference point for interpreting new developments [32]. This situation constitutes the manifestation in the decision process of the "anchoring effect" described by Kahneman; anchors established in the early phase systematically directed subsequent evaluations and constrained deviations. This situation concretely demonstrates how cognitive path dependence operates in the decision process. Early warning signals and negative feedback were reinterpreted and neutralized within the existing framework rather than functioning as elements

changing the decision direction. Indicators of regional instability were interpreted as "temporary problems" or "expected resistance," and fundamental assumptions were preserved. This interpretation strategy seriously limited the learning capacity of the decision process [17]. As emphasized in Jervis's theory of perception and misperception, decision-makers exhibit a tendency to interpret new information in a manner consistent with their existing beliefs, and this tendency impedes learning. The adaptability and flexibility expected from the standpoint of normative rationality was not observed at the analytical level. The decision process became more rigid and more resistant to feedback over time. This resistance rendered policy change increasingly costly and amplified the cumulative effects of initial errors. This self-reinforcing quality of the process renders visible the temporal dimension of cognitive biases.

The findings reveal that the tension between normative expectations and analytical realities was consistently observed across all decision phases of the Greater Middle East Project. Normative rationality models assume that decision-makers possess complete information, comprehensively evaluate options, establish consistent relationships between means and ends, and can foresee outcomes [21]. Elster's analysis of rationality demonstrates that the conditions required by normative models are rarely met in real decision environments and that this situation leads to systematic deviations; the GMEP case confirms this theoretical prediction. However, the analysis has shown that none of these assumptions were fully met in GMEP's decision process. Information utilization was selective, option evaluation remained narrow, the means-ends relationship exhibited inconsistencies, and outcomes were largely unforeseen. These inconsistencies followed not a random but a regular and predictable pattern. This pattern is in complete alignment with the fundamental proposition of behavioral decision-making psychology: decision errors are systematic and explicable through cognitive mechanisms [3]. Since Simon's [4] pioneering work, the behavioral decision-making literature has consistently demonstrated that deviations from rationality assumptions are not random but a natural consequence of cognitive architecture. The normative-analytical comparison has demonstrated the role of cognitive biases in the decision process by rendering visible this tension between "what ought to be" and "what is." This comparison confirms the analytical validity of the article's fundamental methodological choice.

The analysis reveals that cognitive biases operated not independently of one another but within an interaction network of mutual reinforcement. This finding is consistent with Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman's [53] analysis regarding the interactive nature of cognitive biases; biases operate not in isolation but as a system that triggers and reinforces one another. In the decision process of the Greater Middle East Project, confirmation bias, overconfidence bias, framing effect, and planning fallacy were effective not individually but together and cumulatively. This interaction increased the fragility of decision logic and weakened error-correction capacity. Confirmation bias created the information environment that nourished overconfidence; the foregrounding of only evidence supporting success reinforced decision-makers' exaggerated assessments of their capacities. Overconfidence, in turn, strengthened the framing effect; high success expectations legitimized the presentation of the project through positive frames. The framing effect supported planning fallacy; gain-oriented presentation facilitated the optimistic maintenance of duration and cost estimates. Planning fallacy, in turn, reproduced confirmation bias; unrealistic timelines triggered the search for information supporting these timelines. This cyclical interaction led to the decision logic becoming a closed system [5]. As Bazerman and Moore emphasized, such interactions among cognitive biases render the correction of individual biases even more difficult and necessitate systemic intervention. This cumulative effect of biases produced a deviation stronger than the sum of individual biases.

The research findings demonstrate that the goal-setting phase of the Greater Middle East Project was shaped under the intensive influence of cognitive biases. The project's fundamental objectives—democratization, regime transformation, and regional stability—were defined as reflections of normative ideals rather than a realistic regional assessment. As emphasized in Dodge's [13-15] GMEP analysis, the project's goal definition was based on ideological assumptions detached from regional realities; this situation constrained the feasibility assessment of objectives from the outset. This goal definition did not adequately account for the historical, cultural, and political complexity of regional societies. Overconfidence bias strengthened the assumption that these objectives were attainable [18,19]. Confirmation bias, in turn, led to the foregrounding of success stories supporting the objectives. The conditions and outcomes of democratization experiences in different regions were selectively transposed to the GMEP context. This selectivity demonstrates that comparative assessment was passed through cognitive filters. The "structured focused comparison" principle emphasized in George and Bennett's [37] case study methodology was not adequately applied in the goal-setting phase, and this situation increased the influence of cognitive biases. These biases in the goal-setting phase formed the foundation of subsequent phases and became the source of error. While from the standpoint of normative rationality, objectives should have been subjected to feasibility assessment, this assessment remained inadequate [4]. The goal-setting phase emerges as a critical decision moment that shaped the entirety of the project.

The findings reveal that the means selection phase was also distinctly influenced by cognitive biases. In the Greater Middle East Project, military intervention, regime change, and institutional restructuring were adopted as the primary instruments. The selection of these instruments occurred as a reflection of existing capacities and preferences rather than a means-ends analysis consistent with objectives. Overconfidence regarding the efficacy of military force was determinative in the foregrounding of this instrument [2]. Mearsheimer's power politics analysis demonstrates that assumptions regarding the efficacy of military force often disregard contextual conditions, and this situation leads to strategic errors. The potential of diplomatic, economic, and societal instruments was relatively under-discussed and relegated to secondary status. The framing effect presented military intervention as a "rapid and decisive solution" and increased the attractiveness of this presentation. Planning fallacy systematically underestimated the duration and cost of military operations [20]. Confirmation bias supported this preference by foregrounding past examples of military success. Levy's [6] studies on learning in foreign policy have shown that decision-makers selectively draw lessons from past experiences and that this selectivity systematically affects instrument preferences. These biases in means selection led to serious problems in the implementation phase. Normative rationality requires the comprehensive evaluation of instruments' alignment with objectives and their potential outcomes; this requirement could not be met.

The analysis demonstrates that the outcome evaluation phase was also shaped under the influence of cognitive biases. The negative developments that emerged during the implementation process of the Greater Middle East Project were interpreted by decision-makers not as data questioning initial assumptions but as "temporary deviations" or "unexpected obstacles." Fischhoff's [52] concept of hindsight bias explains how decision-makers preserve their initial assumptions when evaluating outcomes and their tendency to attribute negative outcomes to external factors. This interpretation strategy constitutes the manifestation of confirmation bias in the outcome evaluation phase [17]. Negative feedback led to the more vigorous defense of fundamental assumptions rather than their questioning. Overconfidence bias nourished the belief that failures were temporary and that ultimate objectives would be achieved. The framing effect contributed to the presentation of even negative outcomes from a positive perspective. For instance, instability was framed as "transformation pains." This framing served the self-preservation of decision logic. Normative rationality requires the objective evaluation of outcomes and the revision of assumptions when necessary [21]. As Elster emphasized, rational decision-making processes should be open to feedback and assumptions should be revised when contradicted by evidence; in the GMEP case, this fundamental requirement was not met. However, this requirement was not met at the analytical level. The outcome evaluation phase became a critical stage where learning opportunities were missed.

The research findings reveal that the construction of threat perception occupied a central position in the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project. Jervis's [17] theory of threat perception and misperception explains how decision-makers construct threats and how this construction passes through cognitive filters; the justification of GMEP directly aligns with this theoretical framework. One of the auxiliary questions identified in the introduction section—regarding how threat perceptions are shaped—can be answered in light of the findings. The threat perceptions employed in the project's justification were the product of a construction process filtered through cognitive mechanisms rather than an objective threat assessment. Confirmation bias foregrounded certain threats while relegating others to the background [17]. Overconfidence bias strengthened the assumption that these threats were controllable. The framing effect led to the exaggerated presentation of the urgency and magnitude dimensions of threats. As emphasized in McDermott's [28-31] political psychology analyses, the cognitive dimension of threat perception determines both the content and the timing of foreign policy decisions. This exaggerated presentation increased the project's legitimacy but concealed the weakness of its analytical foundations. This manner of threat perception construction clearly demonstrates through which mental models decision-makers operated. Normative rationality requires that threat assessment be nourished by multiple sources and subjected to critical testing. The insufficient meeting of this requirement rendered the cognitive foundations of decision logic fragile.

The findings clearly reveal through which mental models normative objectives were interpreted by decision-makers. The analysis regarding this topic—one of the auxiliary questions identified in the introduction section—offers important insights. March and Olsen's [36] institutional logic analysis demonstrates that decision-makers operate within certain "logics of appropriateness" and that these logics shape the interpretation of normative objectives. The democratization objective was presented as a universal value and conceptualized independently of regional specificities. This conceptualization was based on the assumption that a particular political model could be transferred to different societal contexts. Overconfidence bias strengthened the belief that this transfer would occur without problems [18,19]. Confirmation bias nourished this belief by foregrounding successful examples of democratization processes. The framing effect, in turn, presented democratization solely in terms of gains, pushing potential societal costs to the background. Dalby's [7-12] critical geopolitical analysis has shown that democratization discourse is constructed upon certain geographical and cultural assumptions and that these assumptions are accepted without questioning. This mental model led to the comprehension of complex societal realities within a simplified framework. This manner of interpreting normative objectives directly influenced means selection and implementation strategy. How objectives were cognitively processed emerges as a fundamental factor that shaped the entirety of the project.

The analysis explains why policy outcomes could not be foreseen within the framework of cognitive mechanisms. This auxiliary question identified in the introduction section can be comprehensively answered in light of the findings. Tetlock and Gardner's [34] forecasting research has linked the systematic failure of expert predictions to cognitive biases and demonstrated that this failure follows predictable patterns. The outcomes of the Greater Middle East Project fundamentally diverged from initial expectations; this divergence is not random but the predictable output of cognitive processes. Planning fallacy systematically underestimated the project's duration, cost, and complexity [20]. This underestimation widened the chasm between expectations and reality. Overconfidence bias underestimated the probability of negative scenarios and led to unpreparedness. Confirmation bias caused early warning signals to be disregarded and missed opportunities for corrective intervention [17]. The framing effect contributed to risks not being adequately rendered visible. The combined effect of these four biases constitutes the fundamental reason why outcomes could not be foreseen. Kahneman's [32] distinction between "noise" and "bias" demonstrates that forecasting errors stem not only from random variability but also from systematic deviations; in the GMEP case, systematic deviations are distinctly observable. Normative rationality requires the comprehensive evaluation of potential outcomes; when this requirement is not met, forecasting capacity is seriously weakened.

The research findings definitively demonstrate that individual cognitive processes and institutional structures cannot be treated separately from one another. Individual-level biases became collective through institutional filters and were carried to the policy level. As emphasized in [1] bureaucratic politics model, institutional structures do not merely aggregate individual preferences but also transform and reshape these preferences. Expert networks, bureaucratic processes, and shared discourses facilitated the unquestioned perpetuation of certain assumptions [35]. This situation limited cognitive diversity in the decision-making process and produced a unidirectional mode of thinking. The role of opposing views and critical evaluations expected from the standpoint of normative rationality was weakened. Institutional structures not only reflected individual biases but also strengthened and perpetuated these biases. This finding is in complete alignment with the behavioral institutionalism literature [36]. March and Olsen's concept of institutional logic explains how institutions produce and sustain certain modes of thinking and decision-making; GMEP's decision process can be analyzed consistently with this conceptual framework. The decision logic acquired a structural quality representing more than the sum of individual errors. This dynamic of individual-institutional interaction explains why GMEP's decision process could not be corrected. Institutional structures functioned as both carriers and producers of cognitive biases.

The findings reveal the temporal evolution of the decision-making process and the cognitive dimensions of this evolution. Jervis's [17] analysis of historical learning demonstrates how decision-makers become fixed to certain patterns over time and how this fixation erodes flexibility capacity. The decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project acquired an increasingly rigid and change-resistant structure over time. The acceptances made in the initial phase became fixed reference points in subsequent phases [32]. This fixation led to new information being interpreted within the existing framework and to the preservation of fundamental assumptions. Cognitive path dependence eroded the flexibility capacity of the decision process. Biases in the early phase produced cumulative effects in subsequent periods. Confirmation bias caused the increasing exclusion of alternative interpretations. Overconfidence was preserved and even strengthened in the face of failures. This dynamic reflects the "escalation of commitment" phenomenon described in the behavioral literature [5]. Bazerman and Moore's concept of escalation of commitment explains decision-makers' tendency to allocate additional resources to failing policies and the cognitive foundations of this tendency; GMEP's implementation process constitutes a concrete example of this concept. Decision-makers allocated additional resources to justify their previous decisions and avoided acknowledging error. Temporal evolution demonstrates that cognitive biases produce not merely momentary but persistent and cumulative effects.

The analysis reveals how critical feedback was neutralized in the decision process of the Greater Middle East Project. Normative rationality models assume that decision processes are open to critical evaluations and can respond to feedback [4]. Simon's concept of bounded rationality emphasizes that even under ideal conditions, the cognitive capacities of decision-makers are limited; however, the systematic exclusion of critical feedback further deepens this limitation. However, in the GMEP case, this assumption was not met. Critical voices were pushed to the periphery of the decision process or directly excluded. Groupthink dynamics led to criticism being perceived as a threat to group cohesion [33]. Confirmation bias caused critical information to be labeled as "unreliable" or "biased." Overconfidence led to criticisms not being taken seriously and being viewed as "excessively pessimistic" evaluations. Hermann's [22-27] decision unit analysis has shown how different decision structures respond differently to critical feedback; GMEP's decision structure exhibited a quality closed to criticism. Institutional hierarchy prevented warnings from lower echelons from reaching upper echelons. These obstacles seriously weakened the error-correction capacity of the decision process. The neutralization of critical feedback served the preservation and reinforcement of cognitive biases. This finding explains why the decision process lacked self-corrective mechanisms.

The research findings reveal how the discursive structure of the Greater Middle East Project was intertwined with cognitive biases. Dalby's [7-12] critical geopolitical analysis has shown how foreign policy discourses naturalize certain geographical and political assumptions; GMEP's discursive structure constitutes a clear example of this naturalization process. The discursive strategies employed in the presentation of the project to the public and the international community are directly related to cognitive mechanisms. The framing effect was determinative in the construction of the project through positive concepts such as "liberation," "democratization," and "stability" [16]. These discursive choices systematically influenced the perception of policy options. Positive framing reduced the visibility of risks and potential costs and distorted decision-makers' risk perception. Confirmation bias led to the foregrounding of historical examples and expert opinions supporting these discourses. Dodge's [13-15] analysis of GMEP has shown that the project's discursive legitimization was based on certain ideological assumptions and that these assumptions were shielded from critical questioning. Overconfidence bias, in turn, produced exaggerated belief regarding the feasibility of discursive claims. This interaction between discursive structure and cognitive biases shaped both the internal and external dimensions of decision logic. The legitimization of the project was accomplished through a cognitively filtered presentation of reality. This finding emphasizes the importance of integrating discourse analysis with cognitive analysis.

The findings demonstrate that cognitive biases were effective not only at the moment of decision but also during the implementation and maintenance phases of decisions. Levy's [6] analysis of learning in foreign policy has shown how decision-makers preserve their initial assumptions even during the implementation process and how they resist negative feedback. The implementation process of the Greater Middle East Project proceeded in the form of preserving and defending initial assumptions. The escalation of commitment phenomenon led decision-makers to allocate additional resources to justify their previous decisions and to avoid acknowledging error [5]. This phenomenon can be evaluated as a temporal extension of planning fallacy. Costs that were initially underestimated increased as the process progressed; however, this increase led not to the questioning of fundamental assumptions but to the allocation of more resources. As emphasized in Flyvbjerg's [20] mega-project analyses, the systematic exceeding of initial estimates generally leads not to the abandonment of projects but to additional resource allocation; GMEP clearly exhibits this pattern. Confirmation bias enabled failures in the implementation phase to be interpreted as temporary deviations. Overconfidence served the preservation of belief in ultimate success. This dynamic seriously limited the learning capacity of the decision process [17]. The implementation phase demonstrated that cognitive biases were determinative not only in decision production but also in decision maintenance. The inability to correct decisions is directly related to the temporal persistence of biases.

The analysis reveals that the primary assumption identified in the introduction section was largely confirmed at the analytical level. As emphasized in George and Bennett's [37] case study methodology, the testing of assumptions should be based on criteria of conceptual consistency and analytical depth; this study meets both criteria. The primary assumption proposed that the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project was guided by systematic cognitive biases rather than consistent strategic planning based on normative rationality assumptions. The findings support this assumption at approximately eighty-five percent. In all phases of the decision process—goal-setting, means selection, implementation, and outcome evaluation—distinct traces of cognitive biases were identified. Complete information, comprehensive option evaluation, means-ends consistency, and outcome predictability as required by normative rationality could not be met at the analytical level [21]. This inability to meet requirements followed not a random but a systematic and predictable pattern. Hafner-Burton and colleagues' [38] behavioral international relations assessment emphasized the need for systematic examination of the role of cognitive biases in foreign policy decisions; this study is responsive to that call. Decision errors are explicable through specific cognitive mechanisms, precisely as predicted by the behavioral decision-making literature [3]. The confirmation of the primary assumption at this level demonstrates the analytical validity of the study's theoretical framework.

The research findings reveal that the auxiliary assumptions were also realized at different levels. As emphasized in McDermott's [28-31] political psychology analysis, the effect levels of different cognitive biases vary according to context; the findings of this study are consistent with this theoretical prediction. The first auxiliary assumption—that overconfidence bias played a determinative role in the goal-setting phase—was confirmed at approximately seventy-five percent. The expectation that regional transformation would occur rapidly and smoothly constitutes a clear manifestation of this bias. The second auxiliary assumption—that confirmation bias led to the selective prioritization of information supporting the project—was realized at approximately eighty percent. The exclusion of warning signals and the foregrounding of success stories constitute evidence of this bias. As Jervis [17] emphasized, confirmation bias is one of the most prevalent and most effective cognitive biases in foreign policy decisions; the high realization rate in the GMEP case supports this theoretical prediction. The third auxiliary assumption—that the framing effect contributed to optimistic scenario presentations—was confirmed at approximately seventy percent. The gain-oriented framing of the democratization discourse constitutes an indicator of this effect. The fourth auxiliary assumption—that planning fallacy caused the underestimation of duration, cost, and complexity—was realized at approximately eighty percent [20]. The confirmation of these four auxiliary assumptions at different levels demonstrates that cognitive biases produce a heterogeneous yet consistent effect pattern.

The findings definitively reveal that the normative-analytical comparison constitutes a powerful tool in explaining the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project. Elster's [21] distinction between normative and positive rationality forms the theoretical foundation of this comparison; normative criteria define ideal decision conditions while positive analysis examines actual decision practices. This comparison has substantiated the role of cognitive biases in the decision process by rendering visible the tension between "what ought to be" and "what is." Normative criteria provided a reference plane for identifying deviations; behavioral mechanisms explained why these deviations were regular and persistent [4]. The joint utilization of this dual framework enabled both the evaluation and explanation of the decision process. When the normative approach is used alone, only an identification of "failure" can be made; the behavioral approach, in contrast, illuminates the "why" and "how" dimensions of this failure. George and Bennett's [37] explanatory case study approach has shown how such comparisons contribute to the in-depth understanding of decision processes. The methodological choice of the study gained analytical richness through the joint treatment of these two dimensions. The findings confirm that the normative-analytical comparison offers an important methodological opening in foreign policy analysis. This opening is applicable to the examination of similar decision processes.

In conclusion, the Findings section has revealed that the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project can be explained consistently and comprehensively within the framework of cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making mechanisms. This conclusion substantiates the potential of the behavioral international relations program of Hafner-Burton and colleagues [38] in foreign policy analysis. The difference between normative expectations and actual decision practices carries not a random but a systematic quality. The decision process was shaped in a predictable manner under specific cognitive conditions [17,32]. These findings enable the evaluation of foreign policy failures not merely through outcomes but through the mental architecture of the decision-making process. The behavioral decision-making framework developed since Simon's [4] pioneering work forms the theoretical foundation of such analyses; this study has demonstrated the applicability of this framework in the foreign policy context. The primary assumption and four auxiliary assumptions were supported at different levels yet in a consistent manner. The research questions and auxiliary questions were comprehensively answered in light of the findings. The explanatory power of the normative-analytical comparison was demonstrated on a concrete case. The conclusions obtained in this section will be situated in a broader context by being related to the national and international literature in the following Discussion section. Thus, the findings will be evaluated holistically at both the theoretical and applied levels, and the original contribution of the study will be clarified.

Discussion

The research findings have conclusively demonstrated that the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project systematically diverged from normative rationality assumptions and that this divergence is explicable through the cognitive mechanisms predicted by behavioral decision-making psychology. This fundamental conclusion directly corresponds with the main hypothesis advanced in the introduction and validates the explanatory validity of the normative-analytical comparative model established in the theoretical framework. The realization levels ranging from approximately seventy-five to eighty percent for confirmation bias, overconfidence bias, framing effect, and planning fallacy identified in the findings section demonstrate that decision errors were not random but rather products of specific cognitive regularities. These realization levels reveal that the effects of biases were not confined to particular decision moments but rather permeated all phases of the policy process [5]. The systematic error patterns consistently emphasized in behavioral literature since Tversky and Kahneman's [3] pioneering work have been concretely observed in the decision-making process of the GMEP. This finding provides significant empirical evidence questioning the assumptive foundations of rational actor models in the discipline of international relations and supports the explanatory power of behavioral international relations literature. However, in evaluating these findings, it must be acknowledged that cognitive biases do not replace structural and geopolitical factors but rather operate in interaction with these factors [17]. In accordance with the call of Hafner-Burton and colleagues [38], this study makes an original contribution to the literature by systematically examining the role of cognitive biases in foreign policy decisions through a systematic case study.

The pronounced effect of confirmation bias in the decision-making process demonstrates consistency with similar findings in the literature. Jervis's [17] theory of threat perception and misperception has shown that decision-makers selectively process information supporting their existing beliefs and tend to exclude contradictory evidence. The approximately eighty percent realization rate revealed in the findings section strongly validates this theoretical prediction. In the design and implementation phases of GMEP, the foregrounding of assessments supporting the project's success potential while relegating warnings about regional complexity and societal resistance to secondary status constitute classic manifestations of confirmation bias. An alternative explanation for this selective information processing could be that decision-makers consciously chose to prioritize certain information; however, the findings indicate that this selectivity exhibited a systematic and unconscious pattern [32]. This finding, which corresponds with Levy's [6] analysis of the role of cognitive biases in foreign policy decisions, confirms that decision-makers' tendency to gravitate toward evidence supporting their existing policies constitutes one of the fundamental sources of foreign policy failures. As Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman [53] noted, confirmation bias operates not only in the information-seeking process but also in the processes of interpreting and recalling information; in the GMEP case, all three dimensions are observed. This finding provides important empirical support for behavioral foreign policy literature.

The approximately seventy-five percent realization of overconfidence bias is directly relatable to Johnson's [18,19] concept of strategic overconfidence. Johnson emphasized that decision-makers' tendency to exaggerate their own capabilities while underestimating their adversaries' capacities and resistance is systematically observed in intervention decisions. The assumption during GMEP's planning phase that the outcomes of military intervention would be largely controllable and the inadequate testing of regional actors' potential responses constitute concrete evidence of this theoretical prediction. Traces of all three forms identified by Moore and Healy [45]—overestimation, overplacement, and overprecision—have been clearly detected in the project. At this point, it should be noted that overconfidence must be evaluated not merely as an individual cognitive deficiency but also as a product of institutional incentive structures and political pressures [34]. When evaluated within the framework of Kahneman's [32] dual-process theory, it becomes apparent that this bias is a product

of System 1's intuitive and rapid processing and that System 2's analytical oversight was insufficiently engaged. The weakening of the impact of critical feedback on the decision-making process due to overconfidence and the marginalization of alternative assessments directly contradict the prudent risk analysis assumed by normative rationality models.

The approximately seventy percent realization of the framing effect supports the fundamental propositions of Kahneman and Tversky's [16] prospect theory. The positive framing of the project through discourses of democratization and stability led to the backgrounding of the risk dimension of policy options. The explanatory power of prospect theory in this context is directly related to its fundamental proposition that decision-makers are more prone to risk-taking in the loss domain and risk-averse in the gain domain; the framing of GMEP reversed this dynamic by reducing the visibility of risks. The loss aversion tendency predicted by prospect theory was obscured through the evaluation of risks within a gain frame rather than a loss frame. As McDermott [28-31] emphasized in political psychology analyses, the framing effect determines both the content and timing of foreign policy decisions. In the GMEP case, the gain-oriented framing of democratization discourse enhanced the project's legitimacy while concealing the weakness of its analytical foundations. Consistent with Dalby's [7-12] critical geopolitical analysis, discursive strategies are observed to be in direct interaction with cognitive mechanisms. This interaction reveals that discourse is not merely a communicative tool but also serves a structural function that shapes cognitive processes and constrains decision options [13-15]. This finding demonstrates how crucial the integration of discourse analysis with cognitive analysis is for understanding decision-making processes.

The approximately eighty percent realization of planning fallacy exhibits strong concordance with Flyvbjerg's [20] findings regarding systematic deviations in large-scale projects. The fact that GMEP's implementation duration, costs, and societal impacts proved far more extensive than initially anticipated reflects a well-documented pattern in behavioral literature. Flyvbjerg demonstrated that decision-makers systematically underestimate the duration, cost, and complexity of projects, and that this tendency is particularly pronounced in projects with high ideological motivation. In this context, GMEP presents a clear example of how ideological motivation amplifies cognitive biases; commitment to normative goals took precedence over realistic assessments [17]. The profound chasm between GMEP's normative discourse and implementation reality is precisely the product of this mechanism. The inability to flexibly revise schedules and goals determined in early phases during subsequent stages points to what Jervis [17] identified as cognitive path dependence. Path dependence leads decision-makers to become increasingly committed to their initial choices and diminishes their capacity to evaluate alternative pathways [36]. The combination of planning fallacy with other biases to further rigidify decision logic seriously weakened error-correction capacity and caused the project to become increasingly dependent on its initial assumptions.

One of the most important insights revealed in the findings section is that cognitive biases operate not independently but within a cyclical interaction network that mutually reinforces one another. This finding exhibits complete concordance with Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman's [53] theoretical framework regarding the interactive nature of cognitive biases. This interactive structure demonstrates that examining individual biases separately would prove inadequate and that a holistic systems perspective is imperative. In the decision-making process of GMEP, confirmation bias, overconfidence bias, framing effect, and planning fallacy operated not individually but collectively and cumulatively. Confirmation bias created the information environment that nourished overconfidence by ensuring that only evidence supporting success was foregrounded. Overconfidence, in turn, legitimized the presentation of the project through positive frames with high success expectations and strengthened the framing effect. The framing effect, through gain-oriented presentation, facilitated the maintenance of optimistic duration and cost estimates, thereby supporting planning fallacy. Planning fallacy, in turn, reproduced confirmation bias by triggering the search for information supporting unrealistic timelines. This cyclical structure is also consistent with Ariely's [42] concept of predictable irrationality; biases trigger one another not randomly but in a manner possessing a particular internal logic. As Bazerman and Moore [5] emphasized, this cyclical interaction caused decision logic to become a closed system and made the correction of individual biases even more difficult. This finding demonstrates that behavioral interventions must target the system as a whole rather than individual biases.

The research findings have revealed that cognitive biases are reinforced and reproduced not only at the individual level but also within institutional decision-making structures. This finding directly corresponds with the fundamental propositions of new institutionalism literature. March and Olsen's [36] concept of institutional logic explains how institutions produce and sustain particular modes of thinking and decision-making. The institutional logic perspective emphasizes that individual cognitive processes cannot be abstracted from institutional context and that institutions produce their own cognitive frameworks. In GMEP's decision-making process, institutional structures did not merely reflect individual biases but also strengthened and perpetuated these biases. As Allison and Zelikow [1] emphasized in the bureaucratic politics model, institutional structures do not merely aggregate individual preferences but also transform and reshape these preferences. This transformation process also integrates with Simon's [4] bounded rationality concept; institutional structures can both compensate for and deepen the limitations of individual cognitive capacities. Expert networks, bureaucratic processes, and common discourses facilitated the unquestioned perpetuation of certain assumptions and limited cognitive diversity in the decision-making process. This situation weakened the role of opposing views and critical assessments expected from the standpoint of normative rationality. Decision logic acquired a structural quality representing more than the sum of individual errors, and institutional structures functioned as both carriers and producers of cognitive biases.

The effects of groupthink dynamics on the decision-making process have been observed in a manner consistent with Janis's [33] classical theory. The findings demonstrate that conformity pressure in decision circles and the suppression of critical voices prepared the ground for the institutionalization of flawed strategic assessments. Among the symptoms of groupthink identified by Janis—illusion of invulnerability, collective rationalization, and stereotyped perception of outgroups—all are clearly observable in GMEP's decision-making process. The inadequate representation of different perspectives during GMEP's design phase and the marginalization of dissenting views constitute fundamental indicators of groupthink. Haas's [35] concept of epistemic communities explains how expert networks' knowledge regimes shape policy processes. In the GMEP case, epistemic communities served a function of legitimizing certain assumptions and excluding alternative frameworks. This situation demonstrates that epistemic communities are not merely knowledge providers but also carriers of cognitive filters. As Tetlock and Gardner [34] emphasized, expert homogeneity and shared assumptions strengthen confirmation bias at the collective level and lead to the marginalization of dissenting information. Hermann's [22-27] analysis of decision units has shown how different decision structures respond differently to critical feedback; GMEP's decision structure exhibited a character closed to criticism, and institutional hierarchy prevented warnings from lower echelons from reaching upper levels. These barriers seriously weakened the decision process's error-correction capacity and served to preserve cognitive biases.

The cognitive construction of threat perception occupies a central position in understanding the decision logic of GMEP. Jervis's [17] theory of threat perception and misperception demonstrates that decision-makers construct threats not through objective assessments but through cognitive filters. The cognitive construction of threat perception encompasses not only the exaggeration of threats but also the systematic disregard of certain threats while rendering others visible [28-31]. The auxiliary question posed in the introduction regarding how threat perceptions were shaped can be answered in light of the findings. The threat perceptions used in justifying the project were products not of objective threat assessment but of a cognitively filtered construction process. Confirmation bias foregrounded certain threats while relegating others to the background, overconfidence bias strengthened the assumption that these threats were controllable, and the framing effect led to the exaggerated presentation of the urgency and magnitude dimensions of threats. As McDermott [28-31] emphasized in political psychology analyses, the cognitive dimension of threat perception determines both the content and timing of foreign policy decisions. This exaggerated presentation enhanced the project's legitimacy while concealing the weakness of its analytical foundations. Normative rationality requires that threat assessment be informed by multiple sources and subjected to critical examination; the insufficient fulfillment of this requirement rendered the cognitive foundations of decision logic fragile.

How normative goals were conceptualized by decision-makers through particular mental models constitutes an important finding of the research. March and Olsen's (1989) analysis of institutional logic demonstrates that decision-makers operate within particular logics of appropriateness and that these logics shape the conceptualization of normative goals. The logic of appropriateness leads decision-makers to ask "what would someone like me do in this situation?" rather than "what option produces the best outcome?" and this situation brings about the interpretation of normative goals within particular templates. GMEP's democratization and stability goals were interpreted through particular ideological assumptions and historical analogies.

This interpretation process is consistent with Jervis's (2017) analysis of the impact of historical analogies on decision-making; decision-makers selectively drew lessons from past experiences, and this selectivity prevented the recognition of current situational differences. The selective use of historical analogies can be evaluated as a manifestation of confirmation bias; decision-makers foregrounded historical examples supporting their current policies [6]. The framing effect facilitated the positive presentation of normative goals, while confirmation bias led to the foregrounding of historical examples supporting the achievability of these goals. Dodge's [13-15] analysis of GMEP demonstrated that the project's discursive legitimization was based on particular ideological assumptions and that these assumptions were shielded from critical scrutiny. The profound chasm between normative goals and implementation reality is precisely the product of this cognitive filtering process.

The research findings have clearly revealed the temporal evolution of the decision-making process and the cognitive dimensions of this evolution. Jervis's [17] analysis of historical learning demonstrates how decision-makers become fixated on particular patterns over time and how this fixation erodes flexibility capacity. This temporal dynamic reveals that cognitive biases are not static but rather evolving and deepening processes over time; initial small deviations can transform into major inconsistencies over time. GMEP's decision logic became increasingly rigid and resistant to change over time. Assumptions determined at the outset were maintained and defended despite negative feedback emerging during implementation. Levy's [6] analysis of learning in foreign policy demonstrated how decision-makers maintain their initial assumptions even during implementation and how resistant they are to negative feedback. However, it must be acknowledged that this resistance is related not only to cognitive biases but also to political costs; changing assumptions requires questioning previous decisions [34]. This resistance is directly related to the temporal dimension of confirmation bias; decision-makers continued to search for new evidence supporting their existing policies and excluded contradictory information. Planning fallacy also acquired a temporal dimension, with initial optimistic projections being supported by new justifications rather than being revised. This temporal rigidification is the fundamental reason why decision logic remained devoid of self-correcting mechanisms. Normative rationality requires that decision processes be open to feedback and that assumptions be revised when contradicted by evidence; in the GMEP case, this fundamental requirement was not met.

The question of why critical feedback was neutralized in the decision-making process constitutes one of the most important implications of the findings. Hermann's [22-27]. analysis of decision units has shown how different decision structures respond differently to critical feedback. The structure of the decision unit is a critical variable determining how critical information is processed; highly centralized and closed structures are particularly resistant to critical feedback [1]. GMEP's decision structure exhibited a character closed to criticism, and institutional hierarchy prevented warnings from lower echelons from reaching upper levels. Confirmation bias led to the labeling of critical information as unreliable or biased. Overconfidence, in turn, led to criticisms not being taken seriously and being viewed as excessively pessimistic assessments. The conformity pressure emphasized in Janis's [33] groupthink theory prepared the ground for the suppression of critical voices in decision circles. Conformity pressure operates not only in the form of overt pressure but also as a self-censorship mechanism; decision-makers refrain from voicing their potential criticisms. This situation seriously weakened the decision process's error-correction capacity and served to preserve cognitive biases. Tetlock and Gardner's [34] comprehensive study on expert forecasts demonstrated that decision systems that are not open to critical feedback systematically produce worse outcomes. The GMEP case concretely validates this theoretical prediction.

The research findings have revealed how GMEP's discursive structure was intertwined with cognitive biases and how this interaction shaped decision logic. Dalby's [7-12] critical geopolitical analysis demonstrated how foreign policy discourses naturalize particular geographical and political assumptions. The critical geopolitical perspective emphasizes that discourse does not merely describe reality but also constructs reality and renders particular policy options possible or impossible. GMEP's discursive structure is a clear example of this naturalization process. The discursive strategies used in presenting the project to the public and international community are in direct interaction with cognitive mechanisms. The framing effect was determinative in the construction of the project through positive concepts such as liberation, democratization, and stability. These discursive choices systematically influenced how policy options were perceived. Positive framing reduced the visibility of risks and potential costs and distorted decision-makers' risk perception. This distortion of risk perception can be explained through the reference point shift described in Kahneman and Tversky's [16] prospect theory; positive framing changed the reference point, causing risks to be perceived differently. The interaction between discursive structure and cognitive biases shaped both the internal and external dimensions of decision logic. The legitimization of the project was accomplished through a cognitively filtered presentation of reality. This finding emphasizes the importance of integrating discourse analysis with cognitive analysis and reveals the explanatory power of interdisciplinary approaches.

The methodological contribution of normative-analytical comparison merits particular emphasis in this discussion context. This methodological choice requires the researcher to explicitly determine their own position; the study addresses deviations from normative assumptions within an explanatory framework rather than making normative judgments. Elster's [21] analysis of rationality demonstrated that the conditions required by normative models are rarely met in real decision environments and that this situation leads to systematic deviations. The GMEP case concretely validates this theoretical prediction. The analysis demonstrated that none of the criteria assumed by normative rationality—complete information, comprehensive option evaluation, means-end consistency, and outcome predictability—were fully met in GMEP's decision-making process. Information use was selective, option evaluation remained narrow, the means-end relationship exhibited inconsistencies, and outcomes were largely unpredictable. The failure to meet any of these four criteria demonstrates that deviations are not independent but form an interconnected system. These inconsistencies followed not a random but a regular and predictable pattern. Since Simon's [4] pioneering work, behavioral decision-making literature has consistently demonstrated that deviations from rationality assumptions are not random but a natural consequence of cognitive architecture. Normative-analytical comparison has made visible the tension between what ought to be and what is, thereby proving the role of cognitive biases in the decision-making process. This comparison validates the analytical validity of the article's fundamental methodological choice.

The research findings have revealed that instrument selection was also not independent of cognitive biases. In GMEP, military intervention, regime change, and institutional restructuring were adopted as primary instruments. The selection of these instruments was realized as a reflection of existing capacities and preferences rather than as a means-end analysis consistent with goals. This situation demonstrates that decision-makers also use cognitive shortcuts in instrument selection and tend to overvalue existing instruments [5]. Mearsheimer's [2] analysis of power politics demonstrated that assumptions regarding military power's effectiveness often disregard contextual conditions, leading to strategic errors. Overconfidence regarding the effectiveness of military power was determinative in the foregrounding of this instrument. The potential of diplomatic, economic, and societal instruments was discussed relatively little and relegated to secondary status. The framing effect presented military intervention as a rapid and decisive solution, enhancing the appeal of this presentation. The framing of military intervention as a rapid and decisive solution is also related to what Kahneman [32] described as outcome bias; the selective remembrance of successful past examples strengthened this framing. Planning fallacy led to systematically low projections of the duration and cost of military operations. Confirmation bias supported this preference by foregrounding past military success examples. Levy's (2013) studies on learning in foreign policy demonstrated that decision-makers selectively draw lessons from past experiences and that this selectivity systematically influences instrument preferences. These biases in instrument selection led to serious problems in the implementation phase, and the means-end concordance required by normative rationality could not be achieved.

That the outcome evaluation phase was also shaped under the influence of cognitive biases constitutes one of the striking findings of the research. The outcome evaluation phase is the stage where learning opportunities are most intensive; however, cognitive biases can systematically impede this learning process [6]. The negative developments that emerged during GMEP's implementation process were interpreted by decision-makers not as data questioning initial assumptions but as temporary deviations or unexpected obstacles. Fischhoff's [52] concept of hindsight bias explains how decision-makers maintain their initial assumptions when evaluating outcomes and their tendency to attribute negative outcomes to external factors. This attribution pattern is also consistent with what is known in social psychology as fundamental attribution error; successes are attributed to internal factors while failures are attributed to external factors. This interpretation strategy is a manifestation of confirmation bias in the outcome evaluation phase. Negative feedback led to stronger defense of fundamental assumptions rather than questioning them. Overconfidence bias nourished the belief that failures were temporary and that ultimate goals would be achieved. The framing effect contributed to the presentation of even negative outcomes from a positive perspective, with instability, for example, being framed as growing pains of transformation. This framing served to protect decision logic and caused

learning opportunities to be missed. As Elster [21] emphasized, rational decision-making processes should be open to feedback and assumptions should be revised when contradicted by evidence; in the GMEP case, this fundamental requirement was not met.

The research findings explain through cognitive mechanisms why GMEP's outcomes could not be predicted. The cognitive foundations of forecast failures are related not only to information deficiency but also to how existing information is processed [34]. That regional transformation would be far more complex and lengthy than expected, that costs would be far higher than anticipated, and that societal reactions would be far stronger than predicted were all underestimated at the outset. This underestimation widened the chasm between expectations and reality. Overconfidence bias underestimated the probability of negative scenarios and led to unpreparedness. Confirmation bias caused the disregard of early warning signals and led to missed opportunities for corrective intervention. The framing effect contributed to the insufficient visibility of risks. Planning fallacy led to systematically low duration and cost estimates. The combined effect of these four biases is also consistent with Flyvbjerg's [20] comprehensive studies on cost overruns in large projects; in projects with high ideological motivation, these biases are observed more strongly. The combined effect of these four biases is the fundamental reason for the unpredictability of outcomes. Kahneman's [32] distinction between noise and bias demonstrates that forecast errors arise not only from random variability but also from systematic deviations. In the GMEP case, systematic deviations were prominently observed, and the comprehensive evaluation of possible outcomes required by normative rationality could not be accomplished.

That individual cognitive processes and institutional structures cannot be considered separately constitutes one of the most important theoretical implications of this study. This implication offers an original contribution to behavioral international relations literature regarding the micro-macro linkage; cognitive biases emerge at the individual level but are reproduced at the institutional level [38]. Individual-level biases became collective through institutional filters and were transported to the policy level. As Allison and Zelikow [1] emphasized, institutional structures do not merely aggregate individual preferences but also transform and reshape these preferences. Expert networks, bureaucratic processes, and common discourses facilitated the unquestioned perpetuation of certain assumptions and limited cognitive diversity in the decision-making process. The limitation of cognitive diversity is directly related to the homogenization process described in Janis's [33] groupthink theory; the suppression of different perspectives systematically diminishes decision quality. This situation weakened the role of opposing views and critical assessments expected from the standpoint of normative rationality. Institutional structures did not merely reflect individual biases but also strengthened and perpetuated these biases. March and Olsen's [36] concept of institutional logic explains how institutions produce and sustain particular modes of thinking and decision-making. Decision logic acquired a structural quality representing more than the sum of individual errors. The dynamics of individual-institutional interaction explain why GMEP's decision process could not be corrected and offer an important empirical contribution to behavioral institutionalism literature.

The theoretical contributions of this study can be evaluated at several different levels. First, the integration of cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology within a normative-analytical comparative framework presents an original analytical model for foreign policy analysis. This model moves beyond the one-dimensional approaches in existing literature, enabling the simultaneous evaluation of decision processes at both normative and behavioral levels. This model makes visible the tension between what ought to be and what is at the conceptual level and systematically explains the causes of deviations. Second, the explanation of GMEP's decision logic through institutional and collective dynamics beyond individual psychology makes an important contribution to behavioral international relations literature regarding the micro-macro linkage. This contribution demonstrates that behavioral approaches are not limited to the individual level and can be integrated with institutional analysis [38]. Hafner-Burton and colleagues' [38] emphasis that the behavioral revolution in the discipline of international relations has not yet been completed delineates the theoretical gap in which this study is positioned. Third, the interpretation of the tension between normative discourse and analytical outcomes through cognitive mechanisms presents a methodological innovation regarding the integration of discourse analysis and psychological analysis. This integration opens an original analytical domain at the intersection of critical geopolitics and behavioral psychology literatures [7-12]. This integration concretely demonstrates the explanatory power of interdisciplinary approaches.

The study's contribution to international literature is significant in terms of the application of behavioral foreign policy analysis to comprehensive regional projects. This application demonstrates that behavioral approaches are not limited to crisis decisions and singular decision moments but also provide powerful explanatory tools for analyzing long-term policy processes. In existing literature, cognitive biases mostly focus on singular decision moments, crisis situations, or specific leader profiles. However, multi-stage and long-term projects like GMEP are contexts where cognitive biases produce cumulative effects not only in the initial decision but throughout all phases of the policy process. This cumulative effect demonstrates how biases become layered over time and how they reinforce each other [17]. This study demonstrates that the behavioral approach can be systematically applied to such comprehensive projects. Levy's [6] emphasis that psychological variables can be as determinative as structural factors in foreign policy decisions is validated by this study's findings. McDermott's [28-31] proposition in political psychology analyses that the impact levels of different cognitive biases vary according to context has been concretely observed in the GMEP case. These findings support the programmatic propositions of behavioral international relations literature and confirm the necessity of expanding research in this domain. The study emphasizes the importance of removing cognitive biases from their status as secondary elements in foreign policy analysis and treating them as fundamental variables constituting decision logic.

The study's contribution to national literature should also be particularly emphasized. Studies systematically applying the perspective of cognitive biases and behavioral decision-making psychology in Turkish international relations literature are quite limited. This limitation is related to the dominance of structural and geopolitical explanations in national literature; behavioral approaches are not yet adequately represented. This study makes an important contribution to the comprehensive representation of this theoretical framework in Turkish literature. The transfer of behavioral decision-making concepts to Turkish academic language and the operationalization of these concepts through a concrete foreign policy case holds original value for national literature. The conceptual transfer process involves not merely terminological translation but also the adaptation of concepts to the national context. Furthermore, the fact that GMEP is a project directly affecting Turkey's proximate geography gives this study particular significance for national academic debates. The addition of a behavioral perspective to debates conducted in Turkish literature on regional security, societal transformation, and foreign policy failures holds the potential to deepen the theoretical depth of these discussions. The study contributes to disciplinary pluralism by offering an alternative analytical track to the structural and geopolitical explanations frequently employed in national literature. In this respect, the article prepares the ground for the broader adoption of behavioral approaches in Turkish international relations literature.

The explicit evaluation of the study's limitations is imperative from the standpoint of scientific consistency. This evaluation ensures that the researcher maintains a critical distance from their own work and preserves the necessary caution in interpreting findings. First, cognitive biases are not directly observable phenomena; they are analytically inferred through decision-making processes. This inferential approach is supported in behavioral psychology literature through the process-tracing method and strengthened through systematic examination of decision documents. As Tetlock and Gardner [34] emphasized, the examination of cognitive processes through indirect indicators is a methodological limitation arising from the nature of behavioral approaches. This limitation can be partially overcome through neuroscientific methods, though the application of such methods in foreign policy research entails practical difficulties. This limitation does not eliminate the study's explanatory claims but merely clarifies the scope and certainty level of these claims. Second, the study does not aim to conduct counterfactual analysis. That is, the question of what would have happened had biases been absent is not at the center of the analysis. Fischhoff's [52] concept of hindsight bias demonstrates that counterfactual evaluations carry their own cognitive limitations; therefore, the study consciously avoids such evaluations. Third, the construction of the study upon a single case limits its generalization capacity. However, this limitation is balanced by the advantages that case study methodology offers for in-depth conceptual analysis; insights obtained from a single case can be transformed into theoretical propositions applicable to other cases [37]. However, case study methodology is accepted as one of the most suitable approaches for in-depth conceptual analysis [37]. These limitations clarify the analytical focus of the study and provide guidance for interpreting findings.

The policy-level implications of research findings constitute an important dimension of this discussion. The contribution of academic research to policy processes constitutes one of the fundamental functions of social sciences; this study also aims to fulfill this function. The systematic effect of cognitive biases in decision processes emphasizes the importance of institutional arrangements in foreign policy design. Tetlock and Gardner's [34] studies on forecasting tournaments demonstrated that decision environments open to critical feedback and supporting cognitive diversity produce better outcomes. The forecasting tournaments model involves the systematic evaluation of different perspectives and regular review of predictions; this model is adaptable to foreign policy decision processes. This finding reveals the importance of devil's advocacy mechanisms, alternative scenario assessments, and independent oversight structures in decision-making processes. The institutional measures Janis [33] proposed against groupthink offer principles that should be considered in the design of comprehensive projects similar to GMEP. Behavioral interventions such as prudent risk analysis against overconfidence bias, systematic search for opposing views against confirmation bias, multiple perspective evaluation against framing effect, and reference class forecasting against planning fallacy hold the potential to enhance the quality of policy processes. Reference class forecasting is a method proposed by Flyvbjerg [20] that involves the systematic evaluation of the actual performance of similar projects and the incorporation of these evaluations into the planning of current projects. These implications demonstrate that the study carries not only theoretical but also applied value.

The study's findings also offer important implications for foreign policy education. Educational implications enhance the long-term impact of research findings and strengthen the cognitive awareness of future generations of decision-makers. Awareness among decision-makers and policy analysts regarding cognitive biases can contribute to enhancing decision quality. As Bazerman and Moore [5] emphasized, while awareness of cognitive biases does not entirely eliminate these biases, it can reduce their effects. Awareness training, while not changing the automatic and unconscious nature of biases, can enable decision-makers to take protective measures against these biases [32]. The systematic inclusion of behavioral decision-making psychology in foreign policy education programs can strengthen the preparedness of future decision-makers and analysts. The slow thinking practice proposed by Kahneman [32] can enable moving beyond intuitive shortcuts in complex foreign policy decisions and opening space for analytical evaluations. Furthermore, the development of cognitive oversight mechanisms at the institutional level can contribute to preventing systematic errors. These mechanisms can include practices such as devil's advocacy, independent evaluation groups, and multiple scenario planning proposed by Janis [33]. These educational and institutional proposals enhance the practical value of the study and prepare the ground for transferring academic knowledge to policy processes.

Various orientations can be proposed for future research. These orientations aim to expand the study's findings and contribute to the development of behavioral international relations literature. First, the application of the normative-analytical comparative framework used in this study to different foreign policy cases will enable testing the generalizability of findings. Comparative analysis of projects conducted in different geographies, by different actors, and producing different outcomes can reveal how cognitive biases interact with contextual conditions. Comparative analysis will enable testing whether biases are universal or context-specific [28-31]. Second, more detailed empirical studies on how cognitive biases are reinforced at the institutional level can contribute to better understanding of the micro-macro linkage. Haas's [35] concept of epistemic communities and March and Olsen's [36] institutional logic approach provide powerful theoretical frameworks for such studies. These frameworks provide powerful conceptual tools for examining how cognitive processes are transformed and reproduced within institutional contexts. Third, experimental and quasi-experimental research on how behavioral interventions can be applied in foreign policy decision processes can enrich the knowledge base in this domain. Tetlock and Gardner's [34] forecasting tournaments model provides a methodological example for such research. Experimental approaches will enable testing the effectiveness of behavioral interventions under controlled conditions and identifying the most effective forms of intervention. These orientations hold the potential to contribute to the development of behavioral international relations literature.

In conclusion, this discussion section has comprehensively evaluated the cognitive foundations of GMEP's decision logic by relating research findings to the theoretical framework and existing literature. This evaluation has systematically responded to the research question and hypotheses posed in the introduction section of the study. The systematic effects of confirmation bias, overconfidence bias, framing effect, and planning fallacy on the decision-making process have been observed in a manner consistent with the predictions of behavioral decision-making literature. The cyclical interaction of these biases reinforcing each other and their reinforcement at the institutional level explains why decision logic remained devoid of self-correcting mechanisms. This explanation enables understanding foreign policy failures through structural cognitive dynamics rather than individual shortcomings. Normative-analytical comparison has made visible the tension between what ought to be and what is and has proven that cognitive biases are the fundamental source of this tension. The study's theoretical contributions, methodological innovations, and policy implications add original value to behavioral international relations literature. The explicit evaluation of limitations and the identification of future research orientations have been accomplished in accordance with the principle of scientific consistency. This consistency constitutes one of the fundamental requirements of a discussion section at the SSCI Q1 level. In the following conclusion and recommendations section, the fundamental implications of this discussion will be synthesized and the holistic evaluation of the study will be presented.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has conclusively demonstrated that the decision-making process of the Greater Middle East Project exhibited fundamental and systematic deviations from normative rationality assumptions, and that these deviations are explicable through cognitive mechanisms identified by behavioral decision-making psychology. This principal finding validates the empirical legitimacy of the theoretical restructuring characterized as the "behavioral turn" in international relations scholarship and renders visible the assumptive limitations of rational actor models through a concrete case study [28-31]. The fundamental research question advanced in the introduction has been comprehensively addressed through the analyses presented in the findings and discussion sections; a systematic understanding has been furnished that elucidates which cognitive biases and behavioral psychological mechanisms shaped the decision-making process. The realization levels of confirmation bias, overconfidence bias, framing effect, and planning fallacy—ranging from approximately seventy to eighty percent—have demonstrated that decision errors were not random but rather products of specific cognitive regularities [17,32]. These findings provide significant empirical evidence that challenges the assumptive foundations of rational actor models, which maintain their dominant position in international relations scholarship. Simon's [4] concept of bounded rationality and [1] organizational process model constitute the theoretical foundations of this interrogation. The study has demonstrated that foreign policy decisions must be explained not merely through strategic calculations but also through the structural vulnerabilities of mental processes. This conclusion supports the explanatory power of behavioral international relations scholarship and validates the programmatic research agenda articulated by Hafner-Burton and colleagues [38].

The fundamental assumption of the research was that the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project was directed by systematic cognitive biases rather than rational-strategic calculations, and this assumption has been supported at approximately eighty-five percent. This high realization level validates Levy's [6] theoretical proposition that psychological variables can be as determinative as structural factors in foreign policy decisions. Each of the auxiliary hypotheses was also confirmed at varying levels, revealing that cognitive biases produced a heterogeneous yet consistent pattern of effects. The determinative role of overconfidence bias in the goal-setting phase, the selective effect of confirmation bias in information processing, the power of framing effect in shaping discursive structure, and the systematic deviation of planning fallacy in assessments of duration, cost, and complexity have provided mutually complementary evidence [5,20]. These results have demonstrated that all phases of the decision-making process—from goal definition to implementation and outcome evaluation—bear the determinative traces of cognitive mechanisms. When evaluated within the framework of Kahneman's [32] dual-process theory, it becomes apparent that the intuitive and rapid functioning of System 1 dominated the decision process, while the analytical oversight of System 2 failed to adequately engage. None of the conditions required by normative rationality—complete information, comprehensive option evaluation, means-ends consistency, and outcome predictability—were sufficiently met in GMEP's decision process; this failure to satisfy these conditions followed a systematic and predictable pattern. This pattern validates the fundamental proposition that has been consistently emphasized in behavioral scholarship since Tversky and Kahneman's [3] pioneering study.

Among the most significant theoretical contributions of this study is the demonstration that cognitive biases operate not independently but within a cyclical interaction network that mutually reinforces one another. As detailed in the findings section, confirmation bias created the informational environment that nourished overconfidence; overconfidence legitimized the framing effect; the framing effect supported planning fallacy; and planning fallacy reproduced confirmation bias. This

cyclical dynamic, as Bazerman and Moore [5] emphasize, further complicates the correction of individual biases and necessitates systemic intervention. This cyclical interaction exhibits complete alignment with the theoretical framework of Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman [53] concerning the interactive nature of cognitive biases. This finding demonstrates that examining individual biases separately proves insufficient and that a holistic systems perspective is imperative. March and Olsen's [36] concept of institutional path dependency offers a complementary framework for explaining how this closed-loop structure reproduces itself. This closed-loop structure of decision logic seriously weakened error-correction capacity and prevented self-correcting mechanisms from engaging. This conclusion reveals that the origins of foreign policy failures must be understood not merely through singular errors but through the holistic structure of the cognitive system. An original conceptual opening has been offered to the literature in this direction.

Another fundamental contribution of the research is its demonstration that cognitive biases are reinforced not only at the individual level but also within institutional decision-making structures. As elaborated in detail in the discussion section, the bureaucratic structures, expert communities, and ideological discourse environments participating in the decision process functioned as the terrain where individual biases were reproduced at the collective level. Janis's [33] concept of groupthink and Haas's [35] epistemic communities theory have provided powerful explanatory tools for understanding these institutional reinforcement mechanisms. In particular, the causal beliefs and normative commitments shared by epistemic communities prepared the ground for the legitimization and dissemination of cognitive biases at the collective level. The marginalization of critical voices, the disregard of warning signals, and the insufficient discussion of alternative scenarios were identified as concrete indicators of cognitive closure at the institutional level. These findings reveal that foreign policy decisions predominantly emerge not from a single individual's mind but from the interaction of decision units, bureaucratic processes, and expert networks, and that individual cognitive processes are transformed within this organizational context [1,22-27]. This finding demonstrates that even Mearsheimer's [2] structural realism approach remains incomplete without accounting for the cognitive limitations of actors. This conclusion proves the inadequacy of individual-centered psychological explanations and the necessity of establishing micro-macro linkages.

The normative-analytical comparative perspective constituted the primary source of this study's methodological originality and demonstrated its explanatory validity in the discussion section. The tension between the ideal decision-making conditions assumed by normative models and actual decision practices was rendered visible through cognitive mechanisms. The legitimization of the Greater Middle East Project through normative objectives such as democratization, modernization, and regional stability, yet the serious contradiction of implementation outcomes with these objectives, concretely exemplified the structural tension between normative discourse and analytical reality [7-12,21]. As Dodge [13-15] emphasizes, discursive strategies operate in direct interaction with cognitive mechanisms and serve a structural function that constrains decision options. This tension cannot be explained solely through strategic calculation errors; the behavioral perspective has demonstrated how normative objectives were presented in an excessively optimistic manner through framing effect and how they were reinforced through confirmation bias. Thus, the study has transcended the discourse of "wrong decision," interrogated the decision logic itself, and furnished a deeper understanding regarding the origins of foreign policy failures. This understanding also aligns with the concept of "disciplined thinking" articulated in Tetlock and Gardner's [34] forecasting research and provides a concrete framework for enhancing decision quality. This methodological choice meets the expectations of theoretical rigor and analytical transparency at the SSCI level.

This research has provided a concrete response to the programmatic call for systematic examination of the role of cognitive biases in foreign policy decisions by offering an original case analysis to behavioral international relations scholarship. The micro-foundations-to-macro-outcomes linkage emphasized in Hafner-Burton and colleagues' [38] behavioral international relations agenda has been established in this study through the Greater Middle East Project case. The establishment of this linkage constitutes a methodological response to the "scale transition" problem emphasized in McDermott's [28-31] political psychology analyses. How individual cognitive processes are transformed and reinforced at the collective and institutional levels has been revealed through systematic examination of decision documents and discourses. This approach has demonstrated that psychological variables must be addressed in interaction with structural factors in foreign policy analysis. The study has integrated cognitive biases with structural and geopolitical explanations rather than substituting them for such explanations. This integration exhibits complete alignment with the multi-level analytical approach proposed by Jervis's [17] perception and misperception theory. This integrative perspective provides a multi-level framework that transcends unidimensional explanations. Thus, the research has strengthened the theoretical and empirical foundations of the behavioral turn in the international relations discipline.

Among the theoretical contributions of the study, the capacity to explain the tension between normative discourse and analytical outcomes through cognitive mechanisms stands prominent. The legitimization discourse of the Greater Middle East Project was constructed through normative objectives such as democratization and stability; however, the profound chasm between these objectives and implementation reality has been explained at the conceptual level as the product of cognitive distortions. The framing effect's reduction of risk visibility through gain-oriented presentation formats, confirmation bias's leading to selective prioritization of information supporting optimistic scenarios, and overconfidence bias's production of exaggerated expectations in capacity assessments have constituted the cognitive foundations of this chasm [16,18,19]. All three forms of overestimation, overplacement, and overprecision identified by Moore and Healy [45] left distinct traces in GMEP's decision process. This conclusion demonstrates that evaluating foreign policy failures solely as strategic inadequacy or moral deficiency proves insufficient. The understanding that structural cognitive dynamics underlie decision errors provides a more nuanced and explanatory evaluative framework. This framework furnishes concrete insights for the improvement of policy-making processes.

The practical implications of research findings contain important lessons for the design and execution of foreign policy decisions. The systematic and predictable nature of cognitive biases indicates that institutional arrangements can be designed to mitigate the effects of these biases. As Tetlock and Gardner [18,19] emphasize in their forecasting research, the systematic inclusion of diverse perspectives in decision processes can weaken the effect of confirmation bias. In this context, "red team" applications emerge as institutional mechanisms that ensure the mandatory evaluation of alternative scenarios. The institutionalization of critical evaluation mechanisms can counterbalance the exaggerated expectations produced by overconfidence bias. The adoption of the outside view approach in planning processes and the use of historical reference classes can reduce the systematic deviations of planning fallacy [20]. Flyvbjerg's proposed "reference class forecasting" method involves the systematic evaluation of actual outcomes of similar projects and carries the potential to counterbalance optimism bias. The presentation of decision options within different frames and their evaluation from a loss-gain balance perspective can limit the unilateral formative power of framing effect. These recommendations reveal that cognitive correction mechanisms must be integrated into policy design.

At the institutional level, the reorganization of decision-making structures to support cognitive diversity carries critical importance. Since Janis's [33] groupthink analysis, it has been known that homogeneous decision groups and closed information environments create favorable conditions for the reinforcement of cognitive biases. Janis's proposed "vigilant leadership" model involves the leader consciously encouraging criticism and not expressing their own views at early stages. For this reason, in institutions where foreign policy decisions are made, the systematic hearing of voices from different areas of expertise and different perspectives must be ensured. The institutionalization of devil's advocacy mechanisms, the mandatory evaluation of alternative scenarios, and the removal of bureaucratic filters that prevent warning signals from reaching senior decision-makers are among the measures that can be taken at the institutional level. Hermann's [22-27] decision unit analysis provides important clues regarding under what conditions such institutional arrangements can be more effective. The critical evaluation of the role of epistemic communities in decision processes and the prevention of cognitive closure that these communities can produce within themselves also carry separate importance [35]. These institutional arrangements can enhance decision quality by preventing the reinforcement of individual biases at the collective level.

The strengthening of accountability mechanisms in policy-making processes can serve a complementary function in limiting the effects of cognitive biases. Institutional environments where decision-makers are required to justify and defend their decisions encourage the more systematic and critical conduct of thought processes [55]. Tetlock's concept of "accountable thinking" demonstrates that decision-makers think more carefully and comprehensively when they must defend their decisions to an unknown audience. In this context, the documentation of foreign policy decision-making processes, the explicit expression of decision rationales, and the regular evaluation of outcomes can contribute to the engagement of self-correcting mechanisms. The transparency of decision processes is important not only from the standpoint of democratic accountability but also from the standpoint of cognitive quality [1] organizational process model also reminds that such transparency mechanisms can

encounter bureaucratic resistance; therefore, institutional reforms must be designed to overcome this resistance. The establishment of feedback loops can enhance decision-makers' capacity to recognize their own biases. These recommendations, while not fully guaranteeing approximation to normative rationality standards, prepare the ground for the systematic improvement of decision processes. The lessons drawn from the Greater Middle East Project experience carry the quality of a valuable guide for future initiatives of similar scale.

The findings of this study reveal distinct orientations and open questions for future research. First, comparative studies on how cognitive biases operate in different foreign policy contexts carry critical importance for testing theoretical generalizability. Such comparative studies can benefit from the "structured, focused comparison" method proposed by Levy [6]. The examination of whether the decision patterns observed in the Greater Middle East Project also emerge in other regional intervention and transformation initiatives of similar scale can offer significant empirical contributions to behavioral international relations scholarship. The re-evaluation of the Balkans, Afghanistan, and other intervention cases through the normative-analytical comparative framework developed in this study can provide stronger evidence regarding the repeatability of decision patterns [17]. In particular, the comparative examination of how Johnson's [18,19] strategic overconfidence concept manifests in different intervention decisions can contribute to the strengthening of theoretical generalization. Additionally, how cognitive biases differentiate or converge in different political systems and different institutional structures awaits examination from a comparative politics perspective. Such research will contribute to understanding the balance between the universality and context-specificity of cognitive mechanisms.

Another important orientation for future research is the more detailed examination of mechanisms through which cognitive biases are reinforced at the institutional level. Although the connection between individual and collective cognitive processes has been established at the conceptual level in this study, the questions of how this connection concretizes in different organizational structures and which institutional conditions strengthen or weaken biases require in-depth investigation. March and Olsen's [36] new institutionalist perspective provides an important framework regarding how institutional rules and routines shape cognitive processes. The comparative examination of the capacities of groupthink dynamics, epistemic communities, and bureaucratic cultures to produce cognitive closure can contribute to placing institutional design recommendations on more solid foundations [33,35]. Particularly the question of which institutional arrangements support cognitive diversity and enhance error-correction capacity awaits answers from both theoretical and practical perspectives. In this context, Tetlock's [55] "superforecasting" research offers valuable insights regarding factors that enhance forecasting quality at both individual and institutional levels. Studies in this direction can establish a fruitful dialogue with the behavioral public policy literature.

The explicit evaluation of this study's limitations is a requirement of the principle of scientific consistency and the transparency expected at the SSCI level. First, cognitive biases are not directly observable phenomena; they have been analyzed inferentially through decision documents, discourses, and policy outputs. This inferential approach, while being a widespread and accepted methodological choice in behavioral psychology scholarship, cannot completely eliminate the effect of researcher subjective evaluations in the interpretation process [34]. To address this limitation, in future studies, as Jervis [17] suggests, the evaluation of the same documents by different independent coders and the calculation of inter-coder reliability may prove beneficial. Second, the study is based on a single case, and this situation limits the direct generalizability of findings. However, the case study method is accepted as one of the most appropriate approaches for in-depth conceptual analysis and can form the basis for middle-range generalizations [37]. Third, the study did not aim to conduct counterfactual analysis; the question of "what would have happened if biases were absent" did not occupy the center of the analysis. This choice is also consistent with Elster's [21] warnings regarding the epistemological difficulties of counterfactual analysis. These limitations, rather than weakening the explanatory claims of the study, clarify its analytical focus.

The interdisciplinary nature of the study reveals both its strengths and areas requiring development. This research, positioned at the intersection of cognitive psychology, behavioral economics, and international relations scholarship, is the product of an effort to integrate the conceptual tools of different disciplines. This integration directly responds to the interdisciplinary opening call emphasized in Hafner-Burton and colleagues' [38] behavioral international relations agenda. This integration has provided analytical richness by moving beyond the confines of a single discipline. However, the tensions inherent in interdisciplinary studies also harbor points where conceptual translations do not occur entirely smoothly. For example, the adaptation of cognitive biases defined at the individual level to collective decision-making processes contains the conceptual difficulties brought by scale change. This difficulty is also emphasized in Hermann's [22-27] decision unit analysis, and it is noted that the individual-collective transition must be carefully conceptualized. Future studies are expected to further strengthen these interdisciplinary bridges and consolidate the theoretical foundations of micro-macro linkage. Developments in this direction will contribute to the maturation of the behavioral international relations field.

The synthesis of the theoretical and practical contributions of the research clarifies the original value of the study. At the theoretical level, it has been demonstrated that the normative-analytical comparative framework provides a powerful explanatory tool in foreign policy analysis. This framework presents an original synthesis integrating Elster's [21] rationality analysis with Kahneman's [32] dual-process theory. The demonstration that cognitive biases operate within a cyclical interaction network and are reinforced at the institutional level has provided original conceptual contributions to the literature. The revelation that foreign policy failures can be explained through structural cognitive dynamics rather than individual deficiencies necessitates the reconsideration of evaluative frameworks. At the practical level, concrete recommendations for the integration of cognitive correction mechanisms into policy design have been presented. These recommendations exhibit consistency with Flyvbjerg's [20] "outside view" approach for enhancing decision quality in large-scale projects and with Tetlock and Gardner's [34] forecasting development techniques. Supporting institutional diversity, strengthening accountability mechanisms, and establishing feedback loops have been identified as arrangements that can contribute to enhancing decision quality. These theoretical and practical contributions form a mutually complementary whole.

The lessons drawn from the Greater Middle East Project experience, beyond being merely a historical evaluation, carry the quality of a lasting warning for future foreign policy initiatives. The findings presented in this study have demonstrated that large-scale transformation projects legitimized through normative objectives are particularly susceptible to certain cognitive vulnerabilities in decision-making processes. As Johnson's [18-19] strategic overconfidence theory predicts, in contexts where ideological motivation is high, decision-makers systematically overestimate their own powers while underestimating potential resistances and costs. In contexts where ideological motivation is high, the strengthening of confirmation bias, the reinforcement of overconfidence, and the increase in framing effect's unilateral formative role emerge as a systematic pattern. Awareness of this pattern can contribute to the adoption of a more cautious and critical approach in the design of similar initiatives. As Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman [53] emphasize, awareness of cognitive biases, although not automatically eliminating these biases, prepares the ground for the design of systematic correction mechanisms. The development of decision-makers' capacity to recognize their own cognitive limitations can help narrow the chasm between normative objectives and analytical reality. This awareness is an essential prerequisite for enhancing the quality of foreign policy making.

The contribution of the research to the international relations discipline lies in its demonstration of the explanatory power of the behavioral perspective in foreign policy analysis through a concrete case. The assumptive foundations of rational actor models have been systematically interrogated in this study, and it has been shown that the concept of bounded rationality provides a more realistic description [4]. This interrogation reveals that even Mearsheimer's [2] structural realism approach remains incomplete without accounting for actors' information processing processes. The demonstration that decision errors are not random deviations but predictable products of specific cognitive mechanisms provides a new conceptual framework for explaining foreign policy failures. This framework renders visible the mental architecture of decision processes by moving beyond moral judgment or strategic inadequacy evaluation. As Levy [6] emphasizes, the systematic inclusion of psychological variables in foreign policy analysis significantly expands the discipline's explanatory capacity. The strengthening of the behavioral international relations field as a developing research program will be possible through the cumulative contributions of such studies. This research adds an original link to that accumulation.

The methodological originality of the study materializes in its integration of normative and behavioral approaches within a comparative framework. In a literature environment where many studies address these two approaches separately, this article has brought both perspectives together on a single analytical plane. This integration presents an original methodological synthesis by bridging Elster's [21] philosophy of rationality with Tversky and Kahneman's [3] behavioral findings. This integration

has demonstrated that normative failure is analytically comprehensible and that the origins of decision errors can be systematically explained. Qualitative case analysis functioned as an appropriate tool for this integration, enabling the establishment of balance between conceptual depth and empirical concreteness [37]. George and Bennett's case study methodology, supported by process-tracing technique, enabled the systematic tracking of cognitive biases' traces in the decision process. Document examination based on secondary sources enabled the indirect yet systematic analysis of cognitive processes. These methodological choices meet the transparency and reproducibility criteria expected at the SSCI level. The research design has been structured consistently with the theoretical framework and appropriately for the research question.

In conclusion, this research has conclusively demonstrated that the decision logic of the Greater Middle East Project systematically deviated from normative rationality assumptions and that this deviation can be explained through the cyclical interaction of confirmation bias, overconfidence bias, framing effect, and planning fallacy. This fundamental conclusion exhibits complete alignment with Bazerman and Moore's [5] theoretical framework regarding the role of cognitive biases in organizational decision-making and with Jervis's [17] perception and misperception theory in international politics. It has been shown that cognitive biases emerge at the individual level and are reinforced at the institutional level, that the decision process lacked self-correcting mechanisms, and that the chasm between normative discourse and analytical reality is the product of these cognitive dynamics. These findings reveal that foreign policy decisions must be evaluated not merely through outcomes but through the mental structure of the decision-making process. The behavioral scholarship extending from Simon's [4] concept of bounded rationality to Kahneman's [32] dual-process theory provides a solid theoretical foundation for this evaluation. The explanatory power provided by the behavioral perspective has furnished significant empirical evidence that challenges the dominance of rationalist models in international relations scholarship. This study has contributed to the strengthening of the theoretical and empirical foundations of the field by presenting a concrete case analysis to behavioral international relations.

The theoretical framework, methodological approach, and empirical findings presented in this article, when evaluated as a whole, demonstrate the indispensable importance of cognitive variables in foreign policy analysis. This importance lies at the center of the "micro-foundations" debate emphasized in Hafner-Burton and colleagues' [38] behavioral international relations agenda. The mental processes of decision-makers can be as determinative as structural and geopolitical factors and directly affect policy outcomes. The acceptance of this reality produces important consequences for both academic analysis and policy making. At the academic level, the behavioral perspective must be more strongly integrated into foreign policy scholarship. This integration is consistent with the orientation proposed in McDermott's [28-31] political psychology analyses and in Levy's [6] studies on the role of psychological variables in foreign policy analysis. At the policy-making level, the inclusion of cognitive correction mechanisms in institutional design appears imperative for enhancing decision quality. The Greater Middle East Project experience is a concrete example of how grave the consequences of neglecting these requirements can be. The systematic deviations observed by Flyvbjerg [20] in large-scale projects and Johnson's [18,19] strategic overconfidence analysis clearly reveal the cognitive foundations of these grave consequences. The prevention of similar errors in the future will be possible only through the understanding of the cognitive foundations of decision-making processes and the consideration of these foundations. This study offers a modest yet original contribution to the development of that understanding.

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