Iran Securitization of Terrorist ISIS

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Abstract

This article seeks to identify and explain the process of securitizing ISIS by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The most important question of this article is: How did the Iranian government manage to portray ISIS as an existential threat to its citizens and how to involve them in their foreign and military policies against this terrorist group? This article uses the securitization theory to explain the Iranian war with ISIS in Syria and Iraq. It aims to consider the process and dynamics of securitization of ISIS in Iranian society which led them to support the military combat with ISIS. The research hypothesis is that the focus on securitization theory prepares the constant framework for understanding how the Copenhagen notion of security helps the Iranian government to justify the enemy narrative of ISIS through the trend of exclusion, exceptionalities, and use of physical force. Iranian government actively uses the securitization process to make required changes and adjustments for confronting ISIS to gain support and legitimacy from ordinary people. This article considers the role of the audience in the process of decision-making and how rulers use this opportunity to mobilize and organize armed forces. The Iranian government in the process of securitizing ISIS has shown that it can involve the people in the process of decision-making and the implementation of its foreign and military policies.

Keywords: securitization, audience, speech act, Iran, ISIS

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Introduction

Security is one of the most important concerns of governments and a controversial concept in the politics of countries. With the rise of ISIS and its rapid spread in Syria and Iraq, the Iranian government became worried about its security and interests. Threats to the border and the dangers of Iran's territorial integrity by ISIS determined the Iranian government to take military action against this terrorist group. Iran simultaneously supported its non-state actors in the region to counter the ISIS, as well as sending military advisers to support the Syrian and Iraqi governments. In this situation, the most important challenge for the Iranian government was to persuade public opinion and mobilize citizens for military action against ISIS. The main question of this article is how the Iranian government was able to mobilize public opinion and introduce the ISIS terrorist group as a security threat that needs military action to counter it?

Believing that the ISIS is a security threat to Iranian citizens and supporting the government in countering with terrorist groups outside Iran is one of the most important events in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranian government needs the approval and support of its citizens to successfully securitize ISIS as an existential threat and use military forces against it effectively. The center of gravity of Iran's national security relies on the reactions of the nation-state. For geographical and identity reasons, Iran has had limited strategic relations with major powers, and these relations have been more limited to specific issues. They have found that the most important and effective strategic alliance to safeguard the national interests

is the relationship between the government and the people. In other words, the only historical ally of the government has been the Iranian nation. In this regard, one of the important elements of maintaining the national security and territorial integrity of the country is to strengthen the relationship between the government and the nation in Iran.

This article uses the concept of Copenhagen security to understand how the Iranian government justifies its enemy's narrative about ISIS through the process of deprivation, exceptions, and the use of physical force. This article examines securitization theory to explain how the Iranian Government mobilized its forces, justified its cause, convinced the audience, and framed this security issue as an existential threat. Iranian government actively uses the securitization process to make required changes and adjustments for confronting ISIS to gain support and legitimacy from ordinary people. The article considers the role of the audience in the process of decision-making and how rulers use this opportunity to mobilize and organize armed forces.

Theoretical Framework

National security is the most important principle in a country's political stability and independence. This is important because the survival of any state, its territorial integrity, and the stability and continuity of its government depend on its national security. One of the schools of international relations that have studied the issue of security at the regional level is the Copenhagen School. Since the article focuses on the threats to Iran's national security in the political, military and social dimensions of the region, this theory can help explain the subject of this research.

Security theory seeks to undermine the traditional notion of security, which emphasized war and military might. These scholars explain that the military power is not the only factor for considering the concept of security, while there are many factors linked to it and have an essential effect on it (Stritzel, 2014). The

scholars in Copenhagen School try to shift from the traditional definition of security which emphasized the role of the state and war condition to the other factors and sectors. They define security as an inter-subjective establishment formed between actor and the audience about an existential threat. If the process of securitization is successful, the government gains legitimacy to use physical force and striking tools against the threat (Wæver, 1995: 55).

The scholars in Copenhagen School try to redefine the concept of securitization which expands the notion through the collective units and principles. They emphasize that when the specific object to be securitized, it should be identified as an existential threat that required emergency action. In this situation, the state needs the acceptance of the audience for using physical force against the object (Buzan et al., 1998). Political actors who want to present the object as an existential threat must turn to public persuasion beyond elite circles and executive agencies. For reaching this goal, they need to socially and politically justify a danger as an existential threat in the public realm (Taureck, 2006). The political actors need to raise security for extraordinary measures and share a sense of threat to the nation as a sense of threat to all members of society. Unlike the realists, whose focus is on governments, Buzan focuses his discussion on the people and tries to segment the concept of security to consider the role of the people. According to him, the sectorization helps researchers to study the different aspects of the state (Buzan et al., 1998). For him, it is unfortunate that almost all branches of realism concentrate on military/political sectors and they do not have enough attention to economic, societal, and environmental ones (Buzan, 1996: 4).

The Copenhagen Concept of Securitization

For the Copenhagen School, the concept of security is more important than all other issues, because if they "do not tackle this problem, everything else will be irrelevant" (Buzan et al., 1998,

24). However, Buzan asks two essential questions of securitization which help scholars to construct the notion of securitization:

• "Who can 'do' or 'speak' security successfully, on what issues, under what conditions, and with what effects?"

• "When does an argument with this particular rhetorical and semiotic structure achieve sufficient effect to make an audience tolerate violations of rules that would otherwise have to be obeyed?" (Buzan et al., 1998, 25).

For answering these questions, Copenhagen School tries to transform a traditional understanding of realists into an intersubjective notion of security which takes shape among speakers and audience. Political actors use this situation for the implementation of potentially far-reaching security measures. When the securitization process moves successfully and people recognize the importance of threat, political actors can label the object as an existential threat and use violence against it. According to Copenhagen School, states try to dramatize the issue to a valued referent object for legitimately using force and extraordinary measures against the object (Buzan et al., 1998, 24-29). In this situation, the political actor could claim the special right to control the issue by using extraordinary means. In this condition, the concept of speech act and the relationship between actor and audience become important. To achieve this goal, they remove the issue from normal politics to an emergency condition. In this respect, the securitization situation contains a securitizing actor whose aim is to persuade an audience that an issue sets an existential threat to a referent object (Balzacq, 2011). Consequently, Buzan explains that "by labeling it as security, an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means" (Buzan et al, 1998: 26, 32-33).

To advance this goal, scholars have suggested that political actors pursue a process of securitization as a practice (Hansen, 2000; Bigo, 2002; Williams, 2007; Vuori, 2008). These ideas have been further elaborated in Balzacq's sociological view of

securitization, which emphasizes the importance of practices, context, and power relations. As he explains, "security practices are enacted, primarily, through policy tools." He emphasizes that these practices contribute to the emergence of a security context, creates background knowledge regarding the threat, the way the threat should be addressed, and its "taken-for-granted-ness" (Balzacq, 2011: 15-16).

I- Iran's Relation with Syria and Iraq

Iran has had close relations with Syria since the Islamic Revolution and had good relations with Syria during the war with Iraq. At the same time, Iran has a historical relationship with Iraq. The two countries became strategic allies of Iran, and this strategic relationship has continued to this day. During the Syrian civil war, Iran supported Assad's government and provided logistical, technical and financial supports for its ally. For the Iranian government, the stability of the Syrian government is the main interest and they prepare security and intelligence services as well as military support for preserving Assad's government in power.

On the other hand, Iraq is an essential actor in the region. There is a long historical, cultural, and social relationship between Iran and Iraq. Iraq is an important place for Iranians because of its holy shrines and seminaries that are important for Iranian religious traditions and strategies. It has the second largest Shia population in the world and around 55%-60% of Iraqis are Shiites (Miller, 2009). In general, these two countries are important allies for Iran in the region, and the Iranian Government is committed to support them. Moreover, Iraq and Syria are important for Shia because of the holy cities of Karbala, Najaf, and Damascus. These cities are vital to Iranians because of their religious significance and the narrative they play for Iranian society and politics.

Iranian Decision to Support Syria and Iraq: With the rise of ISIS, Iran faced security problems on its border with Iraq. . Iraq and Iran have 910 miles border which is poorly defended by Iraq

and it caused a potential threat from ISIS (Esfandiary & Tabatabai, 2015). When ISIS took control of large parts of Iraq, Iranian leaders sent a message to their Iraqi counterparts that they would defend the country's territorial integrity. They guaranteed to share their experiences with Iraqi leaders in controlling terrorist activities with technical support.

Iranian leaders used technological and military support to help their allies against these threats. They sent technical and financial supports to help Assad's government for coordinating attacks, training militias, and establishing a system to monitor rebel communications under the leadership of Quds force General Soleimani. For legitimizing their direct action in the region, Iranian leaders tried to explain to their citizens why they should fight ISIS terrorists in the region. They used the concept of securitization to legitimize their moves in the region. Iranians have been victims of terrorist attacks by extremist groups since the beginning of the revolution. The concept of securitization is a powerful tool for Iranians to identify these armed dissidents as a terrorist group. It helps the structure of power to delegitimize these groups as an enemy and push them from gray areas of political contestation to the existential threat (Nadarajah & Sriskandarajah, 2005: 91). The Iranian government's policies in Iraq and Syria are based on a combination of hard power and soft power. Iran has used both powers to increase its influence and dominance in the region (Arif, 2019). Political actors use public media to cover the main narrative of a conflict to gain the broadest acceptance from citizens. In Iranian society, the effects of media are very important because the audience is highly dependent on the official news from the state which helps to consider the effect of the securitization paradigm in society (Stritzel & Chang, 2015).

II- Actor and Audience in Securitization Theory

As Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde (1998: 31) explain, "Securitization is not decided by the securitizer but by the audience" and the speech act is an essential tool for guiding this decision. They

define the security speech act as "negotiated between securitizer and audience". According to them, the role of the audience is essential which they grant the securitizer "permission to override the rules that would otherwise is binding" (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998: 26).

In this situation, ordinary people need to be convinced about the real threat but these peoples' roles are "various according to the political system and the nature of the issue" (Wæver, 2003: 12). Balzacq explains that the audience could support the process of securitization in moral and formal ways. He emphasizes that the general and official moral support of the parliament is very important for political actors. According to him, securitizing agents always try to maintain their relationships with the target community because they are vital to public persuasion (Balzacq, 2005).

The Process of Convincing Citizens by Political Actors in Iran: Iranian political and military leaders from 2011 tried to convince people that not only ISIS is a real threat to Iranian national and religious unity, but also at same time they explain why the Iranian government needs to counter the threat with military force. Through the explanation of the threat from ISIS, the Iranian government tried to identify ISIS as an existential threat and moves the security issues to the stage of identification in securitization theory. Moreover, after they justified their claim about the threat of ISIS, they claimed that if Iranian militaries do not fight with them in Syria and Iraq, they must fight with them inside Iranian territories (Tasnimnews, 2015).

Since the beginning of the uprising in Syria in 2011, Iran's supreme leader strongly supported the Syrian government. The supreme leader and president are the primary political figure for protecting the ideology of the Islamic revolution and performing foreign policy formation. While parliament does not have a strong role in foreign and security policy, but it is important for giving a formal acceptance to the government for using force against an existential threat. Larijani, as the speaker of the parliament during

this period, said in a press conference: "If Iran had not helped Iraq, the ISIS would have invaded countries in the region too," (Fars News, 2015). However, political actors need to be aware of the risk that sometimes-gaining formal support comes at the cost of losing social ties and losing credibility in the eyes of the audience (Balzacq, 2005). The above explanation shows why political actors seek public persuasion and audience support to secure the subject while gaining formal consent.

The rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, especially after the group expanded and moved towards the Iranian borders, became a major security threat to Iran. Their brutal behavior like brutally murdering people, massacring, mass executions, and rape of Shia civilians led to the formation of anti-ISIS waves in Iranian society. The terrorist group's brutal behavior gradually convinced the Iranian audience that the Iranian government should use military force against ISIS to defend them. The Iranian government took the opportunity and decided to use all means to defeat ISIS. Iran used all its facilities, including airstrikes, support for local forces, and expansion of the counter-terrorism plan to prevent future attacks.

For Iran, ISIS represents an existential threat that is different from other Sunni radical groups who threaten Iranian borders in the southeast and northeast of Iranian provinces. Most of these groups have a minimal threat to Iran because they just kidnap Iranian civilians, suicidal operations, and bombings the borders, while ISIS directly threatened Iran's identity and territorial integrity. They became a potential threat to Iran due to their short-lived occupation, mobilization of forces, and the recruitment of large numbers of fighters from around the world. These expansions and moves surprised the Iranian government and push them to resist them. On the other hand, ISIS had separatist and sectarian ideologies and tried to defeat the Shiites and establish an Islamic state based on Sunni extremist ideas and Sharia law.

At first, the Iranian government did not enough attention to the threat of ISIS but after their progress in the region, Iran

became more worried about the threat and involved fighting against them. Iranian leaders took the risk of ISIS approaching Iran's borders seriously, and this concern affected their strategy. They decided to remove this potential threat from their borders by fighting ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Most of the Iranians accepted that ISIS is a potential threat to the Iranian nation and religion which showed the Iranian state succeeded in verbally securitizing ISIS as an identification step. While the people accepted the security threat of ISIS, there was disagreement over military action in Syria and Iraq. Some believed it's better for Iranian security to fight against ISIS outside Iran and the best way is to send troops and equipment to Syria and Iraq to defeat them. Others pointed we could not invade another country in the name of our protection and security which increased suffers and pain for the Syrian people. This situation created a paradoxical condition that could make problems for the government.

According to the Copenhagen school, political actors should not raise demand and put pressure on people to accept the emergency measure. They just have to discuss the existential threat in order to resonate enough and create a platform for people to make this decision freely and accept legitimate emergency measures. Political actors are well aware that if the discourse is not formed as an existential threat, it cannot be accepted by citizens (Buzan et al., 1998, 25). In other words, the actual employment of emergency measures is not in fact needed to define a successful securitization.

The Iranian state portrayed ISIS as an existential threat and resonated this discourse in Iranian society. While much of Iranian supported participation in Iraq to prevent the spread of ISIS, some of the oppositions criticized Iran's involvement in Syria. These Iranians have some critics about some of the political and economic issues but ultimately, they supported Iran's presence in the region to control extremist groups and decrease the threat and risk of war in Iranian territories. Most of the Iranian populations

feel ISIS is a serious threat to them and they believe ISIS belongs to the extremist Sunni idea that is extremely hostile to Shiite thinkings. They referred to the news of how ISIS executed Shiites after imprisoning them in the cities of Syria and Iraq. These events reminded them of the Iran-Iraq war and they were worried about another "imposed war" on their country. Under these circumstances, the Iranian people accepted the idea that the Iranian government should fight with them in Syria and Iraq before ISIS enters Iran and prevent them from fighting inside Iran.

III- The Role of Speech Act

One of the most important factors in the process of securitization is related to a speech act and how political actors convinced citizens that the issue is a legitimate security threat. For receiving acceptance from the audience, political actors try to convince the majority of citizens and find a way to persuade particular audiences (O'Reilly, 2008).

For reaching this goal, the political actors first try to explain the differentiation between us versus others as an enemy. In this situation, the Iranian government tries to show how ISIS is different from us as a nation and how this group threatens the whole country. The securitization theory explains societal identity as a bridge between the individual and state security which helps them to find a sense of cultural understanding of a threat. According to scholars, "identity is the defining point regarding existential threats for a society because it defines whether 'we' are still us" (Buzan and Wæver, 1997: 242). In this situation, the concept of security is shaped by the discursive practices among the elites, the media, and academia (Aras & Polat, 2008).

Identification of ISIS as an Existential Threat: The leaders of Iran stated that this is our duty to defend Shia populations in the region. For explaining the government's arguments about the enmity of ISIS against Shia they release some documents that showed how ISIS thinks about Shiites and what they want to do with them. These documents explained how ISIS behaves with

Shiite people and how they tortured and killed them. The media reported that ISIS holding more than 3500 slaves in Iraq mostly women and children. On the other hand, ISIS directly threatened Iran's interests in the region, and these behaviors gradually led to the Iranian citizen's concern about ISIS. The ISIS terrorist group, for example, claimed in its threats that it intended to destroy the holy shrines in Iraq. On Twitter, they wrote to all Shiites: Let the Shiites know that our goal is to destroy the polytheistic symbol in Najaf, Karbala, and Samarra. They know that after the destruction of these symbols in Iraq, we will come to Iran and destroy Mashhad. The ISIS called on all Muslims to mobilize to eliminate the Shiites so that genuine Islam can spread in the world as soon as possible (Irinn, 2014).

In this situation, the majority of people identified ISIS as a real danger for their nationality and religion and were concerned ISIS as a dangerous group against human rights. On the other hand, the Iranian government tries to get formal acceptance from executive and legislative branches to announced war against ISIS. This step helps the state to increase political consensus and agreement with using media about the security issue (O'Reilly, 2008). Whit this propaganda some of the oppositions convinced that the only way to protect Shia people and their symbols is military action.

Mobilization of People Against ISIS: As I mentioned above, political actors in Iran need the support of ordinary citizens and for reaching this goal they apply the securitization process on two different levels. First, at the identification level, political actors try to define ISIS as a security issue by emphasizing rhetorical securitization, and then they move to mobilization level and active securitization which they want to use forces and significant efforts against the threat (Roe, 2008).

The importance of the threat from ISIS could offer an opportunity for Iranian leaders to take action against ISIS. They used the opportunity to improve their relationships with other Shia groups and expand their role in the region. This situation helps

Iranian officials to restore the Iranian government among ordinary people as the main defender of the nation and religious belief. Social media introduced the Quds Force Commander, General Soleimani, as the main figure of resistance against the brutal behaviors of ISIS. The mainstream media spread his photos in Syria and Iraq with various groups and leaders to show the authority of the Iranian government in the region and their efforts to control and manage the threat against the Shia community in the region.

On the one hand, Iranian formal media tried to depict the brutality of ISIS as a terrorist group and explain their potential threat to Iranians, and on the other hand, they tried to show how Iranian forces control and limit the success of ISIS and their progress in the region. Under such circumstances, Iranian leaders reported in the media that the Iraqi and Syrian armies with the help of Iranians had pushed back ISIS and defeated them in various battle fields. They gave promising news of the withdrawal of ISIS and their confinement to a small area in Syria and Iraq. For instance, Deputy Foreign Minister Amir Abdullahian stressed that ISIS no longer "poses a threat to Iran's geographical borders" (O'Reilly, 2008).

On the other hand, rumors about ISIS had a major impact on Iranian citizens and made them very worried. They caused fear among the people by seeing the horrible images of kidnapping and killing of people by ISIS. There were conspiracies among Iranian populations that ISIS had reached Iranian borders. Abdolreza Mesgarian, the commander of the Ramadan base, pointed out that ISIS had reached 30 kilometers from the borders of Kermanshah province and that Major General Soleimani deployed his forces in the Khanaqin Heights to stop the ISIS advancements (Tasnimnews, 2019). This condition caused a deep sense of insecurity among Iranians and reminded them of the memories of the invasion of Iraq to Iran. These conditions led the people to trust the government and wanted to respond to these threats.

V- Active Securitization

Iranian officials began accusing major powers of meddling in regional affairs and destabilizing the region to achieve their goals. Iranian officials accused foreign countries of supporting extremist groups and terrorists in the region to further their interests (Khamenei, 2014). The Iranian rulers interpreted the intervention of the United States and its allies as a new stage in the Syrian crisis. They believed that the United States and its allies were beginning an interventionist policy to change the government in Damascus (Ahmadian and Mohseni, 2019). National news agencies, like Mehr News, stated to report ISIS progress and blamed foreign countries who supported them and tried to increase sectarian conflict in the region. Iranian leaders claimed that the creation and expansion of ISIS is the fruit of Western policies in the region. According to Zarif the "ISIS is the product of two things; first is the US invasion of Iraq and the foreign presence that creates a dynamic of resistance. The second is the sense of imbalance that has prevailed in some countries in the region since the fall of Saddam. They are trying to change the status quo" (New York, 2014).

As Buzan and others explain, labeling helps political actors to raise the issue to the security level. Labeling security allows the agent to deal with it in an extraordinary means. In this situation, political actors enjoy the support and acceptance of the people for emergency measures against the threat (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998: 26). In their speeches, Iranian leaders emphasized ISIS as a terrorist group and how dangerous it is for our national securityespecially in the age of terrorism in the world. The Iranian leaders understood the importance of moral support of the people as a fundamental step to mobilize the people. With these rhetoric and speech acts, the government was able to satisfy the people and influence public opinion to support the use of military force. In another words, moral support completes the stages of successful securitization of ISIS inside Iran which allowed Iranian leaders to use military action against them.

Iran stated that the fall of the holy cities of Karbala, Najaf and Damascus will be Tehran's red lines and will lead to Iran's direct intervention in Iraq. General Soleimani's message to ISIS was: "if your feet reach to the holy grave of Imam Hossain in Karbala, with the permission of Imam Khamenei we will make another Karbala Battle" (McNally, 2015: 181). Iran's official declaration about the importance of these cities and its policy toward the protection of them showed Iranian leaders' seriousness that their response would be crucial and drastic. According to General Bagheri, Chief of General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, "Baghdad, the holy shrines and the shrine of the Shiite Imams are certainly all of the red lines of the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic will take direct action [if they are attacked]" (World Net Daily, 2014).

The Role of Social Media on Public Opinion: In Buzan's thought, the media has an essential role in convincing the audiences as the reference subject. Media has an essential role and functional ability that helps the Iranian government in the process of securitization of ISIS by showing effective news against this security threat. In this situation, security services provide intelligence information for media to guide public opinion and affect their decision (O'Reilly, 2008).

Iranian leaders use the speech act as an important tool to present the threat to the audiences. In this situation, the role of journals and other media are very important regarding how they framed and present the issue to audiences. The Iranian government used media in convincing the Iranian people based on the concept of perception, framing, and understanding of the power of the media to affect public opinion (O'Reilly, 2008).

In the beginning, Iran's strategy was to have minimum interference and an invisible role on the ground andfor this reason, Iran provided logistical and military support to these countries and provided them security advice. In such circumstances, Iranian leaders denied any direct involvement in these countries. President Rouhani announced that "Iran has never dispatched any forces to Iraq or Syria and it is very unlikely it will ever happen." When

ISIS progress accelerated, Iran became worried about its expansion and changed its policy from "leading from behind" to involve directly fighting against the ISIS. Iran decided to send security advisers to Iraq and Syria and helped their governments and armies with intelligence under the leadership of General Soleimani.The IRGC Commander-in-Chief Jafari stressed: "We have already announced that we have special forces to transfer experience and training in Syria who work as advisers, and this is a public issue" (Gulmohamad, 2104, 5) which formally shows that the Iranian government directly involves to the war in the region. In 2012 Iran decided to send aids to Syria and Iraq to provide more supports for the governments of these countries (Esfandiary, & Tabatabai, 2015, 8). Major General Soleimani, with the help of significant elites close to Iran, such as Hadi al-Amiri, al-Khazali, al-Mohandis, and other militant leaders, took the lead in equipping Iraqi forces against ISIS. Following the fatwa of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani who called for the creation of people's army to defeat ISIS, the Hashd al-shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces), a cohesive militant organization, was established (Ostovar, 2019). Under these circumstances, the cooperation of the Iraqi and Syrian elites with Iran and the effective fatwa of Shiite authority (the Marjaiat) led to the mobilization of the people to fight ISIS.

The Relation between Actors and Audiences: To protect Iraq and Syria's territorial integrity, Iran decided to support non-state actors and deliver political, military, economic, and humanitarian aid to these countries. Iranian leaders supported Hezbollah fighters who directly sided with Damascus in combat in 2012 and provided significant support for Assad which helped him to make advances on the opposition side (Aljazeera, 2014). General Ali Fadavi, the deputy commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary Guards, said that according to an official report from the Planning and Budget Organization, Iran spent about $ 19.6 billion during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq war. While from the beginning of Iran's involvement in the Syrian-Iraqi conflict with ISIS until today, the cost has been much lower than

the Iran-Iraq war (Tasnimnews, 2020). Moreover, Shahidi the director of the Foundation of Martyrs said to Iranian media that at least 2100 Iranian fighters were martyred in Syria and Iraq (Mehrnews, 2016). Amir Abdollahian, Iranian deputy foreign minister in 2014 explained the causes of Iranian support: "We are not seeking to have Assad remain president for life,but we do not accept the idea of using extremist forces and terrorism to topple Assad and the Syrian government" (The Daily Star, 2014). Iranian government sends technological and financial supports to Syria to help Assad for controlling civil war, fight against ISIS, and resist the US and Israel's role in the region. Iranian leaders explained that ISIS was founded by some organizations that were supported by Arab countries and Israel in their fight against Iran (McNally, 2015). Iran's move to protect its borders was a direct fight against ISIS outside its borders. Ayatollah Khamenei said about the fight against ISIS, "If they had not fought terrorism and Takfirism in Syria, we would have fought them here in Tehran" (Tasnimnews, 2015). On the one hand, this strategy of Iran caused the war against ISIS outside the borders to reduce the cost of confronting them inside. On the other hand, it shows the ability and power of Iran throughout the Middle East. In fact, by keeping its security safe from terrorist attacks, Iran demonstrated its effective terrorism policy and its deterrent power against threats. At the same time, Iran, by using its soft power at home began to mobilize forces to confront ISIS (Malakoutikhah, 2020). For instance, Mashreq News, a site closes to Iranian conservatives, reported the story on anti-Iranian and anti-Shiite tweets from ISIS: "Let it be known to the heretics that our goal is the total destruction of the tainted Shia shrines in Najaf, Karbala, and Samarra." The ISIS threatened Iranians that "after we leveled these sites, our next target is Iran, where we will flatten Mashhad cleanly to the ground." A reporter from Press TV in 2014 specified that Saudi Arabia and Qatar were sending weapons to ISIS and other extremist militants to fights against the Syrian government. With these successful uses of media to mobilize the people against ISIS,

many Iranian wanted to join to Iranian military to fight against ISIS. For example, there were websites for registering volunteers to be sent to Iraq and Syria (Mashregh News, 2013).

As you see there is an important link between public opinion and policymakers. The audience's reactions to the securitization issue affect the political policy of the country. The war against ISIS required moral support of the citizens, and the media could help create this moral agreement (O'Reilly, 2008) and the audience could use their experiences to calculate the validity and importance of the claims, and these experiences were usually shared by other members of the public sphere.

Securitization Results on Public Opinion: In this situation, they mobilized the people for a counter-attack and sent them to Syria and Iraq to fight against ISIS which is related to another step-in securitization theory. From 2011 Iranian leaders sought to persuade their audiences that ISIS is a real threat and military action against them is mandatory. The Center for Iranian and Security Studies at the University of Maryland is investigating how Iranian think about ISIS and the Iranian government's response to this terrorist group in the region. Most Iranians accept state's narrative to involve in Syria and Iraq and they support fighting ISIS directly and stabilizing Iran's influence in the region.

Moreover, most Iranians approve of supporting Shiite and Kurdish militia groups and Iran's allies to fight ISIS in the region. According to this poll, 98% of Iranian have a very unfavorable opinion of ISIS and they follow (79%) news about the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. 80% of people accept the direct role of the Iranian military in Syria and Iraq and they (63%) support sending military troops to help the governments in their fighting with ISIS to protect Iranian security and interests in the region. 88% support Iran for helping Kurdish groups to fight against ISIS and 72% support Iran to help Hezbollah, 66% approve of helping Bashar Assad to fight against ISIS. According to the poll, 89% support the idea of protecting Shiite cities and 87% support Iran to fight against ISIS. Moreover, 84% support Iran's decision because it

led to a decrease in Saudi's influence in the region and 77% approve because it decreases the US and Israeli policies in the region (Mohseni et al., 2016).

Iranians have a positive view of their country's allies and 75% have a favorable view of Syria, 74% have a favorable opinion of Hezbollah. On the other hand, people have a negative view of Saudi Arabia (79%) and 58% have a negative opinion of Turkey (Mohseni et al., 2016). These polls showed how public opinion thought about the nature of the ISIS danger and how audiences were concerned with ISIS as an existential threat. This evidence reflected the public opinion and the trend of securitization inside Iran. To put it Concisely, the Islamic Republic of Iran was certainly successful in securitizing ISIS through convincing the Iranian audience. It was a major achievement in the middle of all regional and international pressure against Revolutionary Iran.

Conclusion

Iran is geographically the only Shiite state confined with an Arab and Sunni regions. This confinement has made the governments in Iran more sensitive to the issue of security and protection of national interests. Throughout history, Iranians have realized that they cannot rely on their neighbors, as well as great powers for protecting their security and national interests. For this reason, the defense of national security and territorial integrity has been the most important concern of the governments in Iran. Iranian leaders have concluded that one way to maintain national security and interests is to use defense strategies outside Iran's borders.

For this reason, the Islamic Republic of Iran, by adopting a defense policy outside its territorial borders, has been able to control regional and international threats. The Iranian government has been able to control and manage regional crises and territorial threats through non-state actors. However, the problem was how the government could communicate the seriousness of this danger to its people and how it would mobilize them to defend the country. The government needed the approval and support of its

citizens for a military presence in Syria and Iraq and the war against ISIS.

In this paper, I utilized the securitization theory to explain how the Iranian government succeeded in securitizing ISIS. I analyzed some of the Iranian leaders' speeches since the words deployed therein constitute a "speech act". However, the securitizer's discourse about the existential threat is not enough if not accompanied by the audience's acceptance of this threat. A careful study of the securitization comments made by the Iranian government explains the arrangements of identification and its relations with Iran policy. In this paper, I focused on the public argument conveyed by the supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei and the state's political leaders directly to the public through the media. My intention here is to concentrate on the trend of securitization of ISIS in Iranian society and how the government pushes this potential threat to the realm of existential threat. I considered the level of identification during the process of securitization and how it led to mobilizing citizens for supporting the government to use effective violence against their enemy.

The rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq and their claim for establishing the Islamic government in the region produced a level of insecurity among people and at the same time, it intensified the sense of patriotism, sensitivity, and public outrage in Iranian society. In this situation, the media has an essential role in directing the audience to accept the government's arguments for military action in Iraq and Syria against ISIS. Highlighting the religious and nationalist threat allows the government to easily secure national security issues. The Iranian state used media successfully in contributing to this situation for perceiving an existential threat by citizens and creates successful securitization. In this case, Iranian leaders largely succeed in its securitization in most audiences, Many Iranians supported the intervention as a necessary measure because ISIS was an existential threat. In short, the Iranian government was thus successful in securitizing Syrian opposition in its discourse and speeches among its citizens.

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