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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Political audience and non-linear securitisation: Revisiting Israel–Iran relations and the making of the 1979 Islamic Revolution

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Abstract
The 1979 Islamic Revolution was a tectonic change that influenced the geopolitics of the Middle East to this day. This article highlights the necessity of re-examining the events of 1979 from a securitisation perspective. Through an investigation of Ayatollah Khomeini's pivotal role, I challenge the methodological nationalism often found in the study of Israel–Iran relations. Despite his unconventional position in security matters, Khomeini played a crucial role in the securitisation of the 1979 revolution. Drawing on Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives, secondary sources, elite interviews, and Khomeini's theological speeches, this article re-examines the intricate stages of securitisation and counter-securitisation spanning 16 years. Khomeini effectively mobilized the political audience (Iranian people) to support the revolution, aiming to overthrow the Shah and remove Israel's presence from Iran. I argue that a non-linear securitisation process was employed, characterised by Khomeini's ability to establish informal authority among the opposition. This process ultimately led to him gaining legitimacy from the Iranian people and culminated in the successful securitisation act of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Keywords: 1979 Islamic Revolution; assemblage; Khomeini; methodological nationalism; non-linear securitisation; Shah

Introduction

The date is 22 October 1976. We are at the Shah's palace in Tehran. Mike Wallace, an American Jewish journalist, is interviewing the Shah of Iran, Mohammed Riza Pahlevl, for the renowned American television news magazine *60 Minutes*, broadcast on the CBS network. In one of the most insightful quotes of the interview, Wallace notes:

> Surely, your Majesty, you're not telling me that the Jewish lobby in the United States pulls the strings of the presidency?
>
> *Shah*: … They have many means at their disposal. They are putting pressure on many, many people. And at the end, I don't think that it will even help Israel.
>
> *Wallace*: Why, if this is true, why would the President of the United States pay attention to that lobby?

Shah: They are strong.[1]

This article shows that these statements in fact reflect an in-depth and long-lasting securitisation process employed by both the Shah and his rival, Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, spanning the period from 1963 to 1979. In essence, the Shah's words above were a desperate attempt to 'detach' himself from his Western allies and gain legitimacy from the political audience (the Iranian people) again, as he was, at that point, starting to lose his power and grip over Iran. However, this proved to be too little, too late. What was depicted as a 'security problem' was employed even more effectively by Khomeini as a means of garnering the support of the political audience prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, so as to overthrow the Shah and force Israel to withdraw from Iran.

From a theoretical perspective, this article builds on previous work that has challenged the basic assumptions of the securitisation framework developed by the Copenhagen School (CS), namely that it is unsuited to empirical studies outside the West.[2] Three notable criticisms have been made against the CS's assumptions, initially by the Paris School (PS) and subsequently by different scholars of critical security studies, including Mark B. Salter, Juha A. Vuori, Thierry Balzacq and Bigo Didier, Holger Stritzel, and Claire Wilkinson, among others. The criticism was centred on the following: (1) the sole focus on speech acts, as in the CS framework, is too narrow to provide a full understanding of security practices;[3] (2) the Euro-American-centric focus of the CS and the '"democratic bias" of the theory', also renders the framework too narrow;[4] and (3) the CS framework does not allow for the concept of non-linear securitisation processes.[5] With her case study of the overthrow of the government in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005, Claire Wilkinson, for example, has shown the applicability of normative concepts such as 'security', 'society', and 'identity' outside Euro-American contexts and thus contested the issue of institutionalised Eurocentrism. Wilkinson's case study challenged the notion that such a situation is, by default, cast in Western terms and that processes of securitisation are edited into a 'linear and simplified version of events owing to the emphasis on outcome – that is, a successful securitization'.[6]

[1]Mike Wallace, interview with the Shah of Iran, Mohammed Riza Pahlevl, *60 Minutes*, CBS. 'The Shah on Israel, Corruption Torture and …', *New York Times* (22 October 1976), available at: {https://www.nytimes.com/1976/10/22/archives/the-shah-on-israel-corruption-torture-and.html}.

[2]See, e.g., Stephane J. Baele and Diana Jalea, 'Twenty-five years of securitization theory: A corpus-based review', *Political Studies Review* 21:2 (2023), pp. 376–89.

[3]What was known as the Paris School focuses on the work of scholars such as Thierry Balzacq and Bigo Didier – who initially argued that the CS focus solely on speech acts was too narrow to provide a full understanding of security practices – and that of political sociologists in the context of critical security studies, which the PS argues should also be incorporated into the theory. See, e.g., among many others, Thierry Balzacq, 'The three faces of securitization: Political agency, audience and context', *European Journal of International Relations*, 11:2 (2005), pp. 171–201; Didier Bigo, 'Security and immigration: Toward a critique of the governmentality of unease', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 27:1 (2002), pp. 63–92; and Holger Stritzel, 'Towards a theory of securitization: Copenhagen and beyond', *European Journal of International Relations*, 13:3 (2007), pp. 357–83.

[4]On this, see the discussion in Juha A. Vuori, 'Illocutionary logic and strands of securitization: Applying the theory of securitization to the study of non-democratic political orders', *European Journal of International Relations*, 14:1 (2008), pp. 65–99 (p. 66); and Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen, 'Revolutionary securitization: An anthropological extension of securitization theory', *International Theory*, 4:2 (2012), pp. 165–97 (p. 172).

[5]See, e.g., Claire Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen School on tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is securitization theory useable outside Europe?', *Security Dialogue*, 38:1 (2007), pp. 5–25; Holbraad and Pedersen, 'Revolutionary securitization'; Mark B. Salter, 'Securitization and desecuritization: A dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 11:4 (2008), pp. 321–49; Uriel Abulof, 'Deep securitization and Israel's "demographic demon"', *International Political Sociology*, 8:4 (2014), pp. 396–415 (especially, pp. 402–3); Holbraad and Pedersen, 'Revolutionary securitization'; Sarah Léonard and Christian Kaunert, 'Reconceptualizing the audience in securitization theory', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 57–76.

[6]Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen School', p. 8.

Building on these works but, in this case, exploring the (non-Western) Middle Eastern context, this article demonstrates that the 1979 Islamic Revolution – a tectonic change that influences the geopolitics of the region to this day (2023) – needs examining from a securitisation perspective. The article seeks to fill a gap in the literature by showing how both the Shah and Khomeini, in turn, subscribed to the notion that Jews in the United States and Israel possessed a 'magical power' over politics and policy in Washington and how they both framed and narrated this as harmful to Iranian national interests. There are two main pillars to my argument. First, I make a theoretical argument that, in the case of Iran, the non-linear process of securitisation involved Khomeini building informal authority among the opposition. Stemming from his ability to gain legitimacy from the political audience (the Iranian people), this resulted in a successful securitisation act – the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Secondly, I make a methodological argument that historical case studies of 'revolutionary securitization'[7] moves can be assembled and traced using archival records, intelligence reports and elite interviews pertaining to the security threat, media interviews, secondary literature, and theological speeches by the main security actor, Khomeini.[8] In my second argument, I suggest that the methodological and epistemological approach to securitisation taken in historical case studies stems from the need to challenge the common position adopted by social scientists, among them security scholars (both traditional and critical),[9] as well as historians, who may misrepresent the past because of their bias toward methodological nationalism.[10] Methodological nationalism bias refers to 'research carried out under the premise that national identification is a fundamental aspect of human nature'.[11] Such scholarship, especially the works of Cold War historians, typically involves detailed archival analysis of official documentation from governmental institutions, with a focus on formal institutions and governmental state elites.[12]

In the context of this article, methodological nationalism refers to the conventional security and diplomatic perspective[13] applied by scholars conducting archival research to study various

[7]On the term 'revolutionary securitization', see the pioneering work by Holbraad and Pedersen, who articulate this as 'systematically oriented towards rescinding precisely the liberal premise on which the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary politics – and the securitization model of the Copenhagen School – relies, namely the distinction between people "themselves" and the external political structures by which they are governed'. Holbraad and Pedersen, 'Revolutionary securitization', p. 167.

[8]For recently declassified records of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, available at: {https://catalog.archives.gov.il/chapter/rise-of-khomeini/}.

[9]Social scientists' 'methodological nationalism' bias recently influenced debates and the critical turn in security studies. See, e.g., Fiona B. Adamson, 'Spaces of global security: Beyond methodological nationalism', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 1:1 (2016), pp. 19–35. Adamson argues that 'much of the scholarship in security studies has viewed "security" as being largely about the policies and practice of one "unit" or "actor" responding to threats or violence from another "unit" or "actor"'. These actors and units are nation-states. See also Iver Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[10]The debate about the bias of 'methodological nationalism' is rooted in a different social science discipline. Nevertheless, the field of historical studies has also been impacted by it recently. See, e.g., George Vasilev, 'Methodological nationalism and the politics of history-writing: how imaginary scholarship perpetuates the nation', *Nations and Nationalism*, 25:2 (2019), pp. 499–522. The term 'historiographical nationalism' is also important here. It refers to scholars that drew a close connection between states and nationalist movements. See Stefan Berger and Christoph Conrad, *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[11]Vasilev, 'Methodological nationalism', p. 501.

[12]Vasilev also suggests four narrative practices typical of methodologically nationalist histories: concept overstretch; selection bias; the misrepresentation of governing bodies; and the conflation of culture with identity. See Vasilev, 'Methodological nationalism', p. 500.

[13]Taking a closer look at the mainstream Zionist narrative of Israel's foreign policy through the lens of methodological nationalism that underlines the Arab–Israeli conflict, see, e.g., among many others: Benyamin Neuberger (ed.), *Statecraft in the Dark: Israel's Practice of Quiet Diplomacy* (Jerusalem: Westview Press, 1988); and Benyamin Neuberger (ed.), *War and Peace Making: Selected Issues in Israel's Foreign Policy* (Ramat-Aviv: Open University, 1992); Moshe Yeger, Yosef Govrin, and Arye Oded (eds), *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the First Fifty Years* (Jerusalem: Keter Press, 2002 [Hebrew]); and Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

episodes of Israel–Iran relations.[14] The work of scholars such as Uri Bialer, Yitzhak Mualem, Uri Bar-Joseph,[15] and David Menashri, among others, primarily focused on the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, i.e. the period before the Islamic Revolution, relied on official Israeli documentation, and considered governmental institutions the primary units of analysis. As a result of methodological nationalism bias, the aforementioned scholars narrowed their work to Israeli archival records in order to present an oversimplified binary view, instead of engaging in deeper methodological probing. However, I challenge this bias which neglected Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini – who despite his non-traditional role in security matters, plays a pivotal role.[16]

I proceed as follows: the first part of the article outlines how the securitisation framework developed by the CS is not suited to being critically applied to the Middle Eastern, non-democratic/liberal Cold War state. This part looks at the criticism made by the PS regarding the missing aspects of the CS framework; namely, the importance of security moves being accepted by different audiences. A short methodological discussion then offers critical insights into how to apply PS securitisation dynamics to historical case studies and how methodological nationalism bias prevented non-traditional security actors such as Khomeini from being adequately taken into consideration. This part of the article ends with a very short historical summary aimed at situating the argument presented in this article in a broader scholarly context of Israel–Iran relations. The second part of the article then focuses on the empirical and secondary sources, tracing six phases of non-linear securitisation dynamics that existed between the Shah and his successor, Khomeini, for more than 16 years (1963–79), culminating in the Iranian Islamic Revolution.

Part I

The theoretical framework: Contextualising the role of 'audience acceptance' in successful securitisation up until the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution

The basic assumptions of the CS and the securitisation framework that was initially developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde were intended to serve as a constructivist and critical approach to the study of security.[17] The theory was developed in the post–Cold War period in an attempt to reframe the concept of security that underpinned not only military security, but also political, societal, economic, and environmental security, and was posited as a valuable lens to understand security threats. Securitisation theory (ST) was a genuine attempt to introduce a new framework to challenge the perception of Cold War threats as objectively 'real'. Initially, the CS suggested three fundamental components to securitisation theory: (1) the referent object: what is seen as existentially threatened and therefore as having a legitimate claim to survive; (2) the securitising actor: an actor that securitises issues by declaring something (a referent object) existentially threatened; and (3) the audience: the target that must be persuaded that the referent object is existentially

[14]The following works emphasise the 'realist paradigm' and the mainstream Zionist narrative of Israel–Iran relations: Uri Bialer, *Oil and the Arab–Israeli Conflict, 1948–63* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990); 'Fuel bridge across the Middle East – Israel, Iran, and the Eilat–Ashkelon oil pipeline', *Israel Studies*, 12:3 (2007), pp. 29–67; David Menashri, 'Iran, Israel and the Middle East conflict', *Israel Affairs*, 12:1 (2006), pp. 107–22.

[15]Uri Bar-Joseph's work is also part of this literature, seen through the lens of official documentation from governmental institutions. However, his work differs in two aspects: firstly, it focuses on Khomeini and Israel–Iran relations before the Islamic Revolution (1977–9). Secondly, it delves into the relationship between culture and intelligence. 'Forecasting a hurricane: Israeli and American estimations of the Khomeini revolution', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 36:5 (2013), pp. 718–42.

[16]Other scholars who work on Israeli Iran relations and rely on archival research include, e.g., Hulda Kjeang Mørk, Hilde Henriksen Waage, Neta Feniger, and Rachel Kallus. See also Hulda Kjeang Mørk and Hilde Henriksen Waage, 'Ties that bind: The entangled relations among Israel, Iran, and the United States, 1963–1967', *The International History Review*, 45:3 (2023), pp. 572–89; Neta Feniger and Rachel Kallus, 'Israeli planning in the Shah's Iran: A forgotten episode', *Planning Perspectives*, 30:2 (2015), pp. 231–51.

[17]See the seminal work by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998); Ole Wæver, 'Securitization and desecuritization', in R. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 46–86.

threatened.[18] From a conceptual perspective, the scholarly debate on ST is extremely extensive and sophisticated. This section will therefore seek only to briefly unpack those aspects of the theory that are of use for analysing the case study at hand.

The initial concept put forward by the CS was challenged by scholars for different reasons, and building on their important work will help to develop the argument of this article. Scholars such as Claire Wilkinson, Jef Huysmans, Uriel Abulof, Matt McDonald, Barry Buzan, and Richard Little highlighted the normative aspects of the CS securitisation theory.[19] Buzan and Little, for example, described it as 'IR's "Westphalian straitjacket" … the strong tendency to assume that the model established in seventeenth century Europe should define what the international system is for all times and places'.[20] Quite clearly, though, European understandings of society cannot be applied to Iran and the Middle East during the Cold War, and thus the latter cannot be considered in the context of Euro-American normative values. In fact, as the second part of this article will show, this point is closely related to the core reasons that prompted Khomeini to highlight the Shah's Western reforms and the imperial influence of the Americans in Iran as an existential threat that needed to be securitised. Importantly, the main caveat of what we might call the empirical applications of the central concepts of CS is that in countries or regions, such as Kyrgyzstan, that are beyond the 'Westphalian straitjacket', non-linear and non-simplified versions of events are needed in order to understand the realities of securitisation processes. In their initial work on audience acceptance,[21] Paul Roe and Nicole Jackson, and more recently Uriel Abulof, have clearly conceptualised this: 'securitization [as the core concept of CS] seems to entail a chain reaction of three distinct, binary steps in linear sequence: a securitizing train leaves the rhetorical platform, picks up a sufficient audience along the way to its final, extraordinary, destination'.[22]

According to the CS, an issue is successfully securitised when an audience agrees with the securitising actor's claim that the issue at hand represents an existential threat to the referent object, or at the very least the audience is indifferent to this claim, and thus supports the securitising actor's suggestion of using extraordinary measures to confront the threat.[23] In this way, audience acceptance is marginalised at the expense of the security speech act, which the CS emphasises. Matt McDonald, for example, argued that relying exclusively on language to demonstrate a successful securitisation process is problematic, as contextual factors, such as dominant narratives and identity, play an important role in both patterns of securitisation and the construction of security as a whole.[24] Abulof also notes that 'securitization steps are not binary, but span a spectrum. This applies, as discussed above, to the securitizing move, but equally so to audience acceptance'.[25] Abulof's and McDonald's criticism focuses on the non-binary securitisation steps and non-linear sequences evident in case studies located outside of the 'Westphalian straitjacket'. Indeed, these elements are essential to understanding revolutionary and securitisation dynamics. However, it is important to recognise that, when it comes to the dynamics of 'audience acceptance' in securitisation processes, there are differences between the 'Westphalian straitjacket' context and the Middle East.

[18] Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*.

[19] See, for example David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen School'.

[20] See Barry Buzan and Richard Little, 'Why International Relations has failed as an intellectual project and what to do about it', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 30:1 (2001), pp. 19–39 (pp. 19–25).

[21] Nicole Jeckson, 'International organizations, security dichotomies and the trafficking of persons and narcotics in Post-Soviet Central Asia: A critique of the securitization framework', *Security Dialogue*, 37:3 (2006), pp. 299–318; Paul Roe, 'Actor, audience(s) and emergency measures: Securitization and the UK's decision to invade Iraq', *Security Dialogue*, 39:6 (2008), pp. 615–35.

[22] Abulof, 'Deep securitization', p. 402.

[23] Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 25.

[24] For an excellent discussion of this see Matt McDonald, 'Securitization and the construction of security', *European Journal of International Relations*, 14:4 (2008), pp. 563–87 (specifically, pp. 564–5).

[25] Abulof, 'Deep securitization', p. 402.

To ensure this is borne in mind, the analytical framework I developed for this study involved refining and adjusting some fundamental components of securitisation theory, particularly by incorporating non-linear securitisation moves and the concept of 'assemblage'.[26] The framework refers to intricate networks that are constantly evolving, being assembled, disassembled, and reassembled in various contexts, serving multiple purposes. These networks exhibit a dynamic nature, lack stability, and are always in a state of flux.[27] Amir Lupovici describes this as 'a continuous process contributing to the creation of the assemblage'. He also suggests that 'the interactions among various securitizing moves affect deterrence adoption, employment, and success. Foremost, each of the securitizing moves should be understood not as a single act, but rather as a part of a continuous process contributing to the creation of the assemblage.'[28] Furthermore, in his complex securitisation and counter-securitisation efforts, Khomeini's ability to depict the Shah's regime as spanning six stages and 16 years highlights the importance of gaining legitimacy. This background sets the stage for examining the role of 'audience acceptance' in the successful securitisation of non-democratic/liberal states during the Cold War. To explore this line of inquiry further, I delve into the typology of securitisation and consider the crucial roles played by the 'legal audience' and the 'political audience' as sources of legitimacy. The legal audience typically refers to state rules and institutions. Accordingly, securitising actors, such as governments, security communities, and state elites (e.g. prime ministers) can garner support for executing a securitisation act based on state laws.[29] It is important to note that these state institutions and laws vary across different states, regions, and types of regimes, particularly in non-European/Western contexts such as the Middle East.

The political audience refers to other sources of legitimacy for the execution of a securitisation act. In some case studies, especially in revolutionary contexts such as the one that is the focus of this article, the securitising actor needs to gain support from the general public, or political audience.[30] In this context, in his earlier work on audience acceptance, Paul Roe refers to the political audience as 'hold[ing] "moral" support concerning the "securityness" of an issue".[31] Importantly, Roe also refines the term political audience, suggesting that securitisation be seen as a distinct two-stage process: a 'stage of identification' and a 'stage of mobilisation'. Roe defines the stage of identification as rhetorical securitisation, and the stage of mobilisation as active securitisation.[32] This understanding is useful for tracing Khomeini's securitisation process from 1963 to the 1979 revolution. Hence, in a non-Western context, specifically in revolutionary and politically charged periods, tensions rise around the possibility of regime change, and the political audience has the potential to influence the success of a national security policy.

The moral dimension of the political audience encourages acceptance of the alternative reality promised by Khomeini, lending it legitimacy, as he was able to portray the Shah as immoral and as cooperating with American imperialism and Zionism. However, there are exceptions to this, as foreign governments can also serve as a political audience for another country. According to Ori Wertman and Christian Kaunert, Israel's securitisation moves were aimed at consecutive American

[26]See Amir Lupovici's and Eric Van Rythoven's works, e.g. Amir Lupovici, 'Toward a securitization theory of deterrence', *International Studies Quarterly*, 63:1 (2019), pp. 177–86; Eric Van Rythoven, 'The securitization dilemma', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 5:3 (2020), pp. 478–93.

[27]For an excellent discussion about assemblage, see Florian J. Egloff and Myriam Dunn Cavelty, 'Attribution and knowledge creation assemblages in cybersecurity politics', *Journal of Cybersecurity*, 7:1 (2021), pp. 1–12. (p. 2), available at: {https://doi.org/10.1093/cybsec/tyab002}.

[28]Lupovici, 'Toward a securitization', p. 180.

[29]Ori Wertman and Christian Kaunert, 'The audience in securitization theory', *Strategic Assessment – A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security*, 25:3 (2022), pp. 67–81 (pp. 73–4). Also see Balzacq, 'The three faces of securitization'.

[30]Wertman and Kaunert, 'The audience', pp. 74–5. Also see earlier works on the role of political audience acceptance, including Mark B. Salter, 'When securitization fails: The hard case of counter-terrorism programs', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 116–32.

[31]Roe, 'Actor, audience(s) and emergency measures', p. 615.

[32]Ibid., p. 622.

administrations as the political audience. As one of their case studies demonstrates, the Israeli cabinet sought approval from the Americans before proposing an attack on the Egyptian army. However, the Johnson administration opposed Israeli military action, leading the Israeli cabinet to postpone their plans.[33] This is a useful theoretical observation: Turkey, Iraq, and France also play crucial roles in the Shah's securitisation policy. The acceptance of these governments as the political audience for the counter-securitisation moves against Khomeini resulted in his exile from Iran between 1964 and 1978.

The issue of external governments serving as the political audience is important in the context of the audience acceptance sub-debate among critics of the CS's initial foundations. It has also been a key component of the recent attempts to further develop the securitisation framework. This sub-debate comprises critical assessment by scholars such as Balzacq, Salter, Leonard and Kaunert, and Cote, among others.[34] In the works of these authors, some of the alternative models proposed introduce a vague concept of 'the audience' but do not provide a concrete analytical tool with which scholars can identify a specific 'securitisation actor'. In his early work (2005), Balzacq initiated a debate about the need to take into account the 'social' aspects of securitising moves (e.g. practices and the audience dimension). Balzacq argued that 'securitization is better understood as a strategic (pragmatic) practice that occurs within, and as part of, a configuration of circumstances, including the context, the psycho-cultural disposition of the audience, and the power that both speaker and listener bring to the interaction'.[35] The focus on the relationship between the security actor and the listener was also a feature of recent work by Wertman and Kaunert, who argued that given that 'each securitizing actor has its own personality, previous experiences, or ideology, and thus each has its own political perception, the securitizing actor perceives the support of a different entity besides the legal audience as essential legitimacy for securitization'.[36]

Therefore, the critical observations made by Balzacq, but also by Wertman and Kaunert and others mentioned above, take us beyond the CS and the 'Westphalian straitjacket' and place us at a theoretical departure point for charting and assembling the securitisation trajectory of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Specifically, we can contextualise the strategic and, more importantly, pragmatic relations of both the Shah and Khomeini with their chosen audiences/listeners. This was a parallel process, which, quite strikingly, was a zero-sum securitisation game. From 1963, Khomeini focused on securitising the Shah's corrupt, pro-Western regime, which included Israel, Zionism, and the aforementioned American Jewish 'magical power'. As Khomeini was operating from the opposition with no official or formal legitimacy for his securitisation moves, he was well aware that Iranian public acceptance was key to the success of his actions. Moreover, not only did Khomeini convince his audience/listeners about the need for security action, but his political audience was stronger and ultimately more influential than the legal audience controlled by the Shah and served as the source of his legitimacy for successful securitisation moves. As the second part of this article will show, over time, the zero-sum securitisation game also included the counter-securitisation moves made by the Shah, who targeted the legal audience, i.e. his personal secret security services SAVAK (Persian: *Sāzmān-e Ettelā'āt va Amniyat-e Keshvar*, or the Iranian secret police) and the Iranian police, inciting them to act against Khomeini.

Last but not least, in the revolutionary context, both Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen have emphasised the 'conceptual creativity' of applying the CS framework to revolutionary politics in Cuba. They argue that '"revolutionary securitization", as we call it, is systematically oriented towards rescinding precisely the liberal premise on which the distinction between ordinary and

[33]See Ori Wertman and Christian Kaunert, *Israel: National Security and Securitization of the Role of the United States in Defining What Counts* (Cham: Springer, 2023), pp. 31–43.

[34]See Balzacq, 'The three faces securitization'; Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory*; Léonard and Kaunert, 'Reconceptualizing the audience'; Adam Côté, 'Agents without agency: Assessing the role of the audience in securitization theory', *Security Dialogue*, 47:6 (2016), pp. 541–58.

[35]Balzacq, 'The three faces of securitization', p. 172.

[36]Wertman and Kaunert, 'The audience in securitization theory', p. 10.

extraordinary politics – and the securitization model of the Copenhagen School – relies, namely the distinction between people "themselves" and the external political structures by which they are governed'.[37] Part of the process of creating the distinctions that Holbraad and Pedersen refer to is establishing the legitimacy of opposition leaders and the unofficial state elite. Ori Wertman and Christian Kaunert recently proposed that in some countries, the religious elite can also influence security matters where they have the appropriate authority/legitimacy.[38] Khomeini in pre-revolutionary Iran fits this description well, as the empirical evidence will show. As early as 1963, Khomeini – a member of the religious elite who did not even have a formal role in the Iranian political opposition – articulated how the referent object, in this case the Shah and his supporters, American imperialism, Israel, Zionism, and the supposed magical power of the Jews, were threats to Iran's national security. The Shah, meanwhile, reacted quickly to Khomeini's speech act with a counter-securitisation move challenging Khomeini's security framing and employing his own narrative identifying Khomeini as the security object.

'Methodological nationalism' and the epistemology of securitisation: Archival research, intelligence reports, and elite interviews in the service of critical security studies

David Campbell noted that 'for many, the dangers of the past are a thing of the past'.[39] But can one really draw an artificial boundary between the past and the present or vice versa? Specifically, I seek to understand whether it is feasible to examine problems and complex concepts such as securitisation in the context of the post–Cold War era? Sources of external threat such as migration, pandemics, and global terrorism have been extensively studied and conceptualised in this period.[40] However, while most of these so-called security issues did not emerge until the early 1990s, they were in fact deeply embedded in the final two decades of the Cold War. As noted by Ken Booth, during the Cold War, the 'primary concerns were (military) strategic relations between states. Pedagogy was equally conservative in approach, working for the most part in the straitjacket of a compelling but constrained understanding of realism.' That said, Booth also stressed that 'there is less new in the post–Cold War phase than many imagine, and there is more to be learned from the Cold War phase than many assume'.[41]

Methodological nationalism has contributed to the neglect of these historical connections and the role of non-traditional actors that can be found in official archival records. This has meant that the role of Khomeini in challenging traditional security paradigms and the relationship between Israel and Iran has been frequently overlooked.[42] A key example of methodological nationalism in this historiography is the work of Israeli historian Uri Bialer, who conducted an in-depth examination of Israel–Iran oil relations, focusing on the Eilat–Ashkelon pipeline project and Israel's energy security policies from 1957 to 1977.[43] Bialer's important research primarily explored the interactions between governmental bodies such as the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). He shed vital light on key governmental figures such as Zvi Doriel, the envoy responsible for oil affairs in Tehran, and his counterpart Fatollah Nafici, one of the heads of the NIOC, and the relationships between the Shah and his Israeli counterparts,

[37]Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen, 'Revolutionary securitization', p. 167, available at: {https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-theory/article/abs/revolutionary-securitization-an-anthropological-extension-of-securitization-theory/4BEEBFDBD34816889510C13C5EF736F9}.

[38]Baele and Jalea, 'Twenty-five years of securitization theory', p. 4.

[39]Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 7.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ken Booth, 'Foreword', in Laura J. Shepherd (ed.), *Critical Approaches to Security: An Introduction to Theories and Methods* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. xv.

[42]With one exception to this literature: Bar-Joseph's 'Forecasting a hurricane'.

[43]Among others, see Uri Bialer, *Oil and the Arab–Israeli Conflict, 1948–1963* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); 'The power of the weak: Israel's secret oil diplomacy, 1948–57', in Clive Jones and Tore T. Petersen (eds), *Israel's Clandestine Diplomacies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 67–84; and *Israeli Foreign Policy: A People Shall Not Dwell Alone* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), pp. 109–36; 'Fuel bridge', pp. 29–67.

Levi Eshkol and Golda Meir, or the Israeli Foreign Minister, Abba Eban.[44] Bialer's work, which relies on official documentation from the Israeli MFA and American and British state archives, has traditionally focused on state institutions, the top-down formal decision-making process, and the official state elite.[45] Influenced by methodological nationalism, he also included transnational Zionist actors such as the Jewish philanthropist Baron Edmond de Rothschild and his relationship with Israeli Minister of Finance Pinhas Sapir in the context of Israel–Iran oil relations.[46] However, the perspective of the Iranian opposition on this project, namely the significant role of Khomeini's critique of imperialism, Zionism, and Israel's presence in Iran, or other sources of opposition to the Shah regime, was largely neglected in Bialer's study of Israel–Iran oil relations and, indeed, was systematically overlooked throughout this period.

Similarly, the work of Yitzhak Mualem on Israel–Iran relations in the 1970s also suffered from methodological nationalism bias. By applying a binary zero-sum game to Zionist historiography, Mualem argued that the majority of Iranian Jews who were supporters of the Shah and his policies suddenly faced hostility from the proponents of the Islamist revolution and Khomeini's new regime. Mualem's research primarily focused on the Israeli MFA and the security community, particularly Mossad and its counterpart SAVAK, which were the main security units protecting Iranian Jews in distress.[47] However, Lior Shenfield's critical work revealed that Iranian Jews actually played a role in facilitating the 1979 revolution, through organisations such as the Society of Jewish Iranian Intellectuals and the Sapir Charity Hospital in Tehran.[48] The works of Mualem and Bialer, as well as others,[49] exhibit the methodological nationalism bias by relying heavily on archival research and formal documentation, which overlooks Khomeini's complex role as a security actor and oversimplifies the relationship between Israel and Iran as a zero-sum game. The research conducted by both scholars emphasises the close relations between the Shah and Israel, highlighting the Zionist narrative[50] of the protection of Iranian Jews, while portraying Khomeini as hostile towards Jews and Israel when he came to power.

The added value of studying historical cases of securitisation has already garnered attention and provides an opportunity to reshape our understanding of security. However, studies have so far not adequately connected this with the methodological nationalism bias. Some studies have already shown how identity-related dynamics during the Cold War engage with security and foreign policy, including, for example, Campbell's work on the Cuban Missile Crisis or Weldes's work on the 1956 War.[51] These works demonstrate that, while the articulation of security through foreign policy as part of a state's national identity was useful to Cold War historians and historical evidence, it was grounded in the predictable comfort zones of Euro-American Cold War contexts. These studies

[44] Bialer, *Israeli Foreign Policy*, pp. 109–36.

[45] For more on this discussion, see Uri Bialer, 'On documents in the basement and historical research: A personal perspective', *Essay Series on Learning the Scholar's Craft: Reflections of Historians and International Relations Scholars*, H–Diplo Essay 333 (13 April 2021), available at: {https://issforum.org/essays/PDF/E333.pdf}.

[46] See also Uri Bialer, 'Between Rehovot and Tehran: Gideon Hadary's secret diplomacy', *Israel Studies*, 17:1 (2012), pp. 1–23.

[47] Yitzhak Mualem, 'Israel's foreign policy: Military–economic aid and assisting Jewish communities in distress – can the two coexist?', *Israel Affairs*, 18:2 (2012), pp. 201–18.

[48] Lior B. Sternfeld, 'The Revolution's forgotten sons and daughters: The Jewish community in Tehran during the 1979 Revolution', *Iranian Studies*, 47:6 (2014), pp. 857–69; *Between Iran and Zion: Jewish Histories of Twentieth-Century Iran* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

[49] See, e.g., Menashri, 'Iran, Israel and the Middle East'.

[50] On critical examination of the mainstream Zionist narrative of the current historiography on Israel's protection and Jewish emigration from Muslim countries, see Aviad Moreno, 'Beyond the nation-state: A network analysis of Jewish emigration from northern Morocco to Israel', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 52:1 (2020), pp. 1–21 (pp. 4–7); Aviad Moreno, 'Expanding the dimensions of Moroccan (Jewish) migration: Postcolonial perspectives from Venezuela', *The Journal of North African Studies* (2022), pp. 1–28 (pp. 4–7), available at: {https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13629387.2022.2088522}.

[51] Campbell, *Writing Security*; Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Janice Bially Mattern, *Ordering International Politics: Identity, Crisis, and Representational Force* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

also enjoyed unparalleled access to the National Archives of the United States and the National Security Archive Documents Reader.[52] Most importantly, while these works used archival research and focused on an identity-based understanding of security as articulated through foreign policy, they did not actively apply ST. This article builds on these early attempts to articulate security through foreign policy as part of a state's identity but will also link them to the current critical theoretical debate about the importance of the 'audience component' in ST and the Middle East.

Another way of examining aspects of ST is to look at the relationship between political history and securitisation. The work of Matti Jutila and, more recently, Ori Wertman and Christian Kaunert re-examined these connections.[53] Jutila, for example, sought to conceptualise how the politics of Finnish war history can be securitised. He showed how extreme historical politics can be defended or explicitly used by the state elite to strengthen a securitising act, in other words 'how history, or a particular interpretation of it, can be the referent object of securitization'.[54] While this is clearly an explicit use of the ST in the context of historical narrative, it is applying it strictly to the interpretation of national history. That being said, the case study in this article differs from Jutila's work in three aspects. First, it does not attempt to study a specific interpretation of Iranian national history but to offer a critical reading of the Iranian Revolution. Secondly, it emphasises the interconnections between historical documentation and critical readings of ST. And thirdly, the Finnish case study falls within the 'Westphalian straitjacket', while this article focuses on the non-democratic/liberal context of the Middle East.

As regards methodology and epistemology, Thierry Balzacq's seminal work is vital to this article's analytical framework. Balzacq outlined four methods/techniques that are useful methodological tools in the study of securitisation theory: (1) discourse analysis; (2) ethnographic research and semi-structured interviews; (3) process-tracing; and (4) content analysis.[55] As Balzacq also notes, 'within the conspectus of process-tracing, failed securitizing moves are outcomes worthy of investigation, in part because they enable us to explain why other moves were successful and, in part, as a consequence, because the knowledge culled from failed securitizing moves can "enrich the general theory" of securitization'.[56] These words very much apply to the analysis in the second part of this article, which traces the Shah's failure in order to help us grasp Khomeini's success.

Balzacq further argues that 'process-tracing operates essentially with qualitative data (various types of documents, interviews, newspapers, historical memoirs, surveys, etc.)'.[57] In the empirical part of this paper, these four methods will be used in a mixed approach: Israeli MFA documents, as well as newspaper interviews with the Shah and speeches by Khomeini, will be analysed (content analysis). The emphasis will be on discourse analysis and ways in which the referent object is being framed, in other words, how American imperialism, Israel, Zionism, and so-called Jewish magical power were being depicted as threats to Iran's national security. Ethnographic research or, in this case, semi-structured interviews with the Israeli elite will be used to map how the referent object reported the securitisation process and its climax. The term 'securitisation climax' was coined by Amir Lupovici in his 2016 work, where he argues that 'what distinguishes the securitization climax from other types of securitization moves is the relative dimension of the climax'. Lupovici further proposes that 'in order to demonstrate a securitization climax, one must establish not only the existence of a former (successful) securitization move of the same issue to the same target audience, but establish that it peaked its presentation of the threat (that is, of a higher magnitude and/or

[52]Campbell, *Writing Security*; Weldes, *Constructing National Interests*.

[53]Matti Jutila, 'Securitization, history, and identity: Some conceptual clarifications and examples from politics of Finnish war history', *Nationalities Papers*, 43:6 (2015), pp. 927–43; Wertman and Kaunert, 'The audience in securitization theory', pp. 12–14.

[54]Jutila, 'Securitization, history, and identity', p. 927.

[55]Thierry Balzacq, 'Enquiries into methods: A new framework for securitization analysis', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (New York: Routledge), pp. 33–54.

[56]Ibid., p. 47.

[57]Ibid., p. 51.

more urgent)'.[58] I find that this term also applies to some of Khomeini's key moves from exile, his counter-securitisation against the Shah, and the Shah's interview on *60 Minutes*. I therefore borrow this term and use it in several contexts in the second part of this article. Process-tracing will also be used to identify how the Shah changed the security object in his 1976 securitisation act as well as the de-securitisation act by Khomeini and his changing attitudes towards American and Iranian Jews during February 1979.

In some cases, formal historical documents and archival records provide only limited evidence of a particular securitising move and its different aspects, such as the securitising plot or audience acceptance. However, this complex process can still be traced and assembled using historical intelligence reports, elite interviews, and secondary sources on Iranian society during the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, many countries in the Middle East, including Israel, do not provide scholars with access to official state records and have strict and opaque censorship regulations.[59] Nevertheless, as this article shows, it is possible to use the archival records of the Israeli MFA to trace securitisation moves by both the Shah and Khomeini, as well as how these were perceived by the 'referent object'. That said, we cannot rely solely on the archival records of the Israeli MFA. Thus, this inquiry also taps into other types of historical documentation: media interviews with the Shah, oral interviews with Israeli diplomats and members of the intelligence elite, and the Islamic speeches and lectures Khomeini gave in Najaf between 21 January and 8 February 1970. Together, these primary sources provide a critical narrative of the non-linear trajectory of Iran's securitisation practices that led to the 1979 revolution.

While the interviews used by this article will not directly contribute to our understanding of the grammar of securitisation employed by Khomeini and the Shah, they will reveal how Israeli diplomats and intelligence officials who served in Iran before the 1979 revolution were integral parts of what Khomeini and later the Shah framed as the referent objects of security. This enriches the data about securitisation acts that can be gleaned from archival records.

Historical overview of Israel–Iran relations

As well as an understanding of securitisation theory, this article also requires a concise historical overview to help situate its central argument within the wider context of Israel–Iran relations. The latter can be roughly divided into three main periods. The first period (from the early 1950s to the early 1970s) preceded the 1979 revolution and was characterised by semi-covert relations between the Shah and Israel. The second period is more nuanced and can be seen as a 'transition period' ranging from the 1979 revolution through the 1980s to the 1990s. The third period, starting in the early 2000s and continuing to the present day (2023), is characterised by mutual hostilities. The first period has mainly contributed to our understanding of the economic and security dimensions of Israel–Iran relations as well as, to some extent, to the nature of the clandestine relationship between Tehran and Jerusalem during the Shah's administration.[60] One of most important features of the first period is the instability of relations and fluctuations as a result of Israel's wars with the Arab world as well as changing geopolitical circumstances.[61] For example, after Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, the two countries initiated the Eilat–Ashkelon oil pipeline project. Given that

[58] Amir Lupovici, 'Securitization climax: Putting the Iranian nuclear project at the top of the Israeli public agenda (2009–2012)', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 12:3 (2016), pp. 413–432 (p. 417).

[59] Eldad Ben Aharon, 'Doing oral history with the Israeli elite and the question of methodology in International Relations research', *The Oral History Review*, 47:1 (2020), pp. 3–25; Eldad Ben Aharon, 'Methodological and epistemological reflections on elite interviews and the study of Israel's intelligence history: Interview with Efraim Halevy,' *Intelligence and National Security* 38:1 (2023), pp. 111–27.

[60] For more on the economic dimension of Israel–Iran relations, see Bialer, *Oil and the Arab–Israeli conflict*; 'Fuel bridge', pp. 29–67; *Israeli Foreign Policy*, pp. 109–35. See also Mualem, 'Israel's foreign policy', pp. 201–18.

[61] On this see, e.g., Lior Sternfeld, *Between Iran and Zion: Jewish Histories of Twentieth-Century Iran* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018); Haggai Ram, 'Between homeland and exile: Iranian Jewry in Zionist/Israeli political thought', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 1:35 (2008), pp. 1–22.

the Suez Canal had been blocked since the 1967 war, the pipeline to Eilat allowed the Iranians to cut the costs of exporting their oil to Europe. Iran's oil sales increased, and Israel, meanwhile, was able to solve a serious energy problem, which helped the country continue its economic growth.

The second aspect of Israel–Iran relations from the 1950s to the 1970s was the security perspective through the lens of clandestine diplomacy.[62] Specifically, during the first period, Israel–Iran relations were seen as part of the important concept of the 'periphery doctrine',[63] which was established by Israel's first prime minster, David Ben-Gurion, in the early 1950s and sought to end Israel's isolation from the Arab world's non-Arab and/or non-Muslim factors (e.g. Turkey, Iran, the Kurds, the Berbers, Ethiopia, the Christians) in the Middle East.[64] In his autobiography, Shabtai Shavit, the sixth director general of Israel's Mossad (1989–96), uncovers the role of Iran from the Israeli national security perspective. Shavit notes that 'the "periphery doctrine" was to create two notable *triangles*: the "northern triangle" includes Jerusalem Ankara and Tehran; the southern triangle includes Jerusalem, Khartoum (Sudan), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)'.[65]

The second period (the early 1980s to the late 1990s) starts from the premise that Israel lost the 'northern triangle' by losing Tehran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.[66] However, this period can be seen as the 'transition period' in terms of the ties between Israel and Iran. This period examines the relationship between Tehran and Jerusalem in the broader context of the transition from the Shah's pro-Western orientation during the Cold War, through the 1979 revolution, to Khomeini's era and the post–Cold War period.[67] While Israel officially withdrew from Iran, diplomatic ties were severed and the term 'Little Satan' was used to refer to the Jewish state, with different channels of covert relations between Iran and Israel then being established through third-party countries such as Canada.[68] However, following the 1979 revolution, the relations between Iran and Israel did not

[62]Here, Israeli scholars such as Yoel Guzansky, Noa Schonmann, and Eli Podeh, but also Clive Jones, have contributed to our understanding of clandestine diplomacy. See, e.g., Noa Schonmann, 'Back-door diplomacy: The mistress syndrome in Israel's relations with Turkey, 1957–60', in Clive Jones and Tore T. Petersen (eds), *Israel's Clandestine Diplomacies* (London: Hurst & Co., 2013), pp. 85–102; Elie Podeh, *From Mistress to Known Partner: Israel's Secret Relations with States and Minorities in the Middle East, 1948–2020* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 2022 [Hebrew]); Yoal Guzansky, 'Israel's periphery doctrines: Then and now', *Middle East Policy*, 28:3–4 (2021), pp. 88–100; Clive Jones and Yoel Guzansky, *Fraternal Enemies: Israel and the Gulf Monarchies* (London: Hurst & Co., 2019).

[63]See, e.g., the work of Yossi Alpher, *Periphery: Israel's Search for Middle East Allies* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

[64]Other scholars in this cluster, such as Avner Yaniv, Marvin G. Weinbaum, and Aaron Klieman, have looked at different strategic factors in Israel's foreign policy, including Arab nationalism, arms trading, and the Cold War in the Middle East, and how these manifested in the context of Iran before 1979. See, e.g., Avner Yaniv, *Deterrence without the Bomb: The Politics of Israeli Strategy* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987); Marvin G. Weinbaum, 'Iran and Israel: The discreet entente', *Orbis*, 8 (1975), pp. 1070–87; Ahron S. Klieman, *Israel's Global Reach: Arms Sales as Diplomacy* (Williamsport, PA: Potomac Books, 1985); and Bar-Joseph, 'Forecasting a hurricane', pp. 718–42.

[65]Shabtai Shavit, *Head of the Mossad: In Pursuit of a Safe and Secure Israel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), p. 95. Also on this, see the recent autobiography of another former Mossad official, Rafi Eytan, *The Confidant* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 2020), pp. 178–83 (p. 179).

[66]In fact, Israel almost lost the entire 'northern triangle' when it nearly lost Ankara as well. Turkey, another Muslim country with a Sunni population, was heavily influenced by the Islamic Revolution in Iran. However, these Islamic fundamentalist forces were halted with the military coup of 6 September 1980.

[67]The work of Trita Parsi, Efrat Shaoulian-Sophet, Elie Podeh, Marta Furlan, and Sohrab Sobhani showed how this period is focused on a more constructivist approach to Israel–Iran relations alongside Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). On this see, e.g., Uri Bialer's article, Efrat Shaoulian-Sophet's recent research (2017), and Elie Podeh's book (2022), which emphasise the role of human agency, i.e. the FPA perspective. These works re-examine the actions of specific Israeli diplomats in Tehran, such as Ambassador Meir Ezri, which prevented attempts by Iranian groups such as the Iranian Foreign Ministry and certain religious clerics to create problems for the Israeli–Iranian alliance during the Shah's administration. Shaoulian-Sophet's work is highly relevant to this article, as it also examines human agency and single-actor influence – in this case Shah and Khomeini, respectively – on Israel–Iran relations. See, e.g., Efrat Shaoulian-Sopher, 'Israeli foreign policy towards Iran 1948–1979: Beyond the realist account', PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2017.

[68]See, e.g., the telegrams from Edward G. Lee, the Canadian ambassador in Tel-Aviv to Yael Vered, Director of the Middle East Department in the MFA, Jerusalem on 16 and 19 March 1979, after the Islamic Revolution. As Lee noted, 'Canadian government acceptance to undertake the protection of the State of Israel's interests in Teheran', available at: {https://www.archives.gov.il/archives/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684c86ad0/Item/0907170684ce3d0f}.

adhere to a strictly binary pattern. Instead, they involved a degree of short-term, pragmatic cooperation, particularly notable throughout the 1980s and the Iran–Iraq war.[69] For example, attempts were made to rebuild an alliance between Iran and the United States through the Jewish lobby and arms sales to support Iran in its struggle against Saddam Hussein, known as the 'Iran-Contra Affair'. Israel facilitated the transfer of US-made missiles to Iran in exchange for money that was then used to provide arms to the anti-Sandinista Contra rebels in Nicaragua.[70] However, developments during these years were also used to substantiate the hostile nature of the Islamic republic with the creation of Hezbollah, a Shiite party with an armed militia. Hezbollah, sponsored by Iran, fought to end Israel's military presence in south Lebanon after the 1982–5 war.

The third period starts after the year 2000 and continues to this day (2023). This period is marked by mutual hostility between Israel and Iran. It is largely characterised by mutual securitisation processes, mutual hostilities in international forums, e.g. the UN, anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial of Iranian elites, cybersecurity, and Israel's securitisation of Iran's nuclear programme.[71] Furthermore, building on the previous period, Hezbollah, backed by extensive Iranian financial and political support, bolstered its military capabilities by amassing a vast arsenal of rockets and missiles capable of targeting strategic economic and infrastructure assets in Israel. Hezbollah also engaged in direct conflict with Israel during the 2006 Lebanon War.[72] Essentially, this article seeks to contribute to the first period, by examining overlooked security dynamics within the opposition.

Part II: Securitisation from opposition

Phase 1: Khomeini's referent object of security and building a narrative of threat (1963–1964)

The 'stage of identification' and the 'Khordad Uprising' (June 1963)

In January 1963, the White Revolution, also known as the 'Shah and People Revolution', was announced by the government. The revolution comprised a series of far-reaching reforms (with a total of six elements) introduced by the Shah in an attempt to modernise Iran and was backed by the United States, the Shah's closest ally. These so-called reforms resulted in a major redistribution of wealth to Iran's working class, explosive economic growth in subsequent decades, rapid urbanisation, and the deconstruction of Iran's feudalist customs.[73] As noted by Fakhreddin Azimi, 'it was assumed that enhanced foreign backing, the growing military and security forces, and expanding technocratic elite had rendered redundant the regime's former domestic backers such as landowners, clerics'.[74] However, the Shah's Western-oriented policies drove a deep wedge between his regime

[69]See, e.g., Sohrab Sobhani, *The Pragmatic Entente: Israeli–Iranian Relations, 1948–1988* (New York: Praeger, 1989); Trita Parsi and Marta Furlan both provide a concise overview of the history of Israel–Iran relations that goes beyond the 1980s. See, e.g., Marta Furlan, 'Israeli–Iranian relations: Past friendship, current hostility', *Israel Affairs*, 28:2 (2022), pp. 170–83; Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 87–110.

[70]See, e.g., Seymour M. Hersh, 'The Iran pipeline: A hidden chapter/a special report; U.S. said to have allowed Israel to sell arms to Iran', *New York Times* (8 December 1991), available at: {https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/08/world/iran-pipeline-hidden-chapter-special-report-us-said-have-allowed-israel-sell.html}; see also Furlan, 'Israeli–Iranian relations', p. 172; Alpher, *Periphery*, pp. 80–1; Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p. 90.

[71]The works of Shabnam J. Holliday, Rusi Jaspal, Anda Ghilescu, Check Freilich, Veronika Netolická and Miroslav Mareš, Amir Lupovici, Christian Kaunert and Ori Wertman, Meir Litvak, and many others have contributed to this important scholarship. See, e.g., Rusi Jaspal, 'Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in Iran', *Israel Affairs*, 19:2 (2013), pp. 231–58; Meir Litvak, 'The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Holocaust: Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism', *Journal of Israeli History*, 25:1 (2006), pp. 267–84; Veronika Netolická and Miroslav Mareš, 'Arms race "in cyberspace": A case study of Iran and Israel', *Comparative Strategy*, 37:5 (2018), pp. 414–29; Check Freilich, *Israeli National Security: A New Strategy for an Era of Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Anda Ghilescu, 'An attempt at diplomacy: How the pursuit of a nuclear deal with Iran affected the United States–Israel relations', *Studia Europaea*, 63:2 (2018), pp. 251–69, among many others.

[72]Furlan, 'Israeli–Iranian relations', p. 173.

[73]Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[74]Fakhreddin Azimi, 'Khomeini and the "White Revolution"', in Arshin Adib-Moghaddam (ed.), *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 19–42 (p. 32).

and Iran's Shia religious scholars, the Ulama. Khomeini, a key figure among these objectors, argued that these changes were a serious threat to Islam.[75] On 22 January 1963, he issued a declaration denouncing the Shah and his new policies.

Over the next few weeks, Khomeini continued his scathing attacks on the Shah's White Revolution, issuing a manifesto that also included the names and signatures of eight other senior Ulama. Specifically, in his speech acts, Khomeini built the narrative of threat and the referent object. The Ulama listed the various ways in which the Shah had violated the Shia constitution, condemned the spread of moral corruption in Iran, and accused the Shah of submission to America's and Israel's will. Khomeini also decreed that the Nowuz celebrations for the Iranian year 1342 (which fell on 21 March 1963) be cancelled as a sign of protest against government policies.

The peak of the conflict between the Shah's regime and Khomeini was in the summer of that year, in the form of the Khordad Uprising on 5 June 1963. Khomeini was arrested because he had condemned the Shah and his Western-oriented policies. Khomeini had gone as far as to call the Shah a 'wretched, miserable man' and warned him that if he did not change his ways, the day would come when the people would offer up thanks for his departure from the country. Khomeini's arrest upset many Iranians, and 100,000 took the streets in the uprising to protest against his arrest. This is a critical step in the process of non-linear and informal authority-building pursued by the opposition in an attempt to gain legitimacy through acceptance of the political audience. In many ways, the Khordad Uprising reinforced the resistance to the Shah and his so-called Westernised regime and led to the 1979 revolution. In terms of the Euro-American-centric grammar of the CS, these actions and the large crowds that took to the streets in opposition can be seen as a successful securitising move after the narrative of threat was established by the securitising actor. However, while the narrative of threat was convincing, and in the Iranian context, the first of the two-stage process of securitisation proposed by Roe[76] – the stage of identification – saw approximately 100,000 Iranians take to the streets to oppose Khomeini's arrest, in the non-Western world, the security act was not completed, as it was successfully challenged by the counter-securitisation actions of the Shah, who sent Khomeini into exile.

And this is how the narrative of threat developed in the course of the late 1960s and 1970s. In June 1963, over six days, the Shah's government ordered the police and military to violently suppress protesters, resulting in the death or injury of 380 people.[77] An important point argued by Fakhreddin Azimi is that 'the Shah and Khomeini both described the June uprising as a "turning point"', further noting that, 'in June 1979, the first postrevolutionary anniversary of the event was commemorated in the presence of Khomeini, who had returned from exile four months earlier. He declared that those who had participated and suffered in the 1963 uprising represented the kind of people who had brought about the 1979 Revolution, and were exclusively entitled to inherit its fruits.'[78]

The Khordad Uprising was deeply concerning to the Israeli delegation in Tehran. In these six days of protests, as reported by the Israeli consul Netanel Lorch, some of the anti-Shah slogans chanted also targeted Israel and the Jews, including accusations such as 'the Shah is selling Iran to Israel' and 'we will not be surrendered to Israel, the enemy of Islam'.[79] Lorch further noted that the Iranian authorities were quite surprised about the politicisation of the annual religious rallies celebrating the birth of Mohammed, and he therefore advised that it would be judicious for Jerusalem only to comment on these demonstrations as being 'against the Shah's agriculture

[75] Ibid., p. 29.

[76] See Roe, 'Actor, audience(s) and emergency measures', p. 622.

[77] Ali Rahnema, 'Ayatollah Khomeini's rule of the guardian jurist: From theory to practice', in Arshin Adib-Moghaddam (ed.), *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 88–114 (p. 32).

[78] Azimi, 'Khomeini and the "White Revolution"', p. 36.

[79] Tehran to Jerusalem, ISA–mfa–IT3–000m7wf, 505, 9 June 1963, p. 1.

reforms that Israel has nothing to do with.'[80] As noted above, Khomeini's role in leading these anti-Shah demonstrations cost him his freedom. Even when he was in jail, however, his supporters continued to publish religious manifestos that used very harsh rhetoric against the Shah's regime, Israel, the United States, and the world's Jews. In one of these manifestos, from 1964, entitled *Israel and Imperialism*, Khomeini noted:

> After the Second World War Western imperialism allocated the loot of Islamic countries between themselves. … therefore, Palestine that is now named Israel is an imperialist territory of Christian robbers. … the Islamic brothers in Iran will support the Islamic religious leadership and will stand as a rock against Israel and its supporters, we will fight together against Zionism and the Jewish intruders until they give us back our holy Palestine.[81]

Khomeini sought to increase his political influence by leveraging conspiracy theories that framed Western imperialism, Zionism, and Judaism (in this instance not the Iranian Jews but Jews more generally) as the enemies of Islam, the Middle East, and Palestine, and thus also of the Iranians. Meir Ezri, who was part of the Israeli delegation in Tehran at the time that this religious text was published, noted that Khomeini had been imprisoned for his political activity between June 1963 and November 1964 but had now been released. The Israeli report also stated that Khomeini's release had 'helped him to obtain a reputation and great popular support among the opposition rabble, and religious uneducated in the Shia cities of Isfahan, Qom and Tabriz, who do not hesitate to challenge the current leadership of the Shah'.[82] This telegram reveals a growing concern within the Israeli delegation that Khomeini's increasing influence was becoming a focus of opposition to the Shah.

In a similar vein, the telegram also noted that the Shah had passed a law giving US military personnel stationed in Iran full diplomatic immunity and had also issued a special permit allowing Iranian authorities to purchase arms from the United States. As observed by Ezri, Khomeini used this information to attack the Shah's government, arguing that such laws were destroying the holiness of Islam and were tantamount to the Shah's government 'selling their soul to American imperialism'. Ezri pointed out that Israel was mentioned twice in Khomeini's proclamation: as an agent of American imperialism and as having control of Iran's economy, and from this round of attacks, references to Israel appeared to be on an upward trend.[83]

We can already see from these three short commentaries how, from 1963 onwards, Khomeini was starting to build his reputation and leadership role as a strong opponent to the Shah, especially after the Khordad Uprising. It is also clear that Khomeini was beginning to develop the conspiracy narrative that would help him to securitise the revolution against the Shah by gaining the support of the political audience. In this narrative, Khomeini framed Israel and the Iranian Jews, along with the Shah, as enemies of Iranian nationalism and as a security threat to Iranian national interests. Several scholars, such as Michael Fischer, have noted that Khomeini's harsh rhetoric against Zionists, Jews, and colonialists was also pretty standard fare, not even anti-Semitic in the theological sense, but rather a regular feature of the 'revolutionary' grammar of this period in Iran, as well as much of the Arab world and the Middle East.[84] That, indeed, is the most convincing context within which this speech act should be framed.

[80]Ibid., p. 3.

[81]Tehran to Jerusalem, ISA–mfa–IT3–000m7wf, 348, 13 November 1964, appendix 2, *Israel and Imperialism*, translated from Farsi to Hebrew by the Israeli delegation in Tehran.

[82]Tehran to Jerusalem, ISA–mfa–IT3–000m7wf, p. 348.

[83]Ibid.

[84]Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 154; Mehran Kamrava, 'Khomeini and the West', in Arshin Adib-Moghaddam (ed.), *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 149–69 (p. 168).

Most importantly, Khomeini continually developed non-linear securitisation moves against the Shah and the legal audience, challenging the framework of the CS that had already been demonstrated in the work of Claire Wilkinson and several other scholars.[85] The use of this framing helped Khomeini to talk to the hearts and minds of many Iranian citizens, especially religious fundamentalists in the suburbs and the rural poor, who suffered from reduced income and endured great hardship under the Shah. The latter point had no substantial connection to traditional theologically based anti-Semitism but rather represented strong securitisation-oriented political manoeuvring based on evidence of Israel's support for the corrupt regime of the Shah.

Phase 2: Counter-securitisation and the political audience: Khomeini's exile (1964–1978)

The counter-securitisation moves made by the Shah were successful in terms of the original CS framework and subsequent developments employing the terminology of Balzacq as well as Wertman and Kaunert. The Shah achieved three major successes: first, the arrest of Khomeini after the Khordad Uprising (1963), followed by 10 months of house arrest between August 1963 and April 1964 and his subsequent exile (November 1964).[86] Using his monopolisation of power over the Iranian armed forces (the legal audience) and following the state's own rules, the Shah obtained the formal consent of the aforementioned audience. This is in keeping with the framework's definition of obtaining the consent of legal audiences. The development is not surprising, since in authoritarian regimes, due to a lack of checks and balances, the leader has a full and direct hold over the military and intelligence communities that secure their regime. As for the second of the Shah's achievements, once the security object (Khomeini) and the narrative of threat was removed by means of the former's exile, the Shah's successful securitisation act yielded several additional important achievements in terms of his alliance with Israel. However, adhering to formal state rules in non-democratic regimes such as Iran under the Shah and obtaining the formal consent of the legal audience was not enough to constitute a fully successful securitisation move. The third achievement was that foreign governments, specifically Turkey, Iraq, and France, here representing the moral/political audience, accepted the Shah's counter-securitisation move. However, the Iranian people, which are also a political audience, refused to accept the Shah's political legitimacy. This informal yet powerful securitisation process was not perceived as moral and right and thus continued to support Khomeini while he was in exile. In authoritarian countries like Iran during the Cold War, this could be the difference between successful securitisation and revolution.

Phase 3: Khomeini deepens his relationship with the political audience from exile (1964–1978)

Not only did the three counter-securitisation achievements mentioned above seem to secure the Shah's regime and force Khomeini into exile, but they also managed to strengthen Khomeini's relationship with the political audience (the Iranian people) and drew significant support from abroad.[87] Indeed, Persian sources translated into English show that Khomeini regularly incorporated anti-Semitic tropes in his speeches from exile. First, in Bursa (Turkey) until 1965, thereafter in Najaf (Iraq), and from 1978, in his final destination of Paris, Khomeini continued his securitisation speech acts against Israel, Zionism, the Iranian Jews, and American imperialism. An important source for this period is a book on the Islamic government of Khomeini translated

[85] Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen School', p. 7.

[86] Azimi, 'Khomeini and the "White Revolution"', pp. 39–40.

[87] In the available declassified Israeli MFA records, between 1964 and 1978 the Israeli delegation in Tehran stopped reporting to Jerusalem about Khomeini since he had been exiled from the country. One interpretation here is that, from the Israeli point of view, Khomeini's exile meant that he was not perceived as an immediate threat to the Shah's regime and thus to Israel–Iran relations, which were largely favourable throughout most of this period (1964–78). It is certainly possible that there are many references to Khomeini's anti-Semitic rhetoric in these declassified Israeli MFA records, but these are currently inaccessible to scholars.

into English from Persian[88] and comprising a student's summary of a series of lectures given by Khomeini in Najaf between 21 January and 8 February 1970. One quote from these lectures, in particular, shows how Khomeini's narrative articulates the attitude that needed to be adopted in pan-Islamism vis-à-vis Israel and Zionism:

> If the Muslims had acted in accordance with this command, and after forming a government, made the necessary extensive preparations to be in a state of full readiness for war, a handful of Jews would never have dared to occupy our lands and to burn and destroy the *Masjid al-Aqsā*.[89]

This quote is an example of Khomeini articulating his foreign policy objectives for the future Islamic republic, namely to declare war on the West Bank and East Jerusalem (specifically Masjid al-Aqsā), which had been occupied territories since the 1967 war. While Israel and Zionism are not explicitly mentioned here, and Khomeini refers to a 'handful of Jews', it can be assumed that he is referring to Israeli governments and Zionism more generally. Most importantly, in terms of securitisation theory, it is clear that these foreign policy objectives were actually paving the way for the next phase – the Iranian Revolution.

Furthermore, in another quote from the same source, Khomeini contextualises the Jews, especially British and American Jews, within Western imperialism:

> If the rulers of the Muslim countries truly represented the believers and enacted God's ordinances, they would set aside their petty differences, abandon their subversive and divisive activities, and join together like the fingers of one hand. Then a handful of wretched Jews (the agents of America, Britain and other foreign powers) would never have been able to accomplish what they have, no matter how much support they enjoyed from America and Britain. All this has happened because of the incompetence of those who rule over the Muslims.[90]

Here, Khomeini uses the securitisation speech act with two objectives in mind. First, he frames Western imperialism with what European and American Jews – referred to as 'a handful of wretched Jews' – have been able to accomplish. Secondly, the security narrative put pressure not only on the Iranians but also on Muslim countries in social and financial distress, and the state elite, to cooperate and set aside their petty differences for the sake of pan-Islamism. This can also be read as a call for other Muslim countries in the Middle East and elsewhere to securitise the American Jews, European Jews, and Western countries.

In the next quote taken from Persian sources translated into English, Khomeini asserts that 'since the Jews of Banu Qurayza were a troublesome group, causing corruption in Muslim society and damaging Islam and the Islamic state, the Most Noble Messenger eliminated them'.[91] Here, Khomeini's security speech act makes a connection between the historical Jews of Banu Qurayza and the causes of corruption in Muslim society – referring to future Iran as Khomeini's future Islamic state.[92] That said, these words could in fact refer to any Muslim society in the Middle East, such as Medina, and could therefore also be read as an open invitation for other Muslim countries and Islamic leaders to securitise Jews, Zionists, and Israel's presence in these countries. Once again, Khomeini articulates the nature of the security act required: the elimination of these Jews.

In the last example, Khomeini asserts: 'The Jewish scholars and rabbis were condemned by God because fear or covetousness made them keep silent in the face of the misdeeds of the oppressors, whereas if they had spoken or cried out in protest, they could have prevented oppression from

[88] Wilāyate Faqih, *Governance of the Jurist: Islamic Government Imām Khomeini*, translated by Dr Hamid Algar (Tehran: Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's works, 2017).

[89] Faqih, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 43.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid., p. 77.

[92] The 'Jews of Banu Qurayza' were a Jewish tribe that lived in northern Arabia, at the oasis of Yathrib (now the city of Medina).

occurring.'[93] Here, Khomeini puts the blame on the Jewish rabbis on the side of the oppressors (the Shah and Western imperialism) and argues that if they (the Jewish scholars and rabbis) had spoken up about the oppression experienced by Muslims, they could have put a stop to it. Moreover, this is a clear reference to the influence of Jewish 'magical power' on the aforementioned oppressors, which featured again later in Mike Wallace's interview with the Shah in 1976.

All in all, these examples provide significant empirical evidence of Khomeini's attempts to continue, from exile, to obtain legitimacy from the political audience and to plant more seeds for the security act embodied in the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution. While there is no direct empirical evidence in the Israeli MFA's records regarding the political response to Khomeini's speech acts from exile, there are other sources that clearly reveal how the political audience responded to Khomeini's speeches. In Azimi's article 'Khomeini and the "White Revolution"', he explains:

> Not unexpectedly, Khomeini's new focus enhanced his public appeal. Even some secular opponents of the Shah, ignoring what they disliked in Khomeini's pronouncements, regarded the substance of his political message to be converging with theirs. Many also acknowledged his zeal and tenacity. Once again, Khomeini had raised his voice in protest when, in effect, all his actual and potential secular rivals in the public sphere had been banished or silenced, particularly in the aftermath of the White Revolution. By invoking the Shah's disregard for nationalist sensibilities and constitutional processes, Khomeini had attacked the Shah where he was most vulnerable. Shrewdly combining the constitutional and nationalist causes with the religious, Khomeini distilled and articulated the anti-autocratic sentiments permeating Iranian society, enabling him to become figure of growing national renown. As the U.S. embassy noted, Khomeini's latest showdown with the Shah lent him "a new aura of martyrdom", raising "his stature among the Iranian contenders for Shia paramountcy". In a similar vein, the religious opposition had "obtained a new lease of life by having become an ally of the nationalist opposition".[94]

While the response of the political audience described above focuses on Khomeini's early years in exile – in Turkey and then in Iraq – it demonstrates how successful he was in framing his messages in a way that reached diverse segments of Iranian society, even the secular groups who were potentially his rivals in the public sphere. The speeches described above show how consistent Khomeini was in his speech acts. As noted in the work of Mehran Kamrava, these consistencies 'only enhanced his credibility and revolutionary credentials in the eyes of his growing throngs of supporters'.[95]

Phase 4: 'Securitisation climax' and the Shah addressing the political audience (1976–1978)

As noted, from 1976, the Shah's hold on power was weakening. The opposition factions were becoming bolder, and Khomeini's subversive activities from his base in Iraq were increasing. Most importantly, the latter's political legitimacy was growing in the eyes of the security audience (the Iranian public). In the same insightful *60 Minutes* interview quoted in the introduction, American Jewish journalist Mike Wallace asks:

> Surely, your Majesty you're not telling me that the Jewish lobby in the United States pulls the strings of the Presidency?
>
> *Shah*: Not entirely. But, I think even a little too much, even for Israel's interests.
>
> *Wallace*: You think the Jewish lobby in the United States is too powerful for the interests of Israel?

[93] Faqih, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 97.
[94] Azimi, 'Khomeini and the "White Revolution"', p. 41.
[95] Kamrava, 'Khomeini and the West', p. 149.

Shah: I think so. Sometimes they are disserving the interests of Israel.

Wallace: Explain.

Shah: Because they're pushing around too many people.

Wallace: How do you mean 'pushing around'?

Shah: Well, pressuring. They have many means at their disposal. They are putting on pressure on many, many people. And at the end, I don't think that it will even help Israel.

Wallace: Why, if this is true, why would the President of the United States pay attention to that lobby?

Shah: They are strong.

Wallace: Strong in what sense?

Shah: They are controlling many things.

Wallace: Controlling what?

Shah: Newspapers … medias …

Wallace: Your Majesty …

Shah: Banks … finances and I'm going to stop there.

Wallace: Well, now, just a second. You really do believe that the Jewish community in the United States is that powerful? They make the media reflect their view of foreign policy?

Shah: Yes.[96]

In this interview, the Shah seems more desperate and changes his tactic: the political audience shifts from the governments of Turkey and Iraq, and now his counter-securitisation move against Khomeini is seen as a means to regain his political legitimacy, as his hold on Iran had weakened in the eyes of the Iranian public. Moreover, a closer examination of his account reveals that the Shah is not only trying to target Khomeini as a security threat but also Israel, Zionism, and the American Jewish lobby. These anti-Semitic tropes highlight the similarity between the Shah's characterisation of the influence of Israel and that promulgated by his opponent, Khomeini. He also asserted that the American Jewish lobby was 'disserving the interests of Israel', and it might be argued that this was actually a reference to Khomeini's earlier framing that the preservation of the Shah's regime was in in the interests of Israel, and thus in the interests of all American Jews.

In August 1978, Uri Lubrani, a renowned diplomat and head of the Israeli diplomatic mission in Iran from 1973 until the 1979 revolution, reported on the outcome of a meeting with the Deputy Inspector General of the Iranian Police, Jafari (his first name is not mentioned in the Israel Securities Authority records). The latter was pessimistic about whether the brutal suppression of the popular protests against the Shah would be enough to save the regime.[97] Jafari told Lubrani that

[96]Mike Wallace, interview with the Shah.
[97]Tehran to Jerusalem, ISA–mfa/ 7234/14/152/14 August 1978, p. 1.

the reports from the Iranian intelligence community (SAVAK) to the Shah did not make it clear that the situation was so serious as to call into question the survival of his administration. At the end of the meeting, Jafari told Lubrani: 'I appreciate the special relationship between us, and I will do anything I can to assist you if I can.'[98]

On the morning of the 20 September 1978, Lubrani met the Shah to mark the end of his position in Tehran. Lubrani reported on this meeting in a telegram to the Israeli foreign minister, Moshe Dayan, stating that the Shah appeared depressed, barely smiled, and spent a lot of the time staring into the distance. More importantly, during the meeting, the Shah asked whether the Americans were aware of a Soviet campaign of disinformation to turn Iranian public opinion against him. Specifically, Lubrani wrote in his report that the Shah had asked him: 'Did you [the Israeli government] notice Soviet involvement in the opposition demonstrations? The attempts to assert that the CIA is involved in the opposition demonstrations against me or that IDF [Israel Defense Forces] troops are here to protect me are absolutely absurd.' Lubrani responded that 'both the Israeli government and the Iranian Jews were extremely concerned about the latest opposition propaganda asserting that IDF troops were arriving in Iran to protect the Shah'. Lastly, the Shah asked Lubrani: 'Is the Jewish American community aware of this propaganda?' In his response, Lubrani tried to avoid the American Jewish angle: 'Threats were reported in international media. … and the Israeli prime minister [Menachem Begin] is doing the best he can to advocate for the Shah in Washington and in European capitals'.[99]

Three aspects of this document are particularly revealing. First, as in the Mike Wallace interview, the Shah is peddling the same narrative about Jewish conspiratorial power that Khomeini regularly employed. The Shah thus legitimises Khomeini's security act – depicting the American Jewish lobby and the US administration as a single interconnected whole – and seeks to leverage it to help him retain power. This is not only remarkable in terms of the counter-securitisation actions of the Shah against Khomeini but also highlights one of the theoretical contributions of this case study: the legal audience – SAVAK, which protected the Shah – was not a crucial actor in this revolutionary context; it was the political audience that made the difference. The Shah's articulation of this Jewish lobby was also framed in the context of their common Cold War enemy, the Soviet Union, since he emphasises the Soviet role in the demonstrations against him, rather than domestic discontent and religious feeling. Secondly, the Shah was actually trying to explain to Lubrani – albeit based on a very anti-Semitic worldview – that this situation was undermining the security of his regime, and it seems that he was desperately trying to find out what the powerful lobby in Washington was planning to do about the decline of his power and the security threat to his regime and thus to Israel's investments in Iran.

Later in 1978, as the Shah's hold on power deteriorated further, he asked the Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein, to exile Khomeini from Iraq. Hussein agreed to the Shah's request, and the Israeli delegation reported to Jerusalem that Khomeini had arrived in France on 6 October 1978. Contrary to what was published in the media, 'Khomeini was not restricted from conducting any activity'.[100] Mordechai Gazit, the Israeli ambassador in Paris, reported to Jerusalem that when Khomeini arrived in the French capital, he entered the country on a tourist visa, emphasising that he would not attempt to undertake any political activity from his exile. Almost immediately, however, Khomeini proceeded with his propaganda, and, quite surprisingly, the Iranian ambassador did not demand any explanations from the French government about Khomeini's hostile pronouncements against the Shah.[101]

Eliezer (Geizi) Tzafrir, a former senior Mossad officer who headed the station in Tehran between 1978 and 1979, recalled in an interview with the author:

[98]Ibid., p. 2.
[99]Lubrani to Dayan: re: meeting with the Shah, 20 September 1978, ISA–mfa–IT3–000m7wf/18/, pp. 1–3.
[100]Tehran to Jerusalem, ISA–mfa–IT3–000m7wf /346/31 October 1978.
[101]Paris to Jerusalem, ISA–mfa–IT3–000m7wf/. 30 November 1978, p. 35.

> We [Mossad] received a request from the Shah to take the life of Khomeini. When Khomeini arrived in France, he received full autonomy for his fundamentalist propaganda, including an office and radio broadcasting. I knew what our [Israel's] response to this would be but still asked my supervisors. We declined saying, 'we are not the world police'. You [the Shah] have a problem, deal with it yourself. The French government sent their representative to Tehran saying, if you need to do something about Khomeini – we will look the other way.[102]

Needless to say, the information Tzafrir provides in his oral account cannot be found in any of the declassified documents released by the Israel Securities Authority (ISA), so it is hard to verify. However, Reoven Merhav, who headed the Mossad station in Tehran between 1978 and 1979, before being replaced by Tzafrir, also recalled in an interview with the author that 'there were people in Iran, people who were part of [Shapour] Bakhtiar's transitional government who opposed Khomeini, and asked Israel to kill Khomeini, but we said, "no way". There are things one doesn't do. … that was a very sensitive request'.[103] These first-hand accounts provide evidence of Mossad acting as a political audience for the Shah, utilising moral justifications to reject Khomeini's securitisation. Oral-history interviews with security elites are crucial in demonstrating the ability of scholars to trace the response of the audience acceptance to the securitisation move.

Moreover, together Tzafrir's and Merhav's oral accounts reveal two things: first, the extent of the Shah's desperation at this point, and how he tried to corner Israel – which had made significant investments in Iran and had an obvious interest in the survival of the Shah's regime – to take care of Iran's internal problems. Secondly, the accounts uncovered how France agreed to overlook a move against Khomeini. This shows us that even though Khomeini's supporters could not have known for certain at that time that Mossad had been approached by the Shah with the instruction to kill Khomeini, such a possibility would have been considered rational within the context of the conspiracy narrative which had already asserted that Israel was the secret force behind the Shah's corrupt regime. On the other hand, the Shah's request to Mossad indicates that he had subscribed to the same conspiracy narrative of Israeli all-powerfulness. Meanwhile, on 18 December 1978, Yael Vered, the director of the Israeli MFA, sent a telegram to Prime Minister Menachem Begin assessing the risks arising from the Israeli presence in Iran in light of the recent events:

> Khomeini's recent harsh rhetoric against Israel includes statements that IDF combatants are protecting the Shah, helping him maintain control over Iran. We [the Israeli MFA] were amazed and surprised at how the Iranian people, including the elite, accept this propaganda as the truth.[104]

It would certainly be plausible to interpret Khomeini's statements that IDF combatants are protecting the Shah, helping him maintain control over Iran, as a manipulation of the aforementioned Israeli intelligence training of SAVAK. However, the role Israel played in training this brutal Iranian secret police for several decades in fact created conditions under which Khomeini's followers could (with no trace of anti-Semitism) reasonably see Israel as an enemy.

Phase 5: The 'stage of mobilisation' and the Iranian Islamic Revolution (December 1978–February 1979)

As already mentioned, Paul Roe suggests that the political audience involved a distinct two-stage process: a 'stage of identification' and a 'stage of mobilisation'. The identification stage was achieved in Phase 1 with the Khordad Uprising of 1963. Phase 5 then is the 'stage of mobilisation'.[105] In December 1978, Vered sent another telegram describing the events in Tehran and the winds of

[102] Author's interview with Eliezer (Geizi) Tzafrir, 26 July 2017, Ramat Hashron, Israel.
[103] Author's interview with Reoven Merhav, 23 July 2017, Jerusalem, Israel.
[104] Vered to Prime Minster office; re: Iran–Israel relations, ISA–mfa–IT3–000m7wf /268/ 19 December 1978.
[105] Roe, 'Actor, audience(s) and emergency measures', p. 622.

change. She wrote that the opposition's activities against Israel and Israeli representatives in Tehran had escalated. Khomeini's manifesto stated that 'if any Israeli visits Iran asking for oil, all Muslims must expel and kill him'.[106] At the end of her telegram, Vered then turned to assess the state of the Iranian Jews, stating, 'the Jews are not an object of the opposition. A few religious leaders from the city of Shiraz have claimed the Jews are a protected religious minority in Iran.' Perhaps the most significant turn, however, was, as noted by Vered, that 'Khomeini himself has published a manifesto which attacked Israel, but stated that the Iranian Jews must be protected'.[107]

After Khomeini's conspiracist propaganda against the Iranian Jews, Israel, and Zionism between 1963 and 1964, portraying them as a Zionist fifth column in Iran, what could explain this apparent change in attitude? The application of our conceptual framework would be helpful here. As the reallocation of power between the Shah and Khomeini was more evident in late 1978, it could be argued that a more pragmatic approach vis-à-vis the Jews reflects the delegitimisation of Khomeini's conspiracy narrative of Jewish power. A related argument would be that, as Khomeini got closer to power, he wanted to send a message of tolerance to all Iranian minorities regarding the policies of his regime, thus delegitimising his conspiracy narrative from early 1960 until 1978, in order to recruit the members of these minorities for his planned coup.

Turning to MFA archival documents, Vered also reported that some of the leaders of the Iranian Jews had met with one 'Talharni', whose full name is not mentioned in the ISA records but is known to be Ayatollah Sayyid Mahmoud Taleqani, who had close relations with Jewish leaders and indeed served as Khomeini's right-hand man before his return to Iran. After the meeting, this group of Jews formally identified itself as the 'Intellectual Jewish Committee' and issued a manifesto that supported the struggle of the Iranian people and condemned Zionism and Israel. Vered concluded: 'the Jews who signed this manifesto think it's an "insurance policy for their safety", much like the Armenian–Iranians who signed a similar manifesto'.[108]

Phase 6: De-securitisation: Khomeini's changing attitude towards American and Iranian Jews

As described by Lior Sternfeld, in late 1978, a delegation from the Iranian-Jewish community travelled to Paris to meet Khomeini with the aim of gaining initial recognition from him and making sure that Jews would not be labelled as enemies of the revolution.[109] While Sternfeld reveals that the meeting with Khomeini was initiated by the delegation, ISA documents add another layer to this development, confirming that further meetings followed as part of the thawing of relations between the Jews and Khomeini, but this time on the initiative of the latter. On 14 February 1979, there was a meeting in the United States between Shahriyar Rouhani and American Jewish organisations, as reported by Zvi Rafiah, who was Minister-Counsellor at the Israeli Embassy in Washington DC between 1973 and 1979, serving as the liaison for the Embassy with both Houses of the US Congress.[110] Rafiah noted that Rouhani was Khomeini's representative in the US, according to a message sent from Jerusalem to Rafiah: 'As with the Shah, Rouhani has tried to meet several high-ranking Jewish officials given the importance Khomeini's people are giving to the United States, American public opinion and the importance of American Jews.'[111] The Israeli official further stated:

> We are kindly asking you to emphasise to the Jewish organisations that this is a point in time that is a test to the new Iranian regime, not just with regard to its attitude to Iranian Jews but also to the relations with Israel, and the oil supply.[112]

[106] Vered to the Prime Minster's office; re: Iran, ISA–mfa–IT3–000m7wf /290/19 December 1978, pp. 1–3.
[107] Ibid., p. 1.
[108] Ibid., p. 3.
[109] Sternfeld 'The Revolution's forgotten sons and daughters', p. 867.
[110] Washington to Jerusalem; re: Iran, ISA–mfa–IT3–000m7wf/217/14 February 1979.
[111] Jerusalem to Washington, ISA–mfa–IT3–000m7wf/6690/15 February 1979.
[112] Ibid.

Khomeini's initiative in the United States entailed a continued softening of his position towards the Iranian Jews, as discussed earlier in this article, thus highlighting that he was actually quite pragmatic in his attitude towards the United States and proved able to switch policies as he came closer to power. This document must be treated with caution, however, as it was written from the point of view of the Israeli MFA and may have given Khomeini's initiative too much weight because the Israelis were still hoping that the new regime would appreciate their investments in Iran and especially continue the supply of oil. Nevertheless, in keeping with the theoretical framework, Khomeini's trend towards softening his attitude vis-à-vis the Iranian and American Jews shows how he delegitimised the conspiracy narratives as he got closer to power. It should be stressed here that Khomeini's pragmatism in this context was still somewhat anti-Semitic, in that it appeared to be predicated on the assumption that American Jews and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) lobbying group influenced US decision-making. That said, the flexibility Khomeini demonstrated when it came to the conspiracy narratives surrounding the American Jews shows that his position was more of a means to an end (the Islamic Revolution), which could be adjusted to different political circumstances.

Conclusions: Methodological nationalism and the epistemology of securitisation

This article has focused on how methodological nationalism has impeded scholars of Israeli–Iranian relations from exploring Khomeini's crucial role in the securitization of the 1979 revolution, despite his non–traditional involvement in security matters. This article has showed that oversimplified national narratives fail to capture the nuanced dynamics and evolving nature of Israel–Iran relations before 1979 and the role of a highly significant, yet overlooked, security actor, despite his non-traditional role in security matters, namely Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The non-linear characteristics of securitisation and the ability to go beyond overemphasising the methodological nationalism bias and politics of history-writing were crucial elements in this article that aimed to contribute to a re-evaluation of the role of Khomeini as a security actor. This article's argument seeks to broaden the empirical focus of securitisation studies on Cold War history and has made three distinct contributions to the scholarly literature: theoretical, methodological, and empirical.

Methodologically, the fact that the theoretical framework developed by the CS and the critical turn in security studies was coined and developed in the post–Cold War world is a relevant factor in most of the contemporary case studies that have attempted to apply this framework. With some exceptions, which examined ST in the context of historical episodes, the framework is almost always applied in the context of institutionalised Eurocentrism. And yet connecting the framework to the methodological nationalism bias and the setting of the Cold War in the Middle East actually shows great promise for the study of securitisation processes. These settings include, for instance, the various successful attempts at revolutions and military coups during the Cold War in Turkey, Syria, and Egypt, which are currently under-researched in terms of the securitisation processes employed there.

This valuable process requires social scientists, especially security scholars, to consult formal archival records which contain important traces of securitisation moves. Moreover, elite interviews can help trace the response of the political audience to securitisation moves, as the interviews with security officials such as Tzafrir and Merhav demonstrated.[113] Methodologically, the fact that some digital collections in the Anglophone world – i.e. the United Kingdom and United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand – provide access to significant parts of their Cold War history,

[113]On this discussion, see Andrew Hammond, 'Through a glass, darkly: The CIA and oral history', *History: The Journal of the Historical Association*, 100:340 (2015), pp. 313–14; Ben Aharon, 'Doing oral history', pp. 6–10; and, more recently, Eldad Ben Aharon, 'Methodological and epistemological reflections on elite interviews and the study of Israel's intelligence history: Interview with Efraim Halevy', *Intelligence and National Security*, 38:1 (2023), pp. 111–27.

alongside these countries' relations with non-liberal regimes, makes these records fruitful sources for research by scholars of critical security studies. This not only pertains to filling a scholarly gap but also carries policy implications. It is crucial to comprehend the extent of the animosity between Khomeini and Israel dating back to the 1960s, as it is an important factor in the long-standing securitisation and counter-securitisation dynamics between Iran and Israel. These dynamics did not solely emerge in 1979 but were in fact present as early as the 1960s, when Khomeini exerted influence on Israel–Iran relations from his opposition position. The case study presented in this article could also shed vital light on recent (2023) analogous revolutionary contexts, such as the securitisation and counter-securitisation between Vladimir Putin and Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner Group commanders. Much like Khomeini in the 1964, Prigozhin was sent to exile in Belarus when Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko, agreed to accept him, thus serving as Putin's political audience.[114] Coincidentally, since writing these lines, Prigozhin tragically lost his life in a mysterious plane crash, prompting American authorities to suspect potential involvement by Putin, which raises questions about the dynamics of counter-securitization in Putin's context.[115]

Empirically, this article has shown that scholars of critical security studies should be alert to security speeches that include anti-Semitic references and references to so-called Jewish power. For one thing, it helps to establish the conspiracy narrative of theological anti-Semitism, which can be appealing and convincing to different popular audiences – the political audience – in Middle Eastern Muslim countries. Secondly, the way in which it is also framed as a Western conspiracy speaks to the non-religious political audience and even left-wing anti-imperialist political groups. This is exactly what can be taken from Khomeini's security speech and from Mike Wallace's interview with the Shah when he first tried to appeal to the political audience. It is likely that given the triumph of the 1979 revolution after using such anti-Semitic discourse, many other Islamist leaders – such as Necmettin Erbakan – as well as military generals who led military coups – such as Hafez al-Assad and Gamal Abdel Nasser – were inspired to do the same.

Theoretically, this article has contributed to the ongoing debate about the audience acceptance in securitisation processes. Specifically, it underlined the importance of the political audience when it comes to popular support in a revolutionary context. Utilising anti-imperialist and anti-Semitic discourse is not only important in terms of the empirical evidence and the case studies, but also in helping develop a better grasp of how political and legal audiences compete with each other in a zero-sum game with a revolutionary climax. This article has demonstrated that, in the context of revolutionary momentum, it is likely that the legal audience that supports the dictator will be pragmatic, and it would not be overstated to argue that the legal audience can even undertake its own securitisation move and try to take power. This is shown in Lubrani's report of his conversation with the Deputy Inspector General of the Iranian Police, revealing how the reports from the Iranian intelligence community did not inform the Shah that the situation was so serious as to call into question the survival of his administration. This is clear empirical evidence that helps us to build a theoretical understanding about how the competition between the political audience and the legal audience works.

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[114]Pjotr Sauer, 'Belarusian leader confirms arrival of exiled Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin', *The Guardian* (27 June 2023), available at: {https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/27/belarus-exiled-wagner-chief-yevgeny-prigozhin-russia-ukraine}.

[115]available at: {https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/24/wagner-fighters-gather-at-makeshift-memorial-to-yevgeny-prigozhin}.

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