



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (l) and Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, 2019. Photo: Reuters/ Corinna Kern

# The Audience in Securitization Theory

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For several years, securitization theory, or the Copenhagen School, as it is frequently labeled, has been at the forefront of international relations theory with an advanced conceptualization of security. This article contributes to the discourse by conceptualizing the audience, which is a main component in securitization theory but is one of the least developed concepts in its initial formulation. Acknowledging that perception and misperception have a prominent role in understanding world politics, the article proposes a convergence between political psychology and securitization theory that assists scholars in identifying the relevant audiences during securitization processes, as described by the Copenhagen School. The new conceptualization focuses on two areas for identifying the relevant audience. First are the state's rules, and thus an entity becomes a legal audience by the power of law. Second is the political perception of the securitizing actor and/or audience, and thus an entity becomes a political audience. While the conceptual framework offered by this article is not complete, it enhances the theoretical understanding of the audience component during the securitization process.

*Keywords:* securitization theory, security studies, international relations, political psychology, perception and misperception, audience

## Introduction

Securitization theory is one of the leading contemporary theories in international relations (IR), describing the process of how normal policy issues are transformed into security issues. Nevertheless, although the Copenhagen School's original approach has enhanced the theoretical understanding of the construction of security issues (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998), there are still elements in the theory that require development. Chief among these is the audience component, which has an essential role in any successful securitization act (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998; Balzacq, 2005; Roe, 2008; Leonard & Kaunert, 2011; Cote, 2016). In this vein, Balzacq, Leonard, and Ruzicka (2016, p. 499) suggest that "as long as the criteria of the audience remains unspecified, it will be difficult for researchers to establish the merits of one explanation over another."

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Embracing the argument, this article argues that the audience dimension deserves further attention, especially in relation to the question of how to identify who the relevant audiences are that must be persuaded for performing a successful securitization move. The main goal here is to enhance the theoretical understanding of the audience component during the securitization process, and help scholars identify which audiences the securitizing actor must target for conducting a successful securitization act, and more importantly, why some audiences are essential to securitization while others are not.

It is difficult to explain international politics without understanding the decision maker's political perception of the environment (Jervis, 2017, p. xviii), and thus the phenomenon of perception and misperception plays a prominent

role in understanding world politics and in identifying the audience component during the securitization process. The contention here is that legitimacy to securitize stems from two bases. The first is each state's rules within securitization, which thereby transform an entity into a formal audience. The second is the political perception of the securitizing actor and/or audience, which transforms an entity into a political audience. While the conceptual framework offered by this article is not complete, it enhances the theoretical understanding of the audience component during the securitization process. The typology can also be applied to other contexts, but its uniqueness lies in its emergence from securitization theory and the fact that to date such a typology has not appeared in the literature.

## The Audience Component in Securitization Theory

Securitization theory was developed in the broader attempt to redefine the concept of security, as it introduces a wider security perception that comprises not only military security but also political, societal, economic, and environmental security. In adopting a constructivist approach to the study of security, securitization theory, which was developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde from the so-called Copenhagen School (CS), explores the process in which social entities transform issues into security threats (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998). While Levy (2021) claims that securitization is about transforming non-traditional and non-military issues into security threats to justify exceptional domestic measures, the basic argument presented in this article is that all security issues, including those related to the military realm (where a military threat is introduced or characterized as more severe and existential in order to base the legitimacy for using extreme measures), have the potential to be securitized (Kaunert & Wertman, 2020). Thus, issues not related to the military realm can also be perceived

as existential threats, for instance, migration (Leonard & Kaunert, 2019; Baker-Beall, 2019), lack of water sources (Stetter et al., 2011), and pandemics and diseases (Elbe, 2006; Sjostedt, 2011; McInnes & Rushton, 2011; Kamradt-Scott & McInnes, 2012; Hanrieder & Kreuder-Sonnen, 2014; Michael, 2020; Kaunert, Leonard, & Wertman, 2022). Recognizing that military, political, societal, economic, and environmental issues have the potential to be securitized, the main idea of securitization is to lay the infrastructure and legitimacy for taking extraordinary measures once a threat is perceived as existential. The “existential threat” is a code name of sorts for a particularly severe and acute threat that threatens the foundations of the existing order and therefore requires and justifies the taking of extraordinary measures.

There are three principal components in securitization theory: (1) the referent object: what is seen to be existentially threatened and has a legitimate claim to survive; (2) the securitizing actor: an actor that securitizes 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 threatened (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998). One of the substantial contributions of securitization theory is the way in which the concept of security is perceived. In contrast to the realist concept that perceives threats objectively (there is a “real” threat), securitization theory adopts a constructivist approach to security. Thus, securitization theory perceives threats as a social construct built on a speech act (Waever, 1995) and/or practices (Bigo, 2002; Leonard, 2010). Arguing that threats are not “real” but “perceived,” securitization theory focuses on the process of how issues intersubjectively transform into security threats. In other words, an issue becomes a security threat not because it constitutes an objective threat to the referent object, but rather because an audience accepts the securitizing actor’s position that the issue constitutes an existential threat to the referent

object. In that sense, it is impossible to verify completely whether a threat is “real” or not, as securitization theory focuses on the process of how issues transform into security threats and how those issues are perceived.

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The securitizing actor is the element that securitizes issues by declaring that the referent object is existentially threatened by an outside source. In order to perform the role of securitizing actor, this element must be perceived as an epistemic authority that has an impact on the audience and convinces it that a certain issue constitutes a security threat to the referent object (Michael, 2009). While the actors that commonly fill this role are political leaders, governments (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 40), and the military in cases like Israel (Michael, 2009), other actors, such as the media (McDonald, 2008), NGOs, and environmental groups (Trombetta, 2011), can also raise an issue as a security threat.

The audience is the element that must be persuaded that the referent object is existentially threatened. According to the Copenhagen School, an issue is successfully securitized when an audience both agrees with the securitizing actor’s claim that the issue is an existential threat to the referent object, and supports the securitizing actor’s suggestion to use extraordinary measures to confront the threat (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 25). While the general public or the parliament most frequently fills the audience role, there are cases of other figures—the media, for example—performing that role (Salter & Mutlu, 2013). Although sometimes the securitization process is not publicly available but covert, there is always an audience that must be convinced by the securitizing actor for executing a securitization act (Salter & Mutlu,

2013). While the audience component can be a combination of several audiences (Leonard & Kaunert, 2011; Salter, 2008), Balzacq (2005) argues that the securitizing actor is sensitive to two kinds of support, formal and moral. For example, in the case of launching a war, the audience's moral support from the public is important, while the government needs the formal support of the relevant institution that legally mandates the government to execute a military action (Balzacq, 2005, pp. 184-185). The case of Britain's decision to join the United States in the war against Iraq in 2003 is an example of the formal decision by the parliament that is necessary and sufficient; in other cases, this could be mirrored by another institutional body that mandates the government to adopt a specific policy (Roe, 2008). Nevertheless, the audience is not merely an element that authorizes/rejects the securitizing actor's securitization move. In fact, the audience is an active agent, capable of having a meaningful effect on the intersubjective construction of security values. Thus, the audience also has the ability to influence securitization processes and the policies selected to address perceived threats (Cote, 2016).

Some scholars reject the importance of the audience component during the securitization process. Based on Balzacq's (2005) argument that securitization cannot simultaneously operate as an illocutionary speech act and be dependent on the speech act's acceptance by the relevant audience, Floyd (2011, 2016) rejects the role of the audience. According to Floyd, "the audience is not an analytical concept, but rather a normative concept in analytical disguise, which is to say that it does not stem from actual empirical observation of how politics operates but rather from Ole Waever's view of how politics, including security policy, should be done" (Floyd, 2011, pp. 428-429). Although Floyd asserts that the audience component should be overlooked from securitization analysis, this article supports the claim by Cote (2016, p. 543), whereby Floyd's

opinion represents a selective reading of the CS. Thus, this article agrees with those who contend that the audience is in fact an important element in securitization theory, as its approval or acceptance is essential to execution of a securitization act (Buzan et al., 1998; Balzacq, 2005; Roe, 2008; Leonard & Kaunert, 2011; Cote, 2016). However, how can one identify who/what performs the audience's role during the securitization process, and explain why some audiences are essential for securitization to occur while others are not? Some scholars have tried to decipher this conundrum by suggesting different conceptualizations of the audience element.

Leonard & Kaunert (2011, pp. 65-68) suggest categorizing the audience into three different streams, "problem," "policy," and "politics," with each characterized by specific participants. In the "problem" stream, the audience role is performed by other decision makers involved in the policymaking process. In the "policy" stream, the audience role is performed by specialists and technocrats, who tend to be convinced by arguments based on knowledge, rationality, and efficiency. In the "politics" stream, the audience role is performed by the decision making process and the general public. Thus, this stream comprises elements such as public mood, pressure groups, popular campaigns, and election results, which may have an important impact on whether policy proposals are adopted. To illustrate their audience model, Leonard & Kaunert (2011, p. 74) use the case of the British proposal in 2003 to establish transit processing centers for asylum seekers outside the EU. According to Leonard & Kaunert, this securitization failed because the British government did not manage to persuade the audience in all three respective streams ("problem": other members of government and political elites; "policy": specialist and technocrats working on the issue of asylum in the British government circles; "politics": other governments from the EU and significant segments of the EU public opinion).



In contrast, Salter (2008) suggests a different model that distinguishes between four types of audiences, which he describes as settings. The four settings are “elite,” “technocratic,” “scientific,” and “popular,” each operating based on different logics of persuasion. According to Salter: “Using dramaturgical analysis, we suggest that securitizing moves take place within different sociological settings that operate with unique rules, norms, and practices” (Salter, 2008, p. 321). Hence, Salter argues, “Rather than classify securitizing moves as comedies, tragedies, and histories, we can classify them according to the setting....Each of these settings structures the speaker–audience relationship of knowledge and authority, the weight of social context, and the success of the securitizing move. The setting of a securitizing act includes the stage on which it is made, the genre in which it is made, the audience to which it is pitched, and the reception of the audience” (Salter, 2008, p. 328). To illustrate his model, Salter asserts that the securitization of Total Information Awareness (TIA) in 2003 failed because it was not supported by all the relevant audiences. Thus, although it was supported by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld (elite), Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (technocratic), and the review committee (scientific), it was rejected by the US Senate (popular), and therefore the securitization move failed (Salter, 2011).

### Shortcomings in Audience Conceptualizations

Previous conceptualizations (Balzacq, 2005; Salter, 2008; Leonard & Kaunert, 2011; Cote, 2016) have enhanced the theoretical understanding of securitization theory in general and the audience dimension in particular. Nonetheless, this article contends that the audience component deserves further development. In essence, all models introduce a very vague description of the audience component, without offering any mechanism to identify why a specific actor performs the role of the audience during the

securitization process while others do not. In addition, the models cited above do not explain why a specific audience’s support is essential for securitization to occur, while acceptance by others is not vital for securitization.

Although Balzacq (2005) was the first to suggest the separation between formal and moral audiences, he did not provide a mechanism that identifies who/what the relevant audiences are. Furthermore, Balzacq argues (2011, p. 35) that it may be difficult to identify the relevant audience precisely as long as different political regimes tolerate and value different kinds of audiences. Consequently, there is a need to develop a comprehensive audience conceptualization that identifies who the relevant audiences are that must be persuaded for conducting securitization. Finally, although he mentions the essential aspect of the formal support over the moral one for successful securitization, Balzacq does not adequately address the legitimacy factor, which is what the audience provides to the securitizing actor when the former supports the security policy of the latter. In that context, Balzacq did not mention what is the source of this legitimacy and whether it stems from the laws of the state, or whether perhaps legitimacy for securitization is the outgrowth of another source. Cote’s audience conceptualization (2016, pp. 551-552) indeed characterizes the audience as an active participant in securitization processes. However, despite its substantive contribution to the theoretical understanding of the audience, this conceptual framework also lacks the ability to indicate who the relevant audiences are that must be persuaded in order to successfully execute a securitization act.

Another noteworthy shortcoming stems from both Salter’s (2008) and Leonard & Kaunert’s (2011) models, in which there is a theoretical possibility of multiple audiences that the securitizing actor must convince during the securitization process. In positing several kinds of audiences that operate on respective logics of persuasion, Salter (2008)

asserts that the threshold for securitization varies according to the setting. In essence, Salter's conceptual framework of the audience component introduces different practical ways of how to "speak" with each "audience." Moreover, while "there are four key settings for these securitizing moves[,] this is not to say that, in other contexts, more settings are not possible, but rather that the four settings are the fewest number of categories that allow for significant differentiation" (Salter, 2008, p. 330). Hence, according to Salter, there can be a large number of audiences. A similar argument occurs in Leonard & Kaunert's (2011) conceptualization, which also suggests several kinds of audiences (problem, policy, and politics), each characterized by specific participants. However, the article suggests that the situation of multiple audiences can be a bottomless pit, as theoretically, there can be a very large number of audiences. Yet in reality, the securitizing actor cannot deal with numerous audiences and therefore he/she must focus on those necessary to be convinced for conducting securitization. Moreover, the models suggested by both Salter (2008) and Leonard & Kaunert (2011) do not explain why each specific audience's support is essential for securitization to occur, while others' acceptance is not vital for securitization.

### **Toward a New Audience Conceptualization: Two Basic Assumptions**

After a critical analysis of notable conceptual frameworks of the audience (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998; Balzacq, 2005, 2011a; Salter, 2008; Leonard & Kaunert, 2011; Cote, 2016), this article argues that all lack the ability to recognize who the pertinent audiences are that must be convinced for executing a successful securitization act. In addition, they do not provide an explanation regarding why those audiences are pertinent for the securitization process while others are not. To develop such a comprehensive conceptualization for the

audience component, two important aspects must be considered.

The first is what kind of legitimacy those audiences, formal and moral, as suggested by Balzacq (2005), actually grant the securitizing actor with their support, and what the sources of the legitimacy are. For example, does the legitimization for securitization derive solely from the consent of the official institutions of the state, which received their status in accordance with the laws of the state? Or does the legitimacy emanate from other sources, regardless of the laws of the state? In this context, it seems that Balzacq meant that the legitimacy of the formal audience emanates from the state laws, arguing that "states can do without the UN Security Council, but need the support of their legislative branch to launch a military action" (Balzacq, 2005, p. 185). However, it is unclear what the source of legitimacy of the moral audience is and what are the criteria by which the moral audience is selected. The theoretical literature of securitization theory has no answer to this question.

Second, an audience conceptualization framework must recognize that each country and society has different culture, norms, and rules. Thus, while it is the parliament that gives the formal support for the securitization act in Western states, e.g., Britain's decision to join the US in the war in Iraq (Roe, 2008), there are states where the religious elite also has the authority/legitimacy to decide security matters. For instance, after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, Saudi Arabia's King Fahd realized that the Iraqi army posed an existential threat to his kingdom and therefore needed the protection of the US military. However, to decide on the entry of foreign troops into his kingdom, he had to consult with the Saudi religious establishment and obtain an Islamic *fatwa*, which authorized the entrance of half a million American soldiers into Saudi Arabia (Gold, 2003, pp. 157-158). In that sense, a comprehensive conceptual framework of the audience component must

have the ability to analyze different types of regimes. Moreover, it must recognize that each country has different kinds of institutions that legitimize the country's security agenda. Thus, the new conceptualization moves the audience component beyond the democratic or Westphalian straitjacket, which previous theories of securitization have been accused of wearing (Wilkinson, 2007).

After considering these two aspects, the next step involves elaborating on the arguments of Balzacq (2005), who asserts that there are two kinds of support, formal and moral, and Cote (2016), who claims that the audience is in fact an active element within the securitization process. To expand Balzacq's model, this article argues that the legitimacy of each type of audience originates from two sources: (1) state rules and (2) political perception.

## The Audiences and their Sources for Legitimacy

As the CS seminal framework suggested, to successfully conduct a securitization act, the securitizing actor must obtain the support of the audience to the greatest extent possible. Thus, this audience provides the securitizing actor legitimacy to execute its securitization policy (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, 1998). In that sense, support for securitization means that the audience agrees with (or does not oppose) the securitizing actor's claim that an issue is an existential threat to the referent object. In addition, the audience also consents (or does not reject) the extraordinary measures for eliminating the threat suggested by the securitizing actor. In terms of Roe's two stages of securitization process, the audience gives its support to both the "stage of identification" and the "stage of mobilization" (Roe, 2008). Practically, as Olesker (2018) argues, this legitimacy to securitize is in fact a source of political power that provides the ability to act politically, and without it, securitization cannot take effect.

This article suggests that the legitimacy for securitization stems from two sources, with each

impacting on two different audiences during the securitization process: the state, which governs the impact on the identity of the legal audience; and the political perception of the securitizing actor and/or the audience that impacts on the identity of the political audience. Although Balzacq (2005) uses different adjectives for the two types of audience, "formal" and "moral," the new conceptual framework of the audience uses other terms, namely, legal and political, which better reflect the source of the legitimacy of each audience.

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## Legal Audience

The legal audience's legitimacy for securitization stems from the rules of each state, which in practice inform the securitizing actor from which entity he must obtain the support for his securitization policy. Overall, each state has its own laws that clearly define which body has the authority to order any kind of act. Thus, based on the laws of the state, the securitizing actor knows from whom he should receive support to execute his securitization act. International law has also a prominent role regarding this type of audience. Therefore, one must consider whether the relevant state holds a monist position, in which the domestic and international legal systems form a unity, or a dualist position, whereby only national law exists as a law.

The example of the Oslo Accords illustrates the role of the legal audience well. In terms of securitization theory, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (securitizing actor), who perceived the bi-national state option as an existential threat to the State of Israel (referent object), argued that to eliminate this threat, Israel must

separate from the Palestinians. Therefore, the Oslo Accords (extraordinary measures) were Rabin's platform for creating an autonomy for the Palestinian people in the territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which in practice would create a full separation between Israel and the Palestinians (Wertman, 2021). Yet in order to successfully securitize the bi-national state scenario, Rabin had to obtain the support of the Israeli government, which had the legal authority to approve an Israeli withdrawal from the territories. Without the government's support, the Oslo Accords would not have any legal validity and the State of Israel could not actually execute and implement any agreement.<sup>1</sup> Hence, in terms of securitization theory, the government performed the role of the legal audience, since its legitimacy derives from the laws of the State of Israel. While the term legal audience may be construed as persons engaging in legal matters, such as legal counsel, the interpretation and intention of this article regarding the term is to those individuals/bodies whose acceptance is legally necessary to execute a securitization act.

Hence, this article defines the legal audience as *an entity that according to the state's rules has the legal authority to execute the relevant securitization act. Without this audience's support, the securitizing actor does not have the legal ability and legitimacy to conduct that relevant securitization act.*

### **Political Audience**

While state laws allow certain bodies to approve the securitization act, there are times when the securitizing actor obtains support from other entities as well. However, it is unclear what the source of legitimacy of those other entities is, if their approval is also necessary for conducting securitization. At first thought, it seems that it is very important to gain support from the general public, especially though not necessarily in a democratic regime, in order to execute a securitization act. However, particularly in the military realm, there are instances where the

securitizing actor does not seek to obtain public approval before launching security policies—mainly because some of the security decisions are covert and unknown to the general public in real time due to fear of operational risk. Hence, the conundrum is what legitimates other types of audiences, whose approval is not essential for implementing security policies according to state laws.

Here the recourse is to elements from political psychology. According to McDermott (2004, p. 1), “accurate representations of the world around us demonstrate the link between politics and psychology in deep and myriad ways.” Thus, McDermott (2004, p. 2) suggests that the combination of politics and psychology “can provide additional purchase in topics that include the study of political leadership, political judgment and decision making.” In this vein, this article recognizes that the phenomenon of perception and misperception has a prominent role in understanding world politics, as it would be difficult to explain international politics without understanding the decision maker's political perception of the environment (Jervis, 2017, p. xviii). Consequently, this element also has a prominent role in identifying other kinds of audiences during the securitization process.

According to psychology literature, “perception” is the process of apprehending by means of the senses and recognizing and interpreting what is processed. Psychologists think of perception as a single unified awareness derived from sensory processes while a stimulus is present, and hence it is the basis for understanding, learning, and knowing the motivation for action (Stein, 2013, p. 365). As such, decisions are often shaped in fundamental ways by both the perception people have of the situation they face and the understanding people have regarding what sort of actions produce what sorts of outcomes (Herrmann, 2013, p. 356). Moreover, given that people differ in their beliefs and their perceptions of the world in general and of other actors in particular, they perceive and behave differently in the same



situation (Jervis, 2017, p. 29), e.g., the perception of whether an issue is a threat or not. The same goes with one's political understanding, as every actor within the political spectrum holds its own political view and perception (Jervis, 2017, p. 107). Thus, as individual leaders have a causal impact on outcomes, the counterfactual implication is that if a different individual with different characteristics had occupied a key leadership position, the outcome might very well have been different (Levi, 2013, pp. 302-303). Indeed, Cohen (2018, p. 205), who argues that "who is in charge makes a difference," concludes that the identity of individual leaders clearly matters. In that sense, Cohen indicates that some leaders "swung their respective countries in very different directions than other leaders might have done."

This article contends 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. Therefore, although the securitizing actor is technically able to execute its securitization policy only with the legal audience's support, it often strives to obtain support and legitimacy from an entity that it perceives as necessary for securitization. The policy of the US administration prior to the 1991 Gulf War illustrates this argument. In order to end the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait by military means, President George W. H. Bush wished to obtain the support of the UN, and especially the support of the Soviet Union, perceiving them both as necessary. Bush believed that international support would provide legitimacy to the planned attack against Saddam Hussein's regime (Ross, 2007, p. 87). Although the US President could have attacked Iraq without any endorsement from the international community, he perceived its support as essential for conducting a military operation. Therefore, Bush needed to convince this audience to successfully execute a securitization act. Nevertheless, in

the same situation, a different securitizing actor (a different US president) could have thought differently and might have waged an extraordinary measure (military operation in Iraq) without the support of the international community.

Another example is the Israeli destruction of the Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007. In practice, the State of Israel could have demolished the al-Kibar reactor in Syria without the approval of the US government, as it did in 1981, when Israeli Prime Minister Menahem Begin ordered the destruction of the Iraqi nuclear reactor without informing the Reagan administration in advance (Nakdimon, 2007; Reagan, 1990). However, it seems that the lack of objection by US President George W. Bush had an impact on Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's decision to attack the Syrian reactor in 2007 (Katz, 2019; Olmert, 2018; Abrams, 2013; Wertman, 2022). In both cases, those nuclear reactors were perceived as an existential threat to the State of Israel, and therefore the Israeli leadership decided to demolish them. However, while the former securitizing actor (Begin) did not perceive the US government as a political audience, the latter (Olmert) significantly considered Washington's support (or its lack of resistance) as essential for executing an identical securitization act.

Nevertheless, it is not just the securitizing actor who decides what the pertinent audience is that must be persuaded for securitization to be successful. In fact, the audience component has the same ability: the audience is an active element that participates in the process and influence on the construction of security (Cote, 2016). Furthermore, as with the securitizing actor, the audience has its own political perception. Hence, the audience has also the ability to decide from which entity legitimacy for securitization is required. Moreover, since the audience is the figure that accepts/rejects securitization, it is able to stipulate its support for the securitization act with the support of another entity. The Israeli government's decision making process prior to the Six Day

War illustrates this argument. In mid-May 1967, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser ordered his army both to cross to the eastern side of the Suez Canal and to impose a siege on the Straits of Tiran against Israeli ships, claiming in public that his goal was the destruction of Israel. As a result, the Israeli Defense Forces perceived that the Egyptian army constituted an existential threat to the State of Israel (referent object). In order to eradicate this security threat, the IDF proposed to the Israeli government, which was the legal entity empowered to authorize the IDF to execute a war, execution of a preemptive attack against Egypt (extraordinary measures). The Israeli government agreed with the IDF's argument that the concentration of Egyptian forces was indeed an existential threat to the State of Israel. However, the government stated that without the US administration's support it would not be possible to launch a war against Egypt. In other words, the Israeli perspective was that any significant military action must be coordinated in advance with Washington. Thus, for the first time in its history, the Israeli leadership decided that it should coordinate its positions with the United States, even if the decision was related to Israel's security and existence (Gluska, 2016; Golan, 2017; Oren, 2002; Rabin, 1979; Bregman, 2016). In the theoretical context of the audience, in order to securitize the Egyptian army, the support of the Israeli government was essential according to Israeli law. Hence, the Israeli government performed the role of the legal audience, but conditioned its support for securitization on the demand that for any preemptive attack against Egypt, Israel receive the US administration's approval. Therefore, since the legal audience (Israeli government) perceived a US endorsement to be necessary for securitization, the administration performed the role of the political audience.

Against this background, this article defines the political audience as *an entity whose support for (or lack of objection to) securitization is not required according to state rules yet is perceived by the securitizing actor*

*and/or audience as an essential condition for successfully performing a securitization act. Without the political audience's support (or its lack of resistance), the securitizing actor and/or audience thinks that there is not sufficient legitimacy to conduct securitization.*

In the case of 1967, the Israeli government actually filled a dual role in the securitization process prior to the Six Day War. On the one hand, the Eshkol government played the role of legal audience in the first securitization process when the IDF served as the securitizing actor. On the other hand, the government performed the role of the securitizing actor when it sought to obtain the support of the US administration, which performed the role of the political audience. This phenomenon can be defined as a "positional duality" during the securitization process, which illustrates how the same figure/entity can perform two different roles in two separate but parallel dimensions of securitization. As such, positional duality, which emphasizes the potential complexity of the securitization process in several instances, provides fertile ground for future research in order to delve into the process in which threats are socially constructed, and consider how the common players act to conduct securitization.

### ***Case Study: Austria-Hungary Securitization of Serbia prior to World War I***

Although not contemporary, the following case study is an empirical illustration of the Austro-Hungarian securitization of Serbia, which led to the outbreak of the First World War, and demonstrates the new conceptualization of the audience (Kaunert & Wertman, 2022).

The Austro-Hungarian Empire, with its fifty million citizens from eleven different nationalities, ruled over what is currently Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, northeast Italy, and part of Poland (Hastings, 2013, p. 52). The dual monarchy, which aspired to defend its position as a great power in Europe, perceived Serbia as

an existential threat. The Austrian-Hungarian leadership feared that a strong Slavic state in the Balkan area would cultivate national aspirations among the Slavic citizens and eventually lead to the dual monarchy's disintegration. Hence, the Empire's leadership assumed that the destruction of Serbia and its annexation was an appropriate means to eliminate this threat (MacMillan, 2013, p. 443; McMeekin, 2013, pp. 24-25). However, Serbia's big brother, the Russian Empire, posed a great challenge for Austria-Hungary, as its massive territory and unlimited manpower made the Russian army an opponent that the Austro-Hungarian military would not be able to defeat. For that reason, the dual alliance between Austria-Hungary and Germany made sure that the former could rely on the latter's assistance in case of a Russian attack (Kronenbitter, 2009, p. 36; McMeekin, 2013, p. 40).

Austria-Hungary also had its own domestic political constraints. Starting from 1867, the compromise (*ausgleich*) was the constitutional basis for the dual monarchy's political structure, and Austria-Hungary was in fact composed of two separate states. Each had its own parliament and government, responsible for most aspects of domestic policies and a great deal of economic affairs. Austria-Hungary's diplomacy was steered by a foreign minister, who presided over the Common Ministerial Council, the highest-ranking body of decision makers in the Empire. However, neither parliament had authority over foreign affairs policy, which together—with the command of the armed forces—were the sole prerogative of the Emperor (Kaiser), who was advised by the common ministers and the prime ministers. Moreover, Austro-Hungarian foreign policy was determined by the Emperor, who had the authority to appoint the prime ministers and veto legislation, and in particular, to decide whether to declare a war (Kronenbitter, 2009, p. 29; Clark, 2013, pp. 65-66, 99-100). Hence, in terms of securitization theory, since Kaiser Franz Joseph had the legal authority to approve

any military act according to the Empire's constitution, he performed the role of the legal audience.

In practice, the assassination on June 28, 1914 of the Austrian Crown Prince, Franz Ferdinand, was a pretext for successfully securitizing the Serbian issue and for conducting a war against Serbia (Hastings, 2013, p. 27). Within a few days of the murder, a consensus formed among the key Austrian decision makers, headed by Foreign Minister Berchtold and the military Chief of Staff, Conrad, that only a military action would solve the problem of the monarchy's relations with Serbia (Kershaw, 2015, p. 48; MacMillan, 2013, p. 505; McMeekin, 2013, pp. 30-31; Clark, 2013, pp. 391-392). In Conrad's perspective, without a victorious campaign against Serbia, the Habsburg Empire would fall prey to its greedy neighbors and quarreling nationalities. Therefore, the defeat of Serbia's army was the only path to providing for the monarchy's security in the Balkans (Kronenbitter, 2009, p. 45). In terms of securitization theory, Berchtold and Conrad filled the role of the securitizing actors, asserting that Serbia posed an existential threat to the existence of the Austro-Hungarian empire.

Berchtold went to meet Kaiser Joseph and requested his support for war against Serbia. During their meeting, the Foreign Minister told his sovereign that if Austria let this act of terrorist aggression go unpunished, its southern and eastern neighbors would be convinced of the empire's weakness. Furthermore, Berchtold reassured the Emperor that he would act only after he had reliable information confirming Serbian involvement in the crime. Kaiser Joseph was in favor of waiting, but his own priority was not the investigation, but rather the need for imperial unity. Therefore, he insisted that the support of Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza was essential to any policy concerning Serbia (McMeekin, 2013, p. 35; Clark, 2013, pp. 399-400). In terms of securitization theory, although the Emperor could have launched a military act against Serbia without Tisza's support,

Emperor Joseph, the legal audience, perceived his support as essential for the securitization act. The Hungarian Prime Minister thereby performed the role of the political audience.

In addition to the Hungarian Prime Minister's support, Kaiser Joseph wanted to ensure Germany's military support in case Russia would intervene to defend Serbia. Hence, during his meeting with Conrad, the Emperor conditioned his support for launching a war against Serbia on the Germans' support of Austria-Hungary (MacMillan, 2013, p. 507; McMeekin, 2013, p. 106). In fact, the German support was likewise perceived as essential by both Berchtold and Conrad (securitizing actors) and Tisza (political audience) (McMeekin, 2013, p. 41; Clark, 2013, pp. 401-402). The German support, known as the "blank cheque," was delivered on July 6, as German Prime Minister Bethmann, backed by German Kaiser Wilhelm II, officially granted Germany's commitment to Austria-Hungary (McMeekin, 2013, pp. 104-105). Thus, in terms of securitization theory, although Austria-Hungary could have executed a war against Serbia without the endorsement of Germany, the latter was perceived as essential for executing any securitization act by both the securitizing actors and the audiences. As such, the German leadership performed the role of the political audience.

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**This new framework assists IR scholars in exploring and understanding the full range of the relevant actor's political considerations and constraints during securitization processes.**

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The Common Ministerial Council assembled the day after the Germans granted their blank cheque to Austria-Hungary. During the meeting, Berchtold repeated his argument that Serbia constituted an existential threat to the dual monarchy. The Foreign Minister indicated that despite the risk, showing weakness in the current crisis would be fatal, and only a timely resolution with Serbia could halt the

disintegration of the dual monarchy (McMeekin, 2013, p. 109). While most of the senior political-military elite supported the war against Serbia, there was not a consensus for a military strike among the Common Ministerial Council, as the Hungarian Prime Minister opposed the war. Tisza feared that Russia might enter the war to protect Serbia and hence wanted to be certain of the German support for Austria-Hungary (MacMillan, 2013, p. 506; McMeekin, 2013, p. 41). However, after he heard about both the German support and the inquiry results, proving that there was Serbian involvement in the assassination, the Hungarian Prime Minister was willing to favor military action against Serbia. Nevertheless, Tisza hinged his support on a careful diplomatic strategy preceding the war, in which the monarchy would present an ultimatum to Belgrade before launching an attack (McMeekin, 2013, p. 110). After Berchtold fulfilled all of Tisza's preconditions, the latter was persuaded to support the attack against Serbia, and the Foreign Minister no longer faced any serious opposition to a policy of launching a war with Serbia (McMeekin, 2013, p. 122; MacMillan, 2013, pp. 514-515). Austria-Hungary ultimately sent its 48 hour-ultimatum to Serbia on July 23, which the Serbian leadership could not accept. Thus, after the Serbian government rejected the ultimatum, Kaiser Franz Joseph gave his formal approval for war, and Austria-Hungary declared a war against Serbia on July 28 (MacMillan, 2013, pp. 519-520). The war began with the bombardment on Belgrade the next day (MacMillan, 2013, p. 542).

In conclusion, the conceptualization of the audience component posited here clearly illustrates which actors performed the role of the audiences and why. In order to conduct a successful securitization act and launch a military action against Serbia, the securitizing actors (Foreign Minister Berchtold and Chief of Staff Conrad) had to persuade three different audiences: Kaiser Franz Joseph (legal audience); Hungarian PM Tisza (political audience); and the German leadership (political audience).



## Conclusion

With the aim to enhance the theoretical understanding regarding the audience in the securitization process, this article introduced a new conceptual framework about the audience component. This conceptualization framework has three main advantages.

First, it can assist scholars in identifying who the relevant audiences that must be persuaded for executing a securitization act. While the conceptual framework offered by the article cannot tailor itself to every securitization case study, it can enhance the theoretical understanding of the audience component during the securitization process.

Second, this new framework compels us to explore both the legal aspect of the audience, which is mainly related to the relevant state's laws, and the political aspect of the audience during securitization processes, which is primarily based on the political perception of the securitizing actor and/or audience. Thus, it assists IR scholars in exploring and understanding the full range of the relevant actor's political considerations and constraints during securitization processes.

Third, the framework provides a new integration between elements from political psychology, specifically perception and misperception, and securitization theory, which is one of the leading contemporary IR theories. The convergence helps determine which audience must be convinced in order to successfully conduct a securitization act.

To be sure, the conceptual framework suggested in this article is not complete. However, this audience conceptualization will enhance the theoretical understanding of the audience component during securitization process, and provide fertile ground for future research toward a deeper understanding of the process in which threats are socially constructed.

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## Notes

- 1 The approval in the Knesset originates from the norm that began with the 1979 peace agreement with Egypt. Legally, Rabin did not need the approval of the Knesset to implement the Oslo Accords, but only the approval of the government. In practice, Rabin asked for the support of the Knesset in order to obtain wide legitimacy for the agreements with the Palestinians.