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Policy Report

The Securitization of Iran's Nuclear Program as the Primary Strategy of the Israeli Regime

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Introduction: Why Securitization?

Over the past four decades, the concept of “security” in international relations has undergone a fundamental transformation. During the Cold War, security was largely defined by military balance, nuclear deterrence, and territorial borders. In the post-bipolar order and transitional era, however, security has expanded to include areas such as economics, technology, energy, identity, and even discursive narratives. Under these conditions, a threat is not merely an objective reality; it can also be the product of political, discursive, and institutional construction.

Within this framework, “securitization”—as a process through which an ordinary issue is transformed into an urgent and existential matter—has become one of the most important tools of competition.

This policy report, drawing on the theoretical literature of securitization—particularly the Copenhagen School—and employing a genealogical approach, analyzes the process through which the Israeli regime has securitized the nuclear program of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The aim of this note is not merely to describe a political dispute, but to understand a long-term strategic project that began in the early 1990s and continues to the present.

Theoretical Framework of Securitization

The Copenhagen School and the Concept of Securitization

The concept of securitization was systematically formulated by the Copenhagen School in the 1990s. Scholars such as Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, in their book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, argued that security is less an objective condition than a speech act.

According to this theory:

1. A political actor presents an issue as an existential threat;
2. This presentation occurs through public, official, or institutional discourse;
3. If the audience accepts it, the issue moves from the realm of normal politics into the realm of emergency action;
4. Extraordinary measures—normally unjustifiable—gain legitimacy.

In this framework, securitization is not necessarily a response to a real threat, but a process of producing a “state of emergency”.

Multidimensional Security in the Post–Cold War Order

During the Cold War, security was predominantly military. In the post-bipolar order:

- Economic and technological competition has become more prominent;
- Non-state actors play significant roles;
- Public opinion and media contribute to threat construction;
- International legitimacy has become as important as hard power.

Under such conditions, securitization can serve as a tool for containing rivals even without direct war.

The Historical Context of Iran’s Securitization

From the European Threat to the Arab Threat

In the years following World War II, part of the official discourse of the Israeli regime emphasized Europe as a historical threat—particularly highlighting Germany’s historical responsibility. Through continuous reference to the Holocaust, this discourse transformed the historical insecurity of Jews into a living and political issue in international relations.

This narrative served two strategic functions:

1. Consolidating Israel’s moral standing and historical victimhood in Western public opinion, turning its security into a moral commitment for European governments;
2. Creating legitimacy for financial, military, and political support, including extensive German reparations and long-term security guarantees.

In other words, the securitization of Europe’s past was not aimed at sustaining hostility, but at consolidating moral capital and converting it into tangible advantages within the international structure.

From the Arab Threat to the Iranian Threat

Until the 1980s, the primary threat to Israel was Arab states. The wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973 shaped Israel’s security framework. However, after the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Middle East peace process (the 1991 Madrid Conference), the risk posed by Arab states declined.

In this “threat vacuum,” the Islamic Republic of Iran emerged as a substitute. Iran not only lacked formal relations with Israel but also supported Palestinian and Lebanese resistance groups. This political context provided the initial ground for securitization.

The Shift Toward Iran's Nuclear Program

Beginning in the early 1990s, Israeli leaders repeatedly declared that Iran was on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons. These declarations were periodically repeated:

- Recurrent warnings about being “a few years away from the bomb”;
- Presentation of charts and images in international forums;
- Linking Iran's nuclear program to the concept of an “existential threat.”

This discursive repetition gradually transformed Iran's nuclear program from a technical matter into an international security issue.

Discursive Analysis: The “Existential Threat”

One of the key concepts in Israeli discourse regarding Iran is the “existential threat.” This term carries emotional, historical, and identity-based weight, linking to Jewish collective memory and the experience of the Holocaust.

From the perspective of securitization theory:

- The term “existential” elevates the level of threat to survival;
- It places the audience in a state of urgency;
- It strengthens the legitimacy of preemptive actions;
- It increases the political cost of opposition.

In this context, one of the most significant functions of the JCPOA was the de-securitization of Iran and its nuclear file—a goal that was achieved for a considerable period.

Genealogy of the Securitization Project

Inspired by the genealogical method of Michel Foucault, Iran's securitization should be understood not as a single event, but as a project.

Layer One: Construction of Historical Victimhood

After World War II, Israel portrayed itself as a state under constant threat. This narrative became the foundation of its international legitimacy. Security was defined not merely as a border or military issue, but as a matter of survival.

The discourse of “Never Again” became the basis for legitimizing preventive measures and heightened sensitivity toward future threats. This identity layer provided the psychological and legitimizing foundation for subsequent layers of securitization.

Layer Two: Transfer of Threat from Israel to Iran

The transfer of the threat center from the Arab world to Iran in the 1990s was not merely an intelligence reassessment, but a strategic shift in Israel's security architecture. After the decline in the likelihood of classical war with Arab states, Israel faced a threat vacuum critical for maintaining both domestic cohesion and Western strategic support.

Iran—non-Arab, revolutionary, and anti-Israel in discourse—became a suitable candidate for redefining the “central threat.”

This shift rested on three pillars:

1. Portraying Iran ideologically as challenging Israel's existence;
2. Highlighting Iran's regional capabilities and proxy networks;
3. Increasing focus on Iran's nuclear program as a catalytic variable.

In Copenhagen School terms, this was the stage in which the speech act was systematically repeated until Western audiences accepted Iran not merely as a regional rival, but as a challenge to international order and Israel's survival.

Layer Three: Institutional Consolidation

With the referral of Iran's file to the UN Security Council, securitization was elevated to the institutional level. Sanctions, resolutions, and consensus-building became structural outcomes of this process.

At this stage, the “Iranian threat” moved from narrative to rule and regulation. Multilateral sanctions, strict monitoring mechanisms, banking and financial restrictions, and systemic economic risk materialized the securitized framework.

This produced a form of “automatic security,” whereby international legal and financial structures treated Iran as high-risk by default—even absent active discursive reinforcement.

Consequences for Iran

Securitization entails deeper consequences than political pressure alone:

1. Increased costs of economic engagement;
2. Reduced investor confidence;
3. Securitization of technology and scientific cooperation;
4. Difficulty in normalizing relations;
5. Interpretation of any Iranian action as a sensitive security issue.

Even technical or diplomatic actions become framed within a threat narrative.

Strategic Objectives of Israel

Securitizing Iran's nuclear program serves several strategic goals:

- Maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge in the region;
- Consolidating its special relationship with the United States;
- Fostering domestic cohesion around an external threat;
- Shifting focus away from the Palestinian issue;
- Containing Iran's potential geopolitical rise.

Three Strategic Scenarios

Scenario One: Falling into the Securitization Trap

Iran accepts the securitized logic in practice, responding primarily through hard deterrence and escalation. Each action—even defensive—reinforces the existential threat narrative.

Result: Institutionalized tension and heightened risk of confrontation.

Scenario Two: Discursive Counter-Offensive

Iran attempts to redefine the playing field by shifting attention to:

- Israel's undeclared nuclear arsenal;
- Double standards in non-proliferation;
- Israel's regional destabilization.

Advantage: Increased political cost for Israel.

Risk: Mutual securitization and sustained polarization.

Scenario Three: Active De-securitization Strategy

This scenario entails consciously exiting securitized logic. In Copenhagen School terms, de-securitization means returning an issue from emergency politics to normal politics.

Iran would aim to:

- Reduce the nuclear issue from an existential threat to a technical-legal file;
- Raise the cost of accepting the threat narrative;
- Reduce symbolic tensions;
- Avoid actions that reproduce the threat discourse.

Strategic advantage: Gradual reduction in the legitimacy of military action against Iran.

Risk: Domestic misinterpretation as retreat.

Policy Recommendations

Grand Strategy: From Discursive Confrontation to Narrative Management

Since securitization is discursive, countering it must also be discursive-institutional rather than merely reactive. The strategy should aim at gradually exiting emergency logic and returning the nuclear file to a technical-legal framework.

This involves:

- Maintaining deterrence while avoiding rhetoric reinforcing “existential threat” narratives;
- Practicing targeted transparency;
- Strengthening public diplomacy in Europe;
- Separating economic and technological cooperation from security disputes;
- Multi-lateralizing strategic relations.

The objective is to shift the conflict from a matter of “existential survival” to a politically manageable disagreement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the securitization of Iran’s nuclear program by the Israeli regime has not been a temporary or merely reactive process, but rather a gradual, multilayered, and structural project. It began with the construction of identity-based threats, continued with the strategic transfer of the threat center to Iran, and was ultimately consolidated within international legal and institutional frameworks.

Through the theoretical logic of the Copenhagen School and the use of discursive, political, and legal tools, this process has transformed Iran’s nuclear program from a technical issue into a security and existential matter in the perception of part of the international community.

Understanding this dynamic is therefore essential—not only for analyzing Israeli behavior, but also for designing effective policies to manage tensions, reduce structural costs, and prevent the reproduction of threat discourse.