

## Securitization and Identity: The Speech Acts of Bashar al-Assad

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### Abstract

*Security is one of the crucial concepts in International Relations. Due to diversity of the security issues encountered by the states, there is a lack of consensus on the definition of the concept. The traditional understanding of the security focuses on threats militarily and state was at the center. However, different approaches emerged to re-conceptualize the concept by the end of the Cold War. The Copenhagen School and its offshoot securitization is one of these approaches which is being frequently used in International Relations. The aim of this study is to analyze the securitization process of opposition, different identities and other actors by President Bashar al-Assad during the Civil War. This research argues that the opposition is securitized with the help of different identities in order to convince both Syrians and regional and international actors so that the securitizing actor can take the extraordinary measures. This study conducts the methods of literature review to clarify the concept of securitization and under which conditions it took place and discourse and content analysis to highlight the speech acts of Bashar al-Assad during the process. To this end, 46 different speeches and interviews of President Bashar al-Assad are analyzed. In all, it is concluded that speeches/discourses adopted by Assad had implications which served the aims and the targets of his rule and government during the Syrian Civil War.*

**Keywords:** Copenhagen School, Securitization, Syria, Syrian Civil War, Identity.

### Öz

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Güvenlik, Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplininin çok önemli kavramlarından bir tanesidir. Devletlerin karşılaşışı güvenlik sorunlarının çeşitliliği nedeniyle kavramın ne anlam ifade ettiği üzerinde fikir birligi yoktur. Geleneksel güvenlik anlayışı, askeri tehditlere odaklanmakta ve devleti merkeze almaktadır. Ancak, Soğuk Savaş'ın sona ermeyle güvenliği yeniden kavramsallaştırmak için farklı yaklaşımlar ortaya çıkmıştır. Uluslararası İlişkilerde sıkılıkla kullanılan bu yaklaşımardan biri de Kopenhag Okulu ve güvenlikleştirmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, iç savaş sırasında Devlet Başkanı Esad'ın muhalefeti güvenlikleştirme sürecini analiz etmektir. Bu çalışmanın temel argümanı, güvenlikleştirici aktörün muhalefete karşı olağanüstü önlemler alabilmek adına, farklı kimlikler yardımıyla hem Suriyelileri hem de bölgesel ve uluslararası aktörleri ikna etmek için muhalefeti güvenlikleştirildiğidir. Bu çalışmada, güvenlikleştirme kavramının hangi koşullar altında gerçekleştiğini ortaya çıkarmak için literatür taraması ve Esad'ın süreç içindeki söz edimlerine ışık tutmak adına söylem ve içerik analizi yapılmıştır. Bu amaçla, Devlet Başkanı Esad'ın 46 farklı konuşması ve röportajı analiz edilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, Suriye İç Savaşı sırasında Devlet Başkanı Esad'ın söz edimlerinin iktidarının ve hükümetinin amaçlarına ve hedeflerine hizmet eden bulguları olduğu sonucuna varmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kopenhag Okulu, Güvenlikleştirme, Suriye, Suriye İç Savaşı, Kimlik.

## Introduction

The Arab Spring was a peaceful and democratic protests that started in Tunisia at end of 2010. A Tunisian vendor, Mohammad Bouazizi, did not just pour gasoline on himself but also on the neighboring countries of Middle East (Friedman, 2011) which are still on fire even today. Soon after, it spread to the different countries of the Middle East with the hope of new beginnings like the name suggested. New ideas, the complaints and the frustration of the people motivated the "the Arab Spring" which had different effect on different countries where mainly financial reasons and the misconduct of the regimes were the main driving forces behind it (Jones, 2012, p.449-462). Thus, their demands were the fair economic opportunities, the basic human and democratic rights. These were the primary reasons for the uprising and it eventually turned out to be a civil war which did not have any sectarian or identity basis at the beginning. It is important to add that even though it did not start because of sectarian connections, it became core factor for the war through time (Salamandra, 2013, p.303-304). Like in other countries, it started as peaceful protests against Bashar al-Assad who was unable to establish legitimacy for his rule and himself and led to a violent civil war which effected the country internally, regionally and internationally. Thus, the instability situation that emerged as street protests quickly transformed into a civil war and with the involvement of different regional and global powers, the Syrian Civil War became one of the major problem areas threatening international peace and security (Tinas, 2019:137).

The uprising was a big surprise for Bashar al-Assad. He was in a belief that his country was immune from the "virus of protests" which could happen only in other Arab countries (Lesch, 2012, p.2). Despite of his unforeseen views, country faced protests and tension which was responded harshly by the Syrian regime. This harsh response incited already repressed groups to take action and caused even more radical opposition.

In this respect, Bashar was desperately looking for domestic, regional and international support. This research uses the constructivist approach through its one of the main offshoots;

securitization, in order to analyze how discourse is being used by Bashar al-Assad and his political approach towards other political actors in getting this support. Securitization is theory of Copenhagen School that had made big contributions to the concept of security after the Cold war. It broadened the understanding of security which was developed by traditional approaches. Ole Wæver came up with the concept of securitization in 1990's in his book "Securitization and Desecuritization" in 1995 and further it was advanced by other studies (Wæver, 1995, and Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998, Buzan and Wæver, 2003). Securitization theory is a useful tool for an actor to formalize something as a security issue which helps to convince the audience to allow him to take extreme measures that is otherwise would not be possible. Securitization helps one issue to become existential threat through use of language. It needs a referent object (what is to be securitized), a securitizing actor, an audience who will accept the act and the facilitating factors. Bashar was the securitizing actor who performed certain speech acts for the purpose of securitizing the certain issue through which he wished to gain the support of the audience so that he could take the extraordinary measures. Identity is one of the most important tools which helps the securitizing actor to convince people for his securitization move.

Societal security cannot be separated from identity which means security is not only about individuals, state or economy but a collective identities that can be characterized as "we identities" (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998, p.120). Identities can be related with religion, family and friends, political party, and the state. All these identities could be used to create conflict or support by the securitizing actor. The relation between identity and security can be seen in the analysis of the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al., 1998). It is useful to explain position of the referent object when there is a securitization initiative. People like to get more security which gives a chance to the political authorities to produce security discourses (Huysmans, 2008, p.170). This claim of asking for more security, which is taken for granted by decision-makers in the field of security, provides legitimacy to the authority to

ask more power so that they can protect the citizens against threat and their survival.

In this study, discourse analysis will be used. It is the use of language to draw a meaning. This is mainly because securitization theory tries to understand how elites securitize an issue over speech acts. The way I use this method in this study will be in accordance with the specific framework of securitization theory which is a linguistic way of pointing a certain issue as an existential threat to the referent object. It conceptualizes the security as a 'speech-act' where speech of the actor itself is the act. Key concepts (audience, referent object, audience, and facilitating actors) of the theory will be utilized in order to clarify the securitization of Assad as a securitizing actor. Audience (who needs to be induced about the securitization act) is crucial for the process because they need to be convinced by the securitizing actor so that they will cooperate with the crucial decisions such as going war which otherwise will not be done. Referent object (what is to be securitized) is vital for the relevant audience and needs to be protected at any cost. We will understand the change in discourses by looking at the referent objects in securitization process. Moreover, securitizing actor who performs speech act and declares a matter as a threat for the survival of the referent object such as the state. Accordingly, how Assad presented a specific issue as a security threat and to which audience through his speech acts as a political elite will be examined. Moreover, his discursive changes towards audiences according to their characteristics will be determined. For this purpose, different speeches and interviews are analyzed in order to specify the speech acts used. Additionally, the success of the securitization process of the securitizing actor during the Syrian Civil War will be examined. Main focus of this research is to analyze the speech act and its role in politics and security with reference to the different identities. The time frame for the speeches and the interviews to be selected is limited between the dates of the first speech of the securitizing actor after the Civil War begin which is March 30, 2011 and March, 2020. 2020 is chosen because it was the

date where "the cease-fire is largely protected" (Anadolu Agency, 2021).

### The Concept of Security and Securitization

Even though security is one of the most used concepts in international relations, it is not being conceptualized and defined clearly. Even though it is difficult to define the concept of security just like power, justice and freedom, it would be put as a quest to be free from threats (Buzan, 1991, p.333). Each nation faced different forms of conflict in the last century which led to several views to be born to explain 'what is security?'. The traditional understanding of security focuses on the existential threats from other states and on maximizing military capacity to deal with those threats. During the Cold War, the concept of security was mostly about deterrence, national security and sovereignty of the state. Therefore, the referent object of analysis is mainly the state. After the cold war, this narrow apprehension of security changed and the discussion moved beyond interstate relations where new fields came into attention like economics, migration, environment and identity. Changes in international conditions, such as acceptance of nonmilitary factors, have affected the research in the security studies (Walt, 1991, p.228). This new way of looking at the concept of security gave birth to new approaches. One of these approaches was Copenhagen school.

The Copenhagen School is an academic school which is formed by group of scholars, like Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, Jaap de Wilde, Morten Kelstrup, Pierre Lemaitre and Elzbieta Tromer, who work on the concept of security at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Research – then became Conflict and Peace Research Institute of Copenhagen. The School applies critical approach to security studies and believe that it is socially constructed. The securitization theory of the school give reflexive approach to security analysis which means it is not just defining the given security situation but it is helpful to examine and explain any security issue that arise. Securitization

conceptualizes the security as a 'speech-act' where speech of an actor itself is the act. Issues become security matters with the usage of language through which an ordinary issue turns into an issue of high politics. According to the Copenhagen School securitization is something to be avoided (Williams, 2003, p.523). The authors of the School claim to prefer less security and more politics (Wæver, 1995, p.7). The School identifies four key concepts of securitization act which are the referent object (what is to be securitized), the securitizing actor, the audience (who needs to be convinced about the securitization act) functional actors whose activities effects the security making (Buzan et al., 1998).

Without determining the referent object, any process of security will fail. It is an object which is vital for the relevant audience and is announced as being threatened and needs to be protected. The referent object has a legitimate right to survive so it has to be saved at any cost (Buzan et al., 1998, p.36). Other unit of securitization process the securitizing actor who performs speech acts for securitizing an issue and declares certain matter as a threat for the survival of the referent object like the state, the individual, society, freedom to get the audience's support towards a course of action. In fact, the securitizing actor carry out the whole process of securitization; by claiming that there is a referent object which is threatened and is valuable enough to save; by demanding the right to take extraordinary measures to tackle the threat and by convincing the audience about above all. Consequently, that issue overrides the other issues and becomes foremost priority. Of all, audience may be most crucial unit. Audience are those who have to be aligned with the process for the securitization move to be successful. It is the target of the securitization to be convinced about the issue as a security threat. This is the phase of the process which is the out of control of the securitizing actor. After the process of securitization starts, audience receives and interprets the whole process. Therefore, it is important for the securitizing actor to be well informed about his target community so that the audience can be successfully mobilized. Moreover, just the speech act of securitizing actor is not enough in securitization process. These acts have

to be supported by functional actors like media which differs from one sector to another in which it will take place. Functional actors are those who are not directly involved but influence the process of security related relations without being the referent object or the actors of the securitization (Buzan et al., 1998).

There are certain implications of something transforms form being not security to being security so it is useful to keep issues in the realm of normal politics. The securitizing actor might gain the ability to act urgently but it is like a bilateral trade where there is always a price of labeling an issue as a security matter. It is crucial to point out a threat which requires extra ordinary measures and an audience who accepts the situation along with verbal communication of the security (Williams, 2003, p.526). Securitization is always a political choice (Buzan et al., 1998, p.29). Therefore, it is up to the actor's choice because the actor decides whether or not to start the process.

## **Identity and Security**

In the 1980s, there was a move to widen and go beyond the classical approaches of interpretation of the concept of security. It is not possible to say that the study of identity was missing during the Cold War but it was not given much attention. Traditional approaches take identity as pre-given and can't be changed or built. Self-help understanding of state identity focus on only power balancing and live no room for other explanations. Critical approaches realized that identity is not all about race and religion and anything of that sort but it includes "a wide range of 'self-other' dynamics" (Bilgin, 2010, p.81). Identity is richly ambiguous term and thus can have different meanings (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p.6-7). It is quite difficult to find a statement that summarizes the concept of identity adequately due to its wide range of meanings so it is not being used heterogeneously. It is simply the difference between "we" and the "other" and is self-consciousness of an individual or a group. One defines oneself with the help creation of the others.

Identity refers to an individual or a community in general and gives idea about social categories. Therefore it plays crucial role for individuals and

the communities because of its effect on their very way of thinking. This idea of 'other' has potential to create a loop which can lead to a conflict and that can be manipulated easily by the political elites. Additionally, an individual can possess more than one identity such as religion (different sects in religion), language, gender, race and political view and etc. These different forms of identities become lenses through which people start to see reality. Collective identity, groups with specific ethnic, religious, and other features, becomes the referent object for the securitization theory of Copenhagen School.

### Identities in Syria

After the Ottoman Empire rule, the Syrian Arab Republic is a country in the Middle East which was established by British and French after the World War I and gained its independence in 1946. The area was divided by British and French into Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon as a result of divide, control and rule method which had negative effect on efforts of shaping national identity for Syria. The unfair division of these states caused a lot of disputes in the area until this very day which affected not only the region and neighboring countries but the whole world is influenced. There were different sources internally and externally that effected in shaping the existing identities and also in awakening of new aspects to the Syrian identities such as anti-Israel views over the time.

Moreover, policies of the French created extremely fractionated society which could be seen in the performance of the Syrian governments throughout the 1950s and 60s that prevented them in their effort to pursue a sustainable political stability (Zisser, 2006, p.182). This had certain effect on the population such as awakening the minority feelings which caused instability in the region even today. They strengthened one group against the other awakening the rivalry between different communities. This resulted in failing to create a collective Syrian identity which further made it difficult to form a state which could be seen in the period after independence.

The Ba'th Party (Arab Socialist Renaissance Party) was a mile stone for Syrian history. Eventually, they became popular in other Arab countries as well. In 1970, with Hafiz al-Assad, the Ministry of Defense, the Ba'ath came to power permanently through a military coup. Hafiz al-Assad was born in an Alawi peasant family and he was a member of Ba'th Party through which he gained the political authority (Hinnebusch, 2001, p.8). This made the Alawi sect the most important political entity in the Ba'th Party and in the country.

After gaining the power, Hafiz al-Assad wanted to consolidate the strength of his regime with the help of different strategies: the emplacing the trusted members of the Alawite family coup-critical positions to balance the ones who has less loyalty for the regime; establishing multiple security agencies to monitor military and each other having overlapping jurisdiction with the capability of communicating the leader directly and creating parallel military forces; and financing all these steps (Quinlivan, 1999, p.133-134). It produced "anxiety-inducing simulacrum" where people were forced to behave in a certain manner with the fear of security apparatus (Buchs, 2009, p.26). In other words the country was transformed into an intelligence state.

Hafiz al-Assad implemented multi-layered identity-building steps for which both pan-Syrianism and pan-Arabism were adopted (Philips, 2013, p.40-44). He appointed his family members and other Alawis on the key positions but he did not neglect other minorities and promoted them as well. Additionally, he gave importance to key Sunni figures.

As a result, Hafez al-Assad established a fragile system based on fear which was also implemented by his son Bashar al-Assad who faced this fragility of the system at the end of his time. Bashar al-Assad who was the choice of Hafez al-Assad as his successor came to power in 2000, after his father's death. He adopted from the beginning what his father established and followed his father's footsteps (Zisser, 2006, p.179). He used Arab nationalist ideology to gain popularity internally and externally and perceived it as a tool with

which communal conflict could be suppressed and therefore Sunni Arab Muslims, Alawites, Christians, Druze, and Kurds could live together (Rubin, 2007, p.140).

Each of these identities lived in the certain geographic regions and had its own unique characteristics. These identities used to pursue mostly to their ethnic or religious communities. At the beginning of French mandate, the Sunni majority was powerful as it was under Ottoman rule. French wanted to break the power of Sunnis and empowered the minorities like Alawites by granting them a semi-autonomous status. This gave an opportunity to improve their status in the society and creates a conjuncture for emergence for a small group to make a political breakthrough.

When it comes to Druzes, The Druzes, located mostly in Jabal al Druze, are one of the sectarian identities and constituted 3 percent of the population in Syria (The UN Refugee Agency, 2018). Effect of Druzes went beyond their population percentage and the mountain they lived in the country. They are supporters of the regime because they saw the Alawites as a guarantee for their position in terms of economic and personal security (Zisser, 2007, p.48). At the beginning, they were not involved much in the Uprising. When it turned out to be a struggle between two different religious identities, Sunnis and Alawites, they preferred Alawi predominance (Rabinovich and Valensi, 2021, p.44).

Kurds are another minority in Syria who are mostly Sunni Muslims and are non-Arab minority in Syria. They consisted of approximately 9 percent of the Syrian population. Kurdish community in Syria has stressed relations with the Syrian state because of raise of Arab nationalism which increased intolerance towards minorities in the country. They were regarded as an obstacle to promote state's Arab identity in the region which was accord with pan-Arabism. The policies of Ba'th Party did not treat Kurds equally and had discriminatory policies against them. Kurdish community had little support for the protestors in the Uprising and mostly just watched the demonstrations which in return paid them well. Bashar gave them some right that they were not able to get before the uprising.

## Securitization of Bashar al-Assad

Bashar al-Assad as a securitizing actor uses certain issues (domestic, regional and international) as an existential threat to the referent object and actors that help him for securitization process in his speech act during the Civil War. He focused on such threats which could affect the life of Syrians dramatically through which he could take extreme measure if necessary not just against opposition but against Syrian citizens themselves such as ceasing up the usage of democratic rights.

The opposition was one of the mostly utilized reference point which could be the most important justification for taking extraordinary measures. Following speeches show that how a securitizing actor (Bashar al-Assad) securitizes a certain issue (protests/protestors) with the help of speech acts and referent object (Syria – Syrian state) in order to convince the audience and get their support (Syrians) so that he could take extraordinary measures such as ceasing up the usage of democratic rights and continue to rule the country according to his way:

*....Terrorists are concerned neither with reform nor with dialogue. They are criminals who have set themselves a task.... They will never stop unless we stop them (President Bashar al-Assad, 2012).*

*...we cannot discuss, for example, al-Qaeda and its offshoots and organizations that are affiliated to al-Qaeda, for example, terrorists.... we have to focus on getting rid of the terrorists, their terrorism and their ideology (SANA, 2013c).*

*....Opposition means national, it means working for the interests of the Syrian people.... But you have to separate the national and the puppets....some of the groups are puppets, as I said, of other countries.... the majority are al Qaeda, which is ISIS and al-Nusra, with other similar factions that belong to al Qaeda but are smaller (SANA, 2015b).*

When we think about the environment in the world where people were conscious about terrorism and al -Qaeda after attacks to twin towers in U.S., this speech act of Assad became more meaningful for the securitization act. He securitized the opposition by associating them with the terrorists from al-Qaeda via using the feeling of insecurity and fear. Thus with this speech act, his targeted audience is not just Syrians

but other actor in the region and ultimately in the world. Furthermore, in the following speech, Bashar securitizes the opposition through religious identities:

*....What is happening on the street has three components.... The third and more dangerous component, despite its small size, consists of those who have extremist and takfiri ideology....The ideology we see today is no different from that we saw decades ago. It is exactly the same. What has changed, however, is the methods and the persons. This kind of ideology lurks in dark corners in order to emerge when an opportunity presents itself or when it finds a handy mask to put on (SANA, 2011c).*

*.... In fact, the terrorists have not attacked minorities. They attack everybody in Syria, and the minorities have not been singled out in themselves, but this language has been necessary for them to create divisions within Syrian society (SANA, 2015c).*

He depicted the opposition as extremist and not true believers who tried to penetrate Syria. He tried to persuade Syrians as his main audience with this speech that opposition was an existential threat and thereby extraordinary measures had to be taken through which opposition had to be eliminated in order to protect the referent object that was Syria and the unity of Syrians.

He implies that the opposition attacks the minorities as well. Those minorities were Alawites, Druzes, Christians and Kurdish Syrians who supported regime because they feared from Sunniled government and what might follow afterwards (Philips, 2016:51-52). Fear of the other identity can be very strong drive to attack one another or be in the favor of an authoritarian rule because of greater threat from "other" as it is the case in Syria. Assads' political applications of having absolute control of army and security forces, establishing good relations with business class, Sunni elites and minorities such as Alawites and Druzes helped regime to survive. Additionally, he used especially ISIS for securitizing process as an example of Islamist extremism by using the sensibility of west for Christian minority. Hence, extraordinary measures could be taken to stop the religious extremism.

*.... I speak to you at this exceptional moment when events and developments pose a great test to our unity and self-denial. It is a test which is repeated every now and then because of the continued conspiracy against this country. Thanks to our will, solidarity, and the will of God that we succeed in facing it every time in a manner which enhances our strength and pride.... My responsibility remains that I should protect the security of this country and ensure its stability.... We acknowledge that they had been smart in choosing very sophisticated tools in what they have done; but at the same time we realize that they have been stupid in choosing the country and the people, for such conspiracies do not work with our country or our people (Al-Bab, 2011a).*

In this part of his speech, he claims that there is a conspiracy against the country for which there are certain useful tools (opposition) to achieve their goals. He implies that the state (referent object) is in great danger and needs to be protected. This protection is his responsibility so that the audience (Syrians) must understand and allow him to take the precautions and the crucial decisions that are taken during and after the protests. It is especially important to convince the audience to the referent object to be in existential threat not his own regime. Otherwise, he was unable to take extreme measures such as responding to protestors in a very hard way.

*There are support groups in more than one governorate linked to some countries abroad. There are media groups, forgery groups and groups of "eye-witnesses".... . Daraa is on the frontline with the Israeli enemy; and it is the first line of defense for the hinterland.....With is chaos, using reform as a cover, using sectarianism, where sects become nervous, they clash with each other, virtual defeat is achieved in another form.... In any case, I am sure there will be someone on the satellite T.V. stations who will say that this is not enough. What is enough for them will destroy our country and we simply cannot afford that (Al-Bab, 2011a).*

This speech gives a good example of Assad's securitization move through speech act in which he pointed out that Syria was always facing a struggle with others outside the borders through which he tried to undermined the opposition in the

country by portraying them as those of who act together with the enemy. In order to convince audience about the referent object to be in danger, it is important to create a common enemy which was behind the protests or to use already created ones. Al-Assad used this methodology in this part of the speech through pointing out Israel. Thereby, people were going to be united against a common enemy. In the speech, he refers more than one enemy as external forces but names only Israel which makes it even more useful tool. With this way, he could create more common enemies if necessary.

As explained earlier, a securitizing actor must get the support of the audience for a successful process. For this purpose, the securitizing actor must be well aware of the characteristics of the audience. In other words, the act itself have to reflect the habits, beliefs, history and practices of the targeted public. This support of the audience could be formal (state institutions) or moral (public). Bashar al-Assad guaranteed the formal support with the help of his father's implementations of putting the members of his sect, Alawites, and trusted Sunni elites to important positions. Therefore, Bashar al-Assad was supposed to get the moral support of the public, Syrians. The Palestine issue and Israel were at the heart of historical background, feelings and interests of the Syrian public which in return made it to be a more useful and popular topic of securitization process and speech acts of the President. Because of the above reasons, Israel was used by Bashar al-Assad in different speeches and interviews throughout the civil war. Following part of an inauguration speech given by the President Bashar was a good example of a securitization process:

*The existence of these countries is the West's most important achievement and the most significant cause for Israel's successes and continued existence. There is no clearer evidence than their current stand regarding the Israeli aggression against Gaza. Where is the 'alleged' zeal and ardour that they showed towards Syria or the Syrian people? Why haven't they supported Gaza with arms and money? Where are their jihadists; and why haven't they sent them to defend our people in Palestine?...from the occupation of Palestine, to the invasion of Iraq and trying to divide it now and*

*the division of the Sudan all planned by Israel and the West and always executed by the states of tyranny and backwardness in our Arab world .... (SANA, 2014c).*

Getting support domestically would not be enough for securitizing actor to securitize the certain issue. Earning regional and international support is as important as domestic backing up. International support was especially important for Assad because of the danger of the intervention to Syria directly. To that end, Bashar tried to convince other countries with his speech acts through speeches and interviews about the opposition for being danger not just for his people (his regime) but for regional and international community as well. He tried to securitize the opposition for the possible consequences on the interest of regional and international countries. As a result, referent object changes according to the characteristics of the targeted audience. Iran was one of those regional powers.

*... They (Iranians) understand that this is one region, and consequently if there is a fire in Syria, it is bound to spread to neighboring countries and later to countries further away, including Iran. Iran bases its policies on these foundations and also on the grounds that it is the Syrian people's right to solve their own problems.... what is important for us is the essence of Iranian policy towards Syria; and once again I stress that in essence it is objective and achieves stability for our region, if different parties in Syria have adopted the Iranian vision (SANA, 2013b).*

In this interview to al-Manar TV, President al-Assad securitizes the civil war for his targeted audience, Iran. He put emphasis on regional stability which is supposed to be also important for Iranians. He suggests that Iran would not be immune from the incidents happening in Syria. Therefore, his referent object is as wide as Iran's stability itself. With this successful securitization process, Bashar gained Iran's support in every aspect such as militarily through Hezbollah.

With the revolution, Iran changed its policy towards Israel and started to follow different policy that is anti-Zionism. As a consequence, Israel and Palestine became the common issue the two countries had same understanding about. In the following interview, Bashar uses the issue as speech act to get Iran's support which shows the pragmatic character of the securitizing actor where

he chooses referent object (Palestine and peace of the region) according to the character of the audience (Iran).

*....Israel is an aggressive state. It was created based on expansion. It occupies other people's land and kills the people surrounding it. It has killed numerous Palestinians for over six decades. It killed numerous Lebanese and many Egyptians, Syrians and others using assassinations, bombing, terrorism and other methods. Today it plays the same role by supporting the terrorists directly in the areas adjacent to the Syrian front, i.e. near the occupied Golan, where it provides them with logistic and medical support and also with information, weapons and ammunition....*

*....As for Israeli nuclear weapons....nobody talks about them because Israel, the aggressive state, the rogue state, enjoys full support from the United States in all its policies. It covers up all its crimes. As long as this process of covering up continues inside the United States, in the Security Council and the United Nations, in the international organizations, including the IAEA, it's no longer surprising that any weapon anywhere in the world can be discussed, but not Israeli weapons. This is the prevailing logic in the world, the logic of hegemony, of colonialism, the logic of force .... (SANA, 2013b)*

He securitizes opposition for being Israel's puppet and naming other regional countries to stress upon the terrorist activities carried out by Israel. His securitization act towards Iran was somehow served his aims and targets because the relationship of two countries was unbroken in despite of the fact that some other important countries stood against Bashar during civil war in the region. The interest of Iran and Syria was overlapping which was also another important factor for securitization process

Iran's support was one of the most important factor for Bashar to survive from civil war along with Russia.

*....The same thing is happening now in Ukraine. And this is what they aim for in Russia. They don't like President Putin, so they demonize him.... You know that this is one of the things which some foreign countries have tried to manipulate, even in Russia, by supporting extremist groups which are conducting terrorist acts.... They rather aim at creating a division*

*in Russian society which leads to weakening the country and the state and maybe dividing Russia itself. This is what they had in mind for Russia and this is what they had in mind for Syria....As far as we are concerned, the stronger this presence is in our region, the better it is for the region's stability, because the Russian role is important for the stability of the world.... The conflict for the past decades, including this crisis, is actually linked to what is happening in Ukraine, first because Syria and Ukraine concern Russia, and second because the objective is clear: weakening Russia (SANA, 2015c).*

*....President Putin was .... characterized as a tsar. He is portrayed as a dictator suppressing opposition in Russia, and that he came to power through undemocratic means, despite the fact that he was elected in democratic elections.... For the West, it means that as long as you are there, we will continue to support terrorism, because the Western principle followed now in Syria and Russia and other countries is changing presidents, changing states, or what they call bringing regimes down. Why? Because they do not accept partners, and they do not accept independent states. What is their problem with Russia? What is their problem with Syria? (SANA, 2015f).*

In these two interviews, Assad as the securitizing actor aims to effect decision of his audiences who are Russians and the Russian President Putin. He gives the example of Ukraine in order to justify his situation in the country. With this way, he seeks to equate the situation of a peacefully started and turned out to be a bloody civil war with Russian case in Ukraine. Thus, he implies that he is right about his cause and hopes to get the support of Russia against the opposition for the stability of the region and of the world. Otherwise, it in return would affect the countries in the region and in the world negatively such as Russia himself.

The securitization of Bashar al-Assad served his rule and means in a successful way especially for Russia because his speech acts for securitization of opposition was used by Russia in UN while vetoing a draft resolution. (Security Council, 2011, p.4.)

Even though, the countries that were against Bashar's response to the opposition were higher in

number as compare to those who were in the favor, they could not depose him.

## Conclusion

Since each state has a distinctive geographical and political environment, they face different forms of security threats. Because of this diversity, it is difficult to define the concept of security. During the Cold War, state was in the center and the interstate relations determined the understanding of security threat. This changed after the Cold War and new fields like environment and identity came into attention which broadened and deepened the concept which created a way to re-conceptualize security. In other words, referent object changed which caused emergence of new approaches. The Copenhagen School is one of these approaches and its key concepts, referent object(s), securitizing actor, audiences and functional actor(s), of the securitization process are informative to elaborate the securitization move of the securitizing actor.

In order to analyze the securitization process of President Bashar al-Assad with reference to the different identities comprehensibly, examining the facilitating conditions which helps the securitizing actor during the process are also important. These conditions may be created throughout the history. Syria is one of the oldest civilizations and its goes beyond the current borders where different identities live together which was disturbed with the conscious policies of the colonial powers. These policies created a fractionated society which resulted in political instability. After independence, Syria went through politically unstable period. With Hafez al-Assad, Syria became relatively stabilized with an authoritarian character. Secularism, Pan-Arabism and socialism were main ideologies under the Ba'th regime. The policies of Hafez al-Assad reinforced consciousness of the sectarian identity. The core of the regime was comprised of mostly Alawi community. This gave the advantages and power for President Bashar al-Assad to perform securitization move. Additionally, it gave opportunity to get for the formal support easier during the process.

Some Sunni elites were close to the regime however they never had executive control. They

were kept close enough to control but kept far enough to prevent to be in the critical positions. Different identities and their historical background is again vital for the securitization process. These different identities presented optimal conditions to Bashar for his securitization move. It is important to note that, sectarian policies are not formally implemented. Even Assad denied sectarian understanding however we can see the inferential outcomes of formal policies of the regime as in favoring Alawi sect which caused resentment in other sects such as Sunnis. Moreover, regional and international actors who affected the process too. Historical perception of the audience about certain actors such as Israel and fear, coming from past experiences, of the 'other' are also crucial factors in order to comprehend the atmosphere during the process of securitization.

Convincing the audience(s) is one of the indicators that show the success of the securitization process so that extraordinary measures can be taken. Syrians are the most fundamental targeted audience by the President Bashar al-Assad which is important for moral support. He had enough backing especially from the minorities to carry out his extraordinary measures. Even though opposition had large number of supporters, they could not break the loyalty of the minorities especially Alawites who had the critical positions in the army. Apart from all these, the opposition could not unite and was fragmented which used against effectively by Bashar. Additionally, he could maintained the support from formal institutions which was mostly occupied by Alawites. Most importantly, he sustained the support of Sunni elites. This indicates that the securitizing actor implemented a successful securitization process.

There can be various factors that affect the ideas and the decisions of the people. Therefore, securitization process is just one of the factors that influence the people's ideas during the Syrian Civil War. Securitization is such a useful tool like a magical key which can be changed and improved according to the criticism. This study analyzes the securitization process in convincing the targeted audience to undermine the opposition. This work further aims to demonstrate how a securitization

process can be more effective with combination of other factors such as identity.

In result of an investigation conducted about speech acts of Bashar al-Assad during his government covering 2011-2020, it can be concluded that securitization process via speech acts is frequently utilized. Hence, it can be argued that securitization was instrumental for Assad's rule. At national, regional and international levels speeches/discourses adopted by Assad had implications which served the aims and the targets of his rule and government.

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