Wojciech GRABOWSKI
University of Gdańsk
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5950-5052

# FROM SPEECH ACTS TO EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES – SECURITIZATION AND HYBRID WARFARE IN IRAN-ISRAEL RELATIONS

Iran's nuclear ambitions and its growing political and military influence in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq are a major concern that has been consuming Israeli policymakers for the last few decades. Israel's ruling authorities view Iran's expanding nuclear program, missile capacity and network of non-state militia partners as an existential threat. Iran's past support for terrorist attacks as well as its hate speech expressing the intention to "wipe Israel off the map" has an effect on the Israeli psyche. There is no debate in Israel about Iran's willingness and ability to seriously threaten its security. For Israeli politicians, it does not seem to matter that Iran has limited capabilities to its regional power-projection and is highly vulnerable after years of sanctions and poor governance, nor that Israel, supported by the United States, remains the most powerful and well equipped military force in the region (Kaye, Efron, 2020: 7).

The aim of this article is to briefly present selected determinants influencing Iranian-Israeli relations with the use of the concept of securitization and hybrid war as the basic *modus operandi* of both countries.

In order to achieve the aim of the article, I formulate the hypothesis according to which Iran and Israel have a highly subjective perception of a threat in order to legitimize the use of extraordinary measures to counter it and gain supremacy over their adversary.

For the purposes of this article, I have posed two research questions that I will seek answers to when analyzing Israeli-Iranian relations:
1. How and why do Iran and Israel portray each other as a threat?
2. What methods of hybrid war are used by Iran and Israel against each other?

The primary research method I have mentioned and used is the Copenhagen School securitization concept, which has proved very useful in explaining why and how Iran and Israel pose an existential threat to each other. It provides a specific *modus operandi* of a statesman who tries to convince an audience (through hate speech) that a particular state and its actions threaten another state's security. Another research category that I have used in this article is hybrid warfare. This military strategy uses conventional and irregular methods such as fake news, diplomacy, lawfare and proxy wars with the use of non-state actors and secret services to achieve the goals of state/non-state actors. The concept of hybrid war sheds light on contemporary methods used in conflict relations between states, aimed at destabilizing the enemy and polarizing their society.

In the confrontational environment of the Middle East, this strategy has a lot to offer for states in the race for power/domination. In fact, Iran-Israel relations based on hate speech and hybrid warfare can act as a spur to a struggle for power and domination and both states are willing to sacrifice a lot to achieve this goal.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF IRANIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS

Despite the widespread knowledge of the tense Iranian-Israeli relations, several facts should be mentioned that could contradict the mutual hostility between the two countries. Iran and Israel do not share common borders nor have territorial disputes. For a certain period of time they even were perceived as a common threat by Arab Sunni Muslim states and saw their surrounding environment as a hostile. In the Middle East, Iran's Jewish population is second in size only to that of Israel (8300). Israel and Iran don't maintain diplomatic relations since 1979. However, this doesn't mean that there are no relations between them. On the contrary, the history of mutual interactions is rich, tense and dynamic.

While there are hostile relations between Israel and Iran today, these countries have not always been rivals. Iran was one of the first Muslim countries (after Turkey) to recognize the State of Israel after its establishment in 1948. For Israel it was an opportunity to break out from political isolation in the region. Israel viewed Iran as a natural ally in an Arab world, which was reflected in the Alliance of the periphery doctrine developed by David Ben-Gurion, the primary national founder of the State of Israel and the first Prime Minister of Israel. It was a foreign policy strategy which aimed to develop a close strategic alliance with non-Arab Muslim States in the Middle East to counteract Arab states' opposition to existence of Israel.

During the Cold War, Iran and Israel were threatened by the spread of Soviet-sponsored pan-Arab nationalism. Israel was confronted by Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser who claimed that Israel is an "expansionist state that viewed the Arabs with disdain" (Aburish, 2004: 239). Egypt closed the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping in 1956 and nationalized it leading to the confrontation of the Egyptian army with Israeli, British and French forces. Iran and Israel were interested in resisting the spread of pan-Arabism which was manifested by the alteration of the name of the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Gulf by Arab countries. Besides their common political interests and ally (USA), both states shared economic interests. Iran supplied Israel with oil and Iranian oil was shipped to European markets through the Eilat-Ashkelon Israeli-Iranian joint pipeline.

Following the Iranian revolution and the fall of the pro-Israeli and pro-Western Pahlavi dynasty in 1979, new leader Ayatollah Khomeini reformulated the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and adopted a strict anti-Israeli stance. Iran cut off all relations with Israel and declared Israel "an enemy of Islam," "the Little Satan" that should be destroyed. At the same time relations between Iraq and Iran deteriorated as Iran preached to bordering Shiite communities (among others in Iraq) to spark a revolution. Iran was seeking regional hegemony and pursued an aggressive rhetoric toward Saddam Hussein, who advocated for secular pan-Arab nationalism (Pelletiere, 1992:

32). The Iraqi leader saw an opportunity in the internal turmoil in Iran to take Iran's Khuzestan province dominated by Arabs and rich in oil. On September 22, 1980, the Iran-Iraq War broke out. Israel recognized that Iraq was the greater military power and posed a more serious threat. The Israeli government decided to give military support to Iran, which they saw as a counterweight to the Iraqi state. Israel sold $500 million worth of military equipment to Iran between 1981 and 1983, and a few years later, as part of Iran-Contra, sold Iran its obsolete American weapons. These deals come as no surprise considering that the Shah Pahlavi was the main buyer of Israeli arms. These transactions were based on barter exchange of oil for arms. Ariel Sharon believed that this would leave "a small window open" to bring Iran back to a good relationship with the Jewish state (Parsi, 2007: 108).

However, despite the barter exchange between states, tensions between Israel and Iran arose. In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon in response to the repeated attacks of the Palestine Liberation Organization operating in the south of that country. In reaction, the Shiite terrorist organization Hezbollah was established with extensive financial and organizational support from Iran, particularly from Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The primary goal of Hezbollah was to resist the Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah waged an asymmetric war with suicide bombings against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) which eventually led to the retreat of the IDF from South Lebanon in 2000.

Hezbollah and the IDF fought each other again in the 2006 Lebanon War. The IRGC directly assisted Hezbollah fighters in their attacks on Israel, contributing to the eventual stalemate. Iran also provides political and financial support and weapons to the Palestinian Hamas which wages jihad against Israel towards its destruction to destroy it. Iran's commitment to the Palestinian cause serves to present it as an ally and partner in the Arab, and in fact Islamic, cause. These Iran-Israel proxy wars include not only the Palestinian Autonomy and Lebanon but also Iraq and Syria.

In Iraq, Israel strikes Iranian targets: Iran-backed militias and Iranian missile ship-ments to Iraq. More direct confrontation between both states could be seen in Syria, during the civil war there (2012–). Israel was convinced that Iran wanted to establish a permanent presence in Syria like in Iraq and Lebanon, building camps, ports and civilian infrastructure and structures similar to Hezbollah. Israeli national security of-ficials were concerned that the IRGC division the Quds Forces could develop a preci-sion guided missile arsenal that could overwhelm Israel's Dome defense system posing a threat on its northern border. Israel also believes that Iran is building a "land bridge" of friendly, largely Shia forces from Tehran to Beirut through Iraq and Syria. To stop Iran from building a Shia Crescent (Shia majority/active minority states under Iranian influence), Israel developed the *mabam* strategy, a campaign between wars, against Iranian arms and missile depots, logistics sites, and command and control headquar-ters. Israel struck Iranian weapons and rocket depots, Iran's command headquarters, and intelligence and logistic sites around Damascus. Israel dropped roughly 2,000 bombs in its strikes against Iranian targets in Syria (Goldenberg, Heras, Thomas, Ma-tuschak, 2020).

On the Israel-Iran proxy wars map we can find Iran itself. Israel supports anti-Iranian rebel groups such as People's Mujahedin of Iran financially and carries out

cyber and hybrid attacks against Iran (more details below). The proxy war strategy allows to avoid conventional war between both states, as well as to avoid an Iranian conflict with the US and its Arab partners while at the same time increase its political and military influence without suffering direct military retaliation. It helps Iran to build a wide regional network of non-state actors that exert pressure on its adversaries and build an effective system of deterrence that will discourage Iran's opponents from attacking the country.

However, the most significant discord between Israel and Iran arose around the Iranian nuclear program. Israel is concerned about the presence of another nuclear force in the region and wants to remain the only state having this weapon.[1]

Discussions about the Iranian nuclear program date back to the international controversy resulting from revealed clandestine information that the program might be uses for non-peaceful purposes. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) launched an investigation in 2003 that revealed undeclared nuclear activities. Iran has signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and according to the UN Security Council, the Iranian nuclear program began to take on a military nature, thus breaking the provisions of the treaty.[2] In 2011, the IAEA found evidence that Iran had been involved in activities aimed at designing a nuclear bomb until 2003. This belief was strongly shared by Mossad, the national intelligence agency of Israel.

Despite or because of the controversies around the Iranian nuclear program, USA, Russia, China, UK, France, Germany as well as the EU decided in 2015 to sign a nuclear deal with Iran officially known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The agreement required Iran to reduce the uranium it held by 97%, limit uranium enrichment to 3.67% (from nearly 20%), hand over 2/3 of the centrifuges for storage and implement a comprehensive control system to monitor and confirm that Iran is fulfilling its JCPOA commitments.

Thus, for Israel, the Iranian threat has four components: a nuclear project, support for terrorism, attempts to undermine pragmatic Arab regimes, and an ideological and theological campaign to display Iran's regional legitimacy among the Arab population.

## ISRAEL'S SECURITIZATION OF IRAN

Securitization is probably the most prominent concept of the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. It was originally created and developed by Ole Waever and Bar-

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[1] The anti-Iranian axis includes Israel, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, UK, USA, Morocco, Sudan (since 2020), Yemen (pro-Hadi cabinet), while Iran is supported by Russia, Syria, China, Libya, Sudan (until 2015), North Korea, Venezuela and the above mentioned non-state actors.

[2] It is important to note that Israel is not a signatory of Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons which obliges states to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapon technologies, and promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and complete disarmament as well. In spite being a party to the NPT, Iran has a nuclear program, which means that both states do not promote a non-nuclear zone in the Middle East. Iran criticized Israel's concern about its nuclear program while it didn't regulate its own nuclear status. At the UN General Assembly in September 2013, President Rouhani urged Israel to join the nuclear nonproliferation treaty. S. Rajiv, *Deep disquiet: Israel and the Iran nuclear deal*, "Contemporary Review of the Middle East" 2016, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 47–62.

ry Buzan in 1983–2003. Securitization is defined as "the distinctive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with or eliminate the threat" (Buzan, Weaver, 2003: 491). In contrast to realism theory that perceives threats objectively, the securitization concept proposes to perceive threats as socially constructed on the basis of speech acts that through this process transform an issue into a security concern. Thus, an issue becomes a security threat not because it constitutes an objective threat to the referent object, but rather when an audience accepts the securitizing actor's position who claims that it is existentially threatened (Leonard, Kaunert, 2011: 57–76).

Securitization is a key theoretical term used to examine various aspects of security in a region, such as threats to individual states or the entire region. Securitized threats can remain on the security agenda for decades. The more recipients and political entities support securitization, the more effective it is. Effectiveness depends on the correct assessment of the feelings and needs of audiences and on the of use a public discourse to make them resonate.

Securitization is an instrument used by politicians to obtain public legitimacy to break international norms and rules i.e. use force, break the law etc. This kind of policy aims not only to transform an issue into a security concern but also to transform the state's regular policy into an emergency policy and gain consensus as to seeing certain phenomena, person or entity as an existential threat.

The Iranian nuclear program has been securitized in Israel since the 1990s when nuclear Iran was presented as an existential threat by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (Cohen, Stuart, 2008: 40). However, it was not an immediate concern as the Israeli Prime Minister argued that it would take 10–15 years for Iran to acquire a nuclear bomb. At the beginning of the new millennium, Iran's nuclear capabilities began to emerge as an Israeli top security concern. This was the result of a failed attempt by the International Atomic Energy Agency to obtain information on Iran's nuclear activities. The report of IAEA from February 2013 that concluded that Iran succeeded in enriching 8271 kg uranium up to 5% was an important caesura in perceiving Iran as an existential threat. From that moment it was clear for Israeli leaders that producing a nuclear weapon was only a matter of time and decision. At the same time Iran's influence in the region was rising.

During this period Israeli leadership was trying to obtain public support of clandestine activities to slow down the Iranian nuclear program. Israeli public discourse brought the intended results and was partially successful as the Iranian nuclear program was perceived in Israel as a serious but not existential threat (Ben Meir, Yehuda, Bagno-Moldavsky, 2013: 65). This is confirmed by the results of numerous polls conducted during the 2000s that show that the Iranian threat was perceived by Israeli public as serious.

Iranian and Israeli politicians and security service representatives have tried hard to "construct" the menace and give the impression of an existential threat through acts of speech and public discourse. The Iranian president Mahmud Ahmadinejad's statement (2005) describing Israel as a "disgraceful blot" that should be "wiped off the face of the earth" was cited in this context. But extreme rhetoric was used by Israel as well. Net-

anyahu said that Iran was preparing another Holocaust and that the time to resolve its nuclear program peacefully had run out (Benhorin, 2012). He also called the JCPOA a "stunning historic mistake" while Avigdor Lieberman, then the Israeli foreign minister, compared the deal to the Munich agreement with Nazi Germany. Moshe Ya'alon, the Israeli defense minister said that instead of fighting terror with all its might, the free world had granted legitimacy to Iran's hateful, murderous ways. Similarly as before, the security establishment expressed a far less hostile view of JCPOA than the political elite. Benny Gantz, currently Israel's defense minister, then IDF chief of staff, argued that postponing Iran's nuclear capabilities for 10–15 years is a glass half-full approach but that it didn't threaten Israeli security. However, shortly after the signing of the JCPOA, Israeli politicians concluded that the deal was a fact and that they must start looking at the regional challenges it would raise, especially from Iran. The Israeli Prime Minister made it clear that time was limited and decisive actions were needed.

Since 2016, Israel has received strong support for its policy of securitizing Iran's nuclear program from newly-elected US President Donald Trump. Both Trump and Netanyahu began to seek to withdraw or weaken the Iran nuclear deal. The core Israeli Zionist lobby that influenced Donald Trump's policy, including Jared Kushner (Donald Trump's political advisor and son-in-law), Jason Greenblatt (Trump's advisor on Israel) and David Friedman (United States Ambassador to Israel), believed that the State of Israel is a fulfillment of a Biblical prophecy and claimed that it is the responsibility of Christians to support it. Kushner was convinced that if he led to a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Israel, it would be Iran's worst nightmare (Yingst, 2019). A shared perception of the threat posed by Iran, especially its nuclear program, led to the signing of the Abraham Accords, a joint agreement between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United States, reached on August 13, 2020. The above measures taken by the Israeli political and military establishment, in line with the concept of securitization, emphasize the importance of speech acts, constructing the subjective reality and convincing the society through public discourse that the threat is real. To frame the threat, this first stage of securitization is more effective the longer it lasts and the more support it receives from other states (great powers). Donald Trump launched a "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran that included draconian sanctions to force Iran to renegotiate the 2015 nuclear deal (Stephens, 2019). American "maximum pressure" policy led to increased tensions in the region. Iran shot down a US military surveillance drone and allegedly attacked Saudi oil installations, while the US assassinated Iranian Revolutionary Guard General Qasem Soleimani, which was met with retaliatory missile strikes on US military bases in Iraq. However, the worst consequence of the "maximum pressure" policy was Iran's violation of the terms of the nuclear deal.

Israel decided to take significant steps and engage offensive and defensive resources to limit this threat. Mossad was involved in a number of operations, including the assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists, explosions in Iranian sites and cyberattacks on Iran's nuclear reactors. Israel justified its anti-Iranian sentiment by invoking the Begin Doctrine which assumes a counter-proliferation policy regarding their potential enemies' capabilities to possess weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons. Israel is aware that if Iran gets a nuclear weapon it will not be able to threaten the Iranian regime and limit its expansion. For Iran this weapon

would serve as an instrument to threaten rather than for offensive purposes taking into consideration the fact, that such a weapon was not used since World War II, nor by such a dictators like Kim Jong-Un. A potential Iranian attack on Israel would lead to a devastating retaliation that according to various estimates could inflict up to 28 million dead in the short term and, with more than half of Iran's industry based in Tehran, result in massive economic damage (Cordesman, 2007). If Israel were be attacked it could count on US military support. This was clearly showed in statements of Hilary Clinton in 2008 and Donald Trump many times during his cadency, even Barrack Obama was for stronger sanctions and military deterrence. The nuclear weapon that Israel has is a sufficient deterrent to any other weapon that Iran has at its disposal. Considering the above arguments, the perception of Iran as an existential threat both before and after the acquisition of nuclear weapons confirms that Israel is securitizing Iran's nuclear program and the threat from Iran, obtaining legitimacy for the use of emergency measures.

A public statement and speeches highlighting Israel's concerns about the ongoing negotiations between the US and Iran to restore the 2015 agreement were also continued under Prime Minister Naftali Bennet in 2021. However while Netanyahu and his cabinet did not participate in talks with the U.S. about the nuclear deal, Prime Minister Bennett is involved in discussions about Iran with United States. The Israeli leader demands a long-term and stronger deal that will include other concerns like limiting Iranian ballistic missile capability and expansive activities in the region (i.e. proxy wars). Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid argues that if sanctions against Iran are lifted, the government in Tehran will receive money to spend on terrorism and missiles that threaten Israel's security. Bennett, like Netanyahu, said if the nuclear deal will be not restrictive enough and Iran will be on the brink of being able to deploy a nuclear weapon, he will take a military action. However, there are some doubts about the Israel's ability to conduct such a preemptive strike as many nuclear facilities are underground (Hendrix, Rubin, 2021).

The Iranian threat in Israel and the Israeli threat in Iran are in fact treated as substitute subjects to divert attention from internal troubles. Securitization serves to divert the attention of one's society from unresolved internal issues related to unemployment, corruption charges (Benjamin Netanyahu) and even economic problems (Grabowski, 2020: 27).

But even in Israel, opinions differed on how to deal with the Iranian nuclear challenge. Divisions arose between Israeli political and security institutions, with the former, including Benjamin Netanyahu, displaying a more aggressive and resolute attitude towards Iran than the latter. Security officials supported the US's staying in the JCPOA agreement and believed it was working to stop the nuclear program. The three years when the JCPOA was in force have shown that Iran had strengthened its position, bringing Israeli politicians and security figures closer together, concealing previous differences. Widespread enthusiasm appeared when the American "maximum pressure" approach started to weaken Iran. While many security professionals believe that the new agreement with Iran would be the best course of action, they are reluctant to suggest any alternative viewpoint to the aggressive and decisive one presented by Netanyahu (Kaye, Efron, 2020: 9).

We can argue if the Israeli securitization of the Iranian threat was successful as the "Israeli audience seemed reluctant to support the solution suggested in the securitization climax – attacking Iran" (Lupovici, 2016: 423). There were even views by prominent Israeli figures that doubted if Iran poses an existential threat even if it gets a nuclear bomb. Former Mossad Chief Efraim Halevy stated: "I do indeed argue that a nuclear Iran does not constitute an existential threat to Israel [...] We have deterrent capability and preventive capability. If Iran acquires nuclear weapons, Israel will be able to design a true operational response that will be able to cope with that" (Shavit, 2012). If, however, the key to the securitization process is the acceptance by the public of the arguments used by the securitization entities for the exceptional measures taken, then the securitization of Iran by Prime Minister Netanyahu can be assumed to be (relatively) effective. "Relatively" because the majority of Israelis in favor, object to a unilateral attack on Iran. In a survey conducted in 2013 by New Wave Research, 46% supported an unilateral Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities while 38% were opposed. This shows that the belief that Iran is an existential threat is shared by the majority of Israelis while views are divided regarding the instruments to deal with this threat (*Israeli Public Opinion Pools: Attitudes Toward Iran*, 2013). These findings are important as they show that the Israeli authorities have a limited legitimacy to take extraordinary actions against Iran.

## HYBRID WARFARE

The roots of the idea of hybrid warfare can be traced to the military strategy put forth by Sun Tzu, a Chinese (544–496 BC) general who claimed that the most efficient way to fight an enemy is to break his resistance indirectly without fighting. Using this strategy allows a state to save resources that could have been exhausted in a direct confrontation. Hybrid warfare is a term/concept that has been developed in theory as well as practice. It has been officially used and adopted in strategic documents of NATO, EU and national governments as well as in many articles, policy papers and books. It has been defined a number of times.

Hybrid warfare departs from traditional warfare based on regular armies and uses different strategies and tactics to challenge an enemy state and achieve political and military goals. Hybrid warfare comprises different types of warfare that include conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts and criminal disorder (Hoffman, 2007: 8). Hybrid war is also based on paramilitary tools including proxy forces, missiles, cyber tools, maritime forces and disinformation and propaganda operations (Gierasimov doctrine).[3] The goals of hybrid warfare include achieving success in the physical (taking control of territory or regime change) and psychological (undermining morale) dimensions of the conflict and influencing decision-makers in

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[3] Valery Gerasimov is the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation who emphasized the importance of non-military means of warfare. They include political, economic and humanitarian instruments, manipulating the mood of the population living in the conflict area, propaganda, manipulation (information warfare) and all kinds of asymmetric activities with the use of special units and local political opposition.

such a way as to contain the adversary's rise in power. In hybrid wars the lines between peacetime and wartime, and combatants and civilians are blurred.

An example of hybrid warfare and using irregular methods to counter a conventionally superior force could be seen in the 2006 Lebanon War, also called the 2006 Israel–Hezbollah War. The Israel-Hezbollah conflict is a so-called proxy war, which can be treated as one of the forms of hybrid warfare. The asymmetric nature of this conflict can be seen when we compare the potential of both sides of the conflict: Hezbollah had 3,000 fighters while Israel deployed 30,000 soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces. But Hezbollah was trained and equipped by Iran and used diverse methods of guerilla and conventional military tactics. The organization is equipped in novel technologies such as cellular networks, high tech-weaponry, such as precision guided missiles that could destroy Israeli helicopters and tanks, patrol boats with cruise missiles, aerial drones to gather intelligence or thermal night-vision equipment (Grant, 2008: 18–24). Hezbollah takes advantage of the internet and other media for information and propaganda. Thus, Hezbollah has the ability to compete effectively with states and shape public opinion as well.

Another field of hybrid warfare is cyber warfare. At the beginning cyberattacks targeted military or government buildings or institutions. For instance in 2010, Israel (and the U.S.) was accused by Iran of a cyberattack on programmable logic controllers used to control machinery and industrial processes including gas centrifuges in Iranian nuclear program. – Stuxnet, a malicious computer worm was responsible for these damages that ruined almost one-fifth of Iran's nuclear centrifuges. Another incident was reported in April 2021 in Natanz where a Iranian nuclear facility is placed. A blackout caused a blast hit in Natanz nuclear facility and led to damage the electrical distribution grid. The incident happened a week after Iran and Biden tried to go back to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. According to the U.S. and Israeli intelligence officials, Israel was behind the cyber-attack (Fassihi, Gladstrone, Bergman, 2021). In recent years, however, cyberattacks started to hit ordinary citizens. In 2021, a cyberattack on Iran's nationwide fuel distribution system paralyzed the country's gas stations for almost 2 weeks. A few days later, in this tit for tat warfare, a cyberattack in Israel against a major medical facility took place that has been attributed to Iran. The reasons for such civilian-oriented attacks are two at least: 1) nondefense computer networks (soft targets) are usually less secure than those in the national security networks 2) by attacking civilian targets both governments send a message to the opposing country's policy makers. Some of them hope such attacks will lead to anti-government protests, a strategy similar to terrorist organizations who attack random people and try to force the government to make the decisions and actions they demand (the difference is in fatalities). Certainly, the focus of cyberattacks on infrastructure brings both states closer to military confrontation.

Another dimension of the hybrid warfare are the increasing number of violent incidents at sea in and around the Strait of Hormuz. Regularly repeated attacks on oil tankers off the coast of Oman appeared since (at least) 2019. This often called "shadow war" is conducted by Iran and Israel with the use of drones and target oil tankers managed by Iran or Israeli-owned companies, but pose a challenge for the global shipping industry as well. Naval battle targets included Iranian tankers destined for Syria,

Iranian ships serving as floating bases for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp and Israeli-linked merchant ships. Such warfare activities have a deterrent effect and are difficult to counter. Above all, these activities are a manifestation of the projection of power and protecting of the political and economic interests of both countries (Decis, Le Breton, 2021).

However, the hybrid war and proxy wars in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and the Palestinian Authority seem to be only partially successful for both Iran and Israel. In the short term it might bring some benefits but in the long term it pushes these states into international isolation (Iran) or accusations of unilateral and arrogant actions (Israel). In the case of Iran, the consequences of using hybrid war are much more undesirable and include international sanctions, the unwillingness of international banks and businesses to invest in Iran and these economic consequences impact Iran's ability to invest in and modernize its military. Iranian military expenditures have decreased in the last decade. Hezbollah remains in its worst financial condition in decades while Saudi Arabia and Qatar support its own Sunni proxies in Syria, thereby limiting Iran's efforts to increase its influence in that state (Dalton, 2017: 314). The Abraham Accords might be perceived as an unintended consequence of the Iran-lead hybrid war as well.

Both states justify their strategies using a similar argument: to deter adversaries or use preemptive measures to prevent them from gaining a high status in the regional order/structure. Iran claims that its security position is defensive in nature and plays a deterrent role against more powerful adversaries. Iran's behavior is aggressive and destabilizes the regional order while its goal is to achieve domestic survival and primacy in the Middle East through maintaining a lofty position in the political and economic regional structure and order.

By eschewing open and direct conflict, both states avoid escalating it to the point where they should use conventional forces Still, at the same time, such hybrid warfare poses a challenge for the US and its regional partners. Iran undertakes nonmilitary coercive operations that do not provoke significant retaliation, such as ballistic missile tests or information operations, to shape public perception. Although Iran violates international standards, encroaching upon the sovereignty of other countries, Israel and the US react in a similar way. This is visible when they use a strategy known as targeted killing that includes the murders of crucial members of Iran's political and military establishment, like killing nuclear scientists or important military figures (for instance, Gen. Qassim Soleimani) or organizing explosions in sensitive facilities such as nuclear enrichment factories (e.g. the Natanz nuclear facility) or gas pipelines. These incidents are accompanied by growing tensions and escalations between Iran and the US and Israel since the Trump administration withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in May 2018. Israel's history of targeting nuclear sites in the region is not new and dates back to the Israeli bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor in Osirak in 1981, the Syrian nuclear facility at al-Kibar in 2007 or producing the Stuxnet computer worm used in a cyberattack on Iran's nuclear centrifuges in 2009.

In spite of the political murders of nuclear scientists by Mossad agents, economic sanctions imposed on Iran mainly by the US, support for Bashar Assad's opposition, strikes against Hezbollah, signing of the Abraham Accords and the use of other coercive measures, Iran not only did not withdraw from its nuclear program but expanded

its ambitions and strengthened its nuclear capabilities. Israel's strategy and campaign to mobilize all its potential and the international community against Iran have not succeeded in withdrawing Iran's privileges.

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This article set out to investigate the evolving Israeli-Iranian relations and their determinants, referring to the concept of securitization and hybrid warfare. The concept of securitization proves effective in examining the perception of the Iranian nuclear program by Israeli political elites and public opinion and in assessing the effects of the offensive narrative pursued by the Israeli government. Securitization is intended to serve Israeli political leaders to legitimize taking emergency action against Iran. What stands out in such a policy is that it looks to fears and threats to legitimize offensive measures. The existence of the enemy and attempts to convince the public that only this particular government can ensure security is a well-known political strategy aimed at ensuring the legitimacy of power. This is the motive that brings actors to initiate securitization moves and can be an effective instrument in security policy. The goal of the Israeli government is to convince the Israeli public and the international community of its view of the Iranian nuclear threat. However, there are still many members of the military and political establishment in Israel who do not share the government's rhetoric and are convinced that Israel has sufficient deterrent potential and defensive and offensive resources to defend itself against the Iranian threat. Iran has been "close" to nuclear weapons for many years, and even if it built a bomb, there is no evidence that it will use them against Israel. Nuclear weapons have not been used since 1945, although there have been many nuclear crises (the India-Pakistan, North and South Korea and Cuban crises). On the other hand, membership in the "club of nuclear states" is still prestigious, and it seems to be an important argument for Israel to keep Iran from joining this community.

The Iranian-Israeli hybrid warfare is another form of power competition and a way to reduce the military/economic capacity of its adversary. Hybrid warfare allows to blur responsibility of engaged states (concealment of guilt), involves less military and human potential and is simply cheaper than regular warfare. Such offensive actions tend to intensify the Israeli-Iranian "shadow/cold war" and should be seen as one of the instruments of exerting pressure on another state. Hybrid warfare puts states in a constant condition of threat and danger, giving a reason to build up their armed forces (militarize) to survive, leading to a security dilemma. But is hybrid war effective in limiting the Iranian nuclear program? The aggressive policy towards Iran led by both Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu gave Iranian hardliners an argument for building nuclear weapons while undermining moderate groups in Tehran open to dialogue with the West. The choice of military solutions leads to a rejection of peace talks and diplomacy and has so far not stopped Iran's nuclear program. Increasing pressure from Israel and the US is provoking a similarly negative reaction from Iran, leading to an increase in chaos and regional instability, but most of all is detrimental to the security of the states in the region.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to investigate Iranian-Israeli relations, which are based on hate speech and hybrid warfare, but can actually be reduced to a struggle for power and domination. In order to legitimize their military actions against an enemy state, both Iran and Israel must securitize the threat, which means they must convince the public that the opposing state poses an existential threat. Hate speech and aggressive rhetoric are used by both countries and represent a subjective perception of a threat, as well as a legitimizing tool to justify extraordinary measures to counter the threats. Appealing to fears and threats and the method of creating an enemy are well-known political strategies that ensure the legitimacy of power.

**Keywords:** Securitization, hybrid warfare, Iran, Israel, security, Iranian nuclear program

## OD „AKTU MOWY" DO UŻYCIA NADZWYCZAJNYCH ŚRODKÓW – SEKURYTYZACJA I WOJNA HYBRYDOWA W STOSUNKACH IRAŃSKO-IZRAELSKICH

### STRESZCZENIE

Celem artykułu jest analiza stosunków irańsko-izraelskich, które opierają się na mowie nienawiści i wojnie hybrydowej, ale w rzeczywistości można je sprowadzić do walki o władzę i dominację. Aby legitymizować swoje działania militarne przeciwko wrogiemu państwu, zarówno Iran, jak i Izrael muszą dokonać sekurytyzacji zagrożenia, co oznacza, że muszą przekonać opinię publiczną, że wrogie państwo stanowi zagrożenie egzystencjalne. Mowa nienawiści i agresywna retoryka są wykorzystywane przez oba państwa i są przejawem subiektywnej percepcji zagrożenia, a także stanowią narzędzie legitymizujące do uzasadnienia nadzwyczajnych środków przeciwdziałania zagrożeniom. Odwoływanie się do lęków i zagrożeń oraz metoda kreowania wroga to znane strategie polityczne zapewniające legitymizację władzy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** sekurytyzacja, wojna hybrydowa, Iran, Izrael, bezpieczeństwo, Irański program nuklearny