**SECURITIZATION, FRAMING AND THE CASE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE**

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**Abstract**

Although there is a growing body of scholarly literature exploring the phenomenon of securitization in Western state systems, little attention has been paid thus far to the securitization moves taken by religious-based groups such as the Islamic State (IS). In an effort to fill the gap in the literature on this crucial topic, this paper combines a revised version of the Copenhagen School’s securitization theory (ST) with elements of framing theory (FT).Borrowing from and expanding upon recent work in the theoretical and case study literature, the framework used here offers needed revisions to the ST model while also providing crucial insights into the securitization strategies and techniques used by religious-based, non-state actors such as IS.

Introduction

This paper examines the securitizing moves taken by the Islamic State (IS).[[1]](#footnote-1) Through the utilization of a theoretical framework that combines securitization theory (ST) with elements of framing theory (FT), the paper seeks to map out the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing strategies that have been used by IS in its efforts to convince crucial audiences both in those territories which IS directly controls as well as across the *ummah* (global Sunni community) that the Islamic State’s salafist-takfiri doctrine is worthy of defense. In addition, the analysis undertaken in this paper will highlight the contextual claims that IS uses to frame and justify its pursuit of a peculiar form of “offensive securitization” as it seeks to spread the influence of the Islamic State’s doctrine and principles through the expansion of the caliphate’s borders, a religious requirement that mandates and justifies direct violent action against governments, Sunnis who reject the Islamic State’s doctrine, and other Muslim and non-Muslim religious sects.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, the key concepts and theoretical assumptions of ST are summarized, the relevant crucial shortcomings of ST in its original formulation are discussed, and the efforts within the ST literature to address these shortcomings are examined. Second, the core theoretical concepts and assumptions of FT are presented, and both the complementary nature of the two theories *and* the rehabilitative utility of integrating key elements of FT into the ST framework are presented. Third, this integrated framework is applied to the contemporary case of the Islamic State in order to gain a deeper insight into the context-specific goals of the group’s securitizing moves, the multiple frames by which IS delivers its message to its target audiences, and the reasons why the securitization moves taken by IS have resonated with at least a portion of the Sunni ummah. The concluding section will summarize the main findings of this paper and offer suggestions for how to counter the Islamic State’s securitization moves.

Securitization Theory: A Summary and Critique

First fully developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jappe de Wilde (1998) in their groundbreaking book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, securitization theory (ST) has been widely heralded and embraced as one of the most important and influential developments in the contemporary discipline of international relations in general, and in security studies specifically. At its core, securitization theory presents security as a speech act: “In this usage,” says Waever (1995: 55), “security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance itself is the act.” By proclaiming something to be an existential threat to a cherished referent object, the securitizing agent attempts to move that issue outside the realm of regular politics and into the realm of special politics, thereby justifying the use of extraordinary means to defeat the threat. The success or failure of the securitization move is then determined by whether relevant audiences support or reject the move.

The process by which securitization takes places unfolds as follows: First, a securitizing agent both frames an actor or development as posing an existential threat to an object of cherished value and makes the case that this existential threat requires the securitizer to undertake extraordinary measures in defense of the referent object. In the literature, this is referred to as a *securitizing move*. However, an issue is *securitized* only if and when the relevant audience accepts the securitizer’s claim that a) the survival of the cherished referent object is under existential threat, *and* b) therefore, that the securitizer has the legitimate right to undertake extraordinary measures in order to defeat that threat (Buzan et al 1998: 25).

What factors determine the likelihood that a particular audience will accept a particular agent’s securitizing move? Buzan et al identify key *felicitous conditions* that pave the way for successful securitization. These include internal conditions, which focus on the ‘grammar of security’—constructing a scenario for presentation to the audience that incorporates the identification of an existential threat, the argument that the threat must be addressed, and a proposed solution for defeating the threat. Essential external conditions include the social capital of the securitizer (she/he/they are generally recognized by the intended audience as having the power and authority to address the threat) and the nature of the threat itself (Buzan, et al: 32-33). “Thus, security is neither objective (threats in themselves) nor subjective (a matter of perceptions), but intersubjective and political: who can securitize what and with what effects?” (Laustsen and Waever 2000: 708).

ST has been lauded as “one of the most significant conceptual innovations to emerge out of the debate over the nature security in recent decades” (Peoples and Vaughn-Williams 2010: 75). Although a critic of securitization as originally formulated, Balzacq observes that, “Among the many methods developed to scrutinize the tenets and implications of security discourse, the theory of securitization, grounded upon speech act philosophy, has aroused the most interest” (Balzacq 2005: 171). Hayes (2011: 1) describes securitization theory as “one of the most dynamic and interesting developments in security studies in the last 20 years.”

Increasingly however ST has taken a number of critical broadsides and, subsequently, efforts at revision, based on interpretations of the theory’s shortcomings in several key areas.[[2]](#footnote-2) Of particular relevance for the purposes of this paper is the criticism that in its original design ST failed to treat religion as security sector in its own right (Sheikh 2014; Laustsen and Waever 2000). Because the designation of religion as a sector is a major recent development in the ST literature *and* because the securitzation moves of the Islamic State are framed in religio-political terms, a detailed discussion of the religious sector is required for the purposes of this paper.

*Bringing Religion in as a Security Sector*

Credit for the initial formulation of the concept of sectors goes to Barry Buzan (1991). As described by Buzan (1991: 19-20, cited in Buzan et al, 1998: 7-8)

Generally speaking, the military security concerns the two-level interplay of the armed offensive and defensive capabilities of states, and states’ perceptions of each other intentions. Political security concerns the organizational stability of states, systems of government and the ideologies that give them legitimacy. Economic security concerns access to the resources, finance and markets necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and state power. Societal security concerns the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture, *religious* (emphasis added) and national identity and custom. Environmental security concerns the maintenance of the local and planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend.

Each sector identifies “specific types of interaction” (Buzan, et al 1998: 7). In the original sectors model religion was subsumed with the societal sector. In their 1998 text Buzan et al (1998: 123) identify religion as being one of a number of potential referent objects for a securitizing move within the societal sector, placing it in the same category with units such as tribes, clans, nations, civilizations, and races. According to the authors, these referent objects are similar insofar as they all are anchored in *identity* (emphasis in original) and the general sense that *we* (again, emphasis in the original) are threatened by some *they*.

In recent years, however, the concept of religion has been reworked in the securitization literature in a way that makes it possible to treat religion as its own security sector. In their 2000 article in the journal *Millennium*, Laustsen and Waever make the case for recognizing the potential for religion to act as its own distinct sector. “Searching for the religious element in religion,” the authors argue, “we cannot rest satisfied with looking to religions as forms of communities or identities. Religious discourse does not defend identity or community, but the true faith, our possibility to worship the right gods the right way and—in some religions—thereby have a chance at salvation” (Laustsen and Waever 2000: 709).

According to Laustsen and Weaver (2000: 718) “religion has three main dimensions. It has faith as the guiding principle of discourse. This faith is only possible due to a distinction between the immanent and the transcendent, and this distinction is finally reinterpreted as a distinction between sacred and profane.” They go on to assert (2000: 719) that, because “sacred objects mediate between the transcendent and earthly realm, losing these objects means losing contact with God. Hence, *the act of referring to sacred objects as threatened typically means securitizing an issue*” (emphasis in original) and could “imply immediate action by the state.” In fact, because threats to sacred objects are, almost by definition, considered by the faithful to be an existential threat to their faith, securitization moves that are based on religion tend, ceteris paribus, to have a higher probability of success than securitization moves that are taken in other sectors (Laustsen and Waever 2000: 719).

Although in a post-9/11 world that is characterized by a ‘Global War on Terror’ Laustsen’s and Waever’s conceptualization of religion as a security sector is a major step forward in the securitization literature, it has been met with some criticism and efforts at revision. Principally, in her 2014 article Mona Kanwal Sheikh offers important amendments to the original formulation of religion as a security sector. First, she criticizes Laustsen and Waever for adopting a Western-centric conceptualization of religion. According to Sheikh (2014: 254) Laustsen and Waever “can be criticized for adopting an ethno-centric concept of religion by relying too heavily on western theology/philosophy in its demarcation of religious discourse.” Specifically, Sheikh (2014: 257) rightly points out that the distinction made by Laustsen and Waever between the sacred and the profane—the religious sphere and the political sphere—is much more relevant to and descriptive of certain Western-based faiths (e.g. the Protestant form of Christianity) than it is of many Non-Western faiths, including Islam. As she correctly observes (Sheikh 2014: 259), “orthodox religious discourse in relation to Islam concerns both the *deen* (faith) and *dawla* (polity) and in this discourse the separation of politics from religion is often perceived as an artificial boundary.”

Sheikh also criticizes the assertion that the referent object of security moves taken in the religious sector is necessarily faith. This “narrow and substantialist definition appears as a limitation since it does not enable the theory to capture the manifold dimensions of religion that religio-political activists claim in various parts of the world when they securitize religion” (Sheikh 2014: 260). Specifically, it is crucial for those studying a particular case of religious securitization to take into account the ways in which culture shapes the content and process of a religious-based securitizing move.

Sheikh’s argument on this point places her work squarely in what we might call the “second generation” of ST literature, with its focus on the social, political and cultural context within which security is uttered. As articulated by Balzacq (2011: 13), “to move an audience’s attention toward an event or a development construed as dangerous, the words of the securitizing actor need to resonate with within the context within which his/her actions are collocated.” In a similar fashion, Hayes emphasizes the importance for analysts to take into account what he calls the *socio-political terrain*—“the various elements of social, cultural and political fabric (which) combine to create courses that are more or less likely to produce securitization” (Hayes 2011: 9).

As an alternative to depicting faith as the referent object of religious securitization, Sheikh (2014: 264) makes the case for the utility of the concept of doctrine as the referent object of security in the religious sector. She defines doctrines as “particular principles, values or ideas about ways of life, which are accepted as authoritative by a group of people and upheld by particular legendary myths that easily make the doctrines worth dying for.” Sheikh (2014: 265) goes on to note that “having believers appears to be the main criterion for survival when doctrines are securitized.” Thus, successful securitization in the religious sector is a process which involves securitizing actors who speak the language of culturally-embedded security in such a way that they invoke powerful elements of religious doctrine, thereby mobilizing believers to support their securitizing moves. The ability to imbue a securitization move with religious and cultural meaning is particularly crucial for potential securitizing actors in the religious sector, since they typically lack the automatic legitimacy that is supposed to come with being the recognized leader of a secular state in the contemporary international system.

In addition to revising and rehabilitating the definition of the religious sector, Sheikh forges important new ground in recognizing the peculiar power of offensive discourse within the context of religious securitization. Based on her own analysis of the recruitment efforts of the Pakistani Taliban, Sheikh (2014: 269) finds that “religio-political actors often draw upon a double layer of discourses in their security moves and that defensive claims walk hand in hand with a more offensive storyline, where religious imperatives play a more aggressive role in justifying violence.” She goes on to note that “the logic of the offensive storyline is that the necessity to struggle for (the referent object) stems not from the threat against it, but from what is interpreted as religious imperatives and justification claims.” As will be discussed in the case study portion of this paper, the Islamic State’s ‘offensive storyline’ constitutes an important element of its securitizing package.

There is no doubt that the critiques and correctives offered by the authors discussed in the preceding paragraphs represent important steps forward in the development of ST. As has been noted, of particular importance for the purposes of this paper is the development of religion as a distinct sector. At the same time, however, further rehabilitation of the ST framework remains to be done. Most importantly, revision and clarification is required in providing greater insight as to both the selection of particular frames of reference by securitizing actors in making their security moves, and to elucidating those factors that shape the likelihood that a particular audience will accept the credibility and salience of a given securitization move. For that, we turn to framing theory.

The Corrective Role of Framing within the Securitization Framework

In an effort to bolster the theoretical and conceptual sharpness of ST, this paper incorporates elements of framing theory (FT) into the broader securitization framework. The complementary nature of ST and FT has been most thoroughly addressed to this point by Watson in his article published in 2012. Watson (2012: 280) argues “not only that these two bodies of work are compatible and based on strongly overlapping theoretical and normative commitments, but also that ‘security’ operates as a distinct master frame similar to ‘rights’ and ‘injustice’ and that securitization theory maybe usefully be seen as a subfield of framing.”

Although it is likely an overstatement to conceptualize securitization as a “subfield of framing,” there is no doubt that the two theories overlap in important and meaningful ways, and moreover that certain elements of FT in fact offer a useful compliment to some of the most crucial pillars of the ST framework. Of particular importance is the concept of collective action frames in the framing literature. As described by Benford and Snow (2000: 613), collective action frames involve “the struggle over the production of mobilizing and counter-mobilizing ideas and meanings . . . (and) *movement actors are viewed as* *signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers*” (emphasis added). Those movements that possess what Van Dijk (2000: 355) calls “a *power base* (emphasis in original) of privileged access to scarce social resources, such as force, money, status, fame, knowledge, information (and) culture . . .” have an advantage in terms of controlling the information, images and discourse to which the ordinary people who are their target audiences are exposed.

For the purposes of this paper, two specific sets of analytical and theoretical categories drawn from framing theory will be incorporated into the traditional ST framework. The first of these deals with what is called in the framing theory literature the *core framing tasks* of social movements (Benford and Snow 2000: 615-618). It is argued here that, when blended into the ST framework, the concept of core framing tasks sheds important light on the first stage of the securitization process: that is, the securitizing move that is taken by an actor. As discussed by Benford and Snow (2000: 615), core framing tasks “are constructed in part as movement adherents negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as being in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change.” Core framing tasks include diagnostic framing (problem identification and attribution), prognostic framing (the articulation of a solution to the problems identified within the diagnostic framing task), and motivational framing (a rationale for why individual action within the group setting is necessary for the achievement of the proffered solution to the problem previously identified).

The securitizing move represents the first stage in the process of securitization. As has been noted, however, something only becomes securitized if and when the securitizing move is accepted by crucial audience members. This draws our attention to the question of *why* the audience accepts or rejects a securitizing move, which leads us to consider whether or not the social movement’s collective action frame achieves *resonance* with crucial audiences (Benford and Snow 2000: 619-622). Of particular importance on this issue are the credibilityandsalience of movement’s action frames. Credibility rests on three factors: *frame consistency* (the extent to which the beliefs and claims of the group ‘hang together’ to form a consistent message and the degree to which the groups actions match its words); *empirical credibility* (does the frame’s depiction of the world seem empirically plausible given the experiences and beliefs of the target audiences?); and the *credibility* of frame articulators (do they possess the perceived status, knowledge, and position of authority to make a credible claim). The salience of a movement’s framing actions draws from three dimensions: *centrality* (the degree to which the values expressed in the action frame matter within the value systems of target audiences); *experiential commensurability* (do the movement’s framings resonate with the daily life experiences of the members of the target audiences?); and *narrative fidelity* (do the frame’s messages correspond with dominant cultural narratives, myths, assumptions and beliefs?). The movement’s success or failure in its mobilizing efforts (i.e. its “securitizing move”) vis-à-vis its intended audiences determines whether that effort results in a successful or unsuccessful securitization move.

It is important to note that this paper does not represent the first effort to employ an integrated ST/FT framework in the analysis of a case study. Previous work in this area includes Pinto’s (2014) analysis of the interplay between securitization and framing in the case of the Arab Spring events in Bahrain, and Rychnovska’s (2014) study of the securitization of terror within the context of the United Nations’ Security Council following the 9/11 attacks. For the purposes of this paper, Rychnovska’s work is of particular utility. Rychnovska (2014: 17-18) makes the case that the resonance of a collective action frame (or securitizing move) often rests on “a creative process of linking newly articulated threat frames to the established system of meaning in a given social environment.” The success of a securitizing move depends upon the degree to which the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames constructed by the securitizing actor resonates with the audience through the successful linking of the securitization move at hand with credible and salient culturally and historically grounded meanings of security.

Rychnovska (2014: 19) observes that power plays a critical role within the framing/securitization process. She argues that “power is embedded in . . . the structure of social relations as well as in the established system of meaning.” The context of meanings and relations then “translates to the ability of actors to establish a certain frame of security as dominant in the process of securitization.” Thus, power relations are best seen as “contextual and in constant flux,” and the nature and direction of a particular set of power relations plays out through “the very dynamics of negotiating the meaning of threats.” As will be seen in the analysis below, IS has attempted to empower itself with the legitimate right to ‘speak security’ by embedding its security claims in frames of reference that are designed to resonate with ‘true believers’ in the Sunni Muslim faith, both inside Iraq and Syria as well as across the global Sunni Muslim ummah**.** In doing so, IS seeks to defend and build support for the salafist-takfiri doctrine that is at the core of the group’s securitization framings.

The History of the Islamic State: A Brief Overview

Although a detailed presentation of the history of IS is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief summary of the creation and evolution of the organization is crucial if we are to understand its securitization moves and framing strategies. The organization which today calls itself the Islamic State traces its immediate roots to the violence and chaos that wracked Iraq in the years following the fall of Saddam Hussein (Sedgwick, October/November 2015). The brainchild of the Jordanian-born criminal-turned-militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the *Jama’at al-Tawhid w’al-Jihad* (or Party of Monotheism and Jihad, as it initially branded itself) quickly set itself apart from Al Qaeda (AQ) by directing large-scale terrorist operations against the Shi’a population of Iraq, with the goal being to stir up a sectarian hornet’s nest inside post-Saddam Iraq. Although this strategy stood in stark contrast to AQ’sfocus on Western targets, (Ghosh, August 14, 2014), by 2004 it was also clear to the mainstream AQ leadership that Zarqawi’s approach was having its intended strategic effect on the ground, as well as attracting media attention *and* new recruits, particularly after the successful bombings at the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad, the UN compound in the Iraq capital, and the Imam Ali Shi’a mosque in Najaf (Barrett 2014: 11). Zarqawi’s group was ideologically unique (Crooke August 2014) in that it subscribed to a very severe and literal interpretation of Wahhabism, the ultra-conservative Sunni doctrine whose roots can be traced back to the 18th century in what is today Saudi Arabia. Specifically (Ramahi September 2014; Bunzel 2015), Zarqawi combined salafist doctrine (the desire to return society to the ‘perfect state’ in which it existed during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad) with an advocacy for the practice of takfir (branding those who do not subscribe to salafist principles as infidels worthy of death). The salafist-takfiri worldview continues to serve as the doctrinal core of the Islamic State’s vision today.

In the fall of 2004 AQ extended an offer to Zarqawi’s group to become its franchise in Iraq, an offer which Zarqawi officially accepted on October 17, 2004. In his statement of *bay’ah* (oath of allegiance), Zarqawi renamed his organization Al-Qaeda in Iraq(AQI) while proclaiming the loyalty of both himself and his fighters to Osama Bin Laden, pronouncing him to be “the *Sheikh al-Mujahideen* of our times” (Jamestown Foundation, December 15, 2004). From a strategic perspective the alliance between Zarqawi’s forces and AQ met the needs of both parties to the arrangement. Zarqawi expected that taking on the AQ brand name would both assist him in his recruiting and funding efforts and establish greater legitimacy in the eyes of Iraqi Sunnis, many of whom viewed Zarqawi’s organization, with its preponderance of foreign fighters, with some suspicion. Meanwhile, AQ’s main leadership gained both a footprint in Iraq as well as leverage (at least in theory) to rein in the excessively violent and sectarian orientation of Zarqawi’s group (Ghosh 2014; Barrett 2014: 11).

In point of fact, Zarqawi’s reign of bloody terror against Iraq’s civilian population—and Iraqi Shiites in particular—continued unabated even after his erstwhile pledge of obedience to Bin Laden. Matters finally came to a head in a dramatic letter penned by Ayman al-Zawahiri in 2005 (weeklystandard.com, October 11, 2005), in which Osama Bin Laden’s top lieutenant reminded Zarqawi that achieving Al-Qaeda’s two major immediate-term goals—the expulsion of American forces and the creation of an Islamic emirate in Iraq—was largely dependent upon “popular support from the Muslim masses in Iraq, and the surrounding Muslim countries.” The letter went on to lecture Zarqawi that attacks on Shi’a civilian targets, and in particular mosques, “won’t be acceptable to the Muslim population, however much you have tried to explain it, and aversion to this will continue.” In hammering home his point Zawahiri warned against repeating mistakes made by the Taliban in Afghanistan, where the regime’s detachment from, and disregard for, the masses created the conditions under which “the Afghan people disengaged themselves from them.” Much to his chagrin, Zawahiri found that, in practice, he had no real power to bring Zarqawi to heel. In an ironic twist, the United States took care of Al-Qaeda’s“Zarqawi Problem” when they killed the AQI leader in an air strike in June 2006.

Following Zarqawi’s death, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi emerged as the leader of the newly reformulated Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Baghdadi took over an organization that was rocked by the loss of its founder. On the battlefield, ISI and other militant groups faced mounting military pressure from both the local tribesman who took part in the US-orchestrated “Sunni Awakening” and from the American military itself in the form of “The Surge.” ISI’s political and strategic fortunes were in steep decline, capped by the death of Abu Omar al-Baghdad in April 2010, again, as a result of a US-led air strike (Ghosh 2014).

Just has it seemed on the verge of a total collapse, the group’s new leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, seized upon the developing crisis inside Syria in 2011 to breathe new life into ISI. The Syrian civil war, which pitted a seething and resentful Sunni majority against the Alawite-led minority regime of Bashar al-Assad, was the perfect incubator for ISI’s brand of radical salafist-takfiri jihad (Barrett 2014: 12). Meanwhile, the death of Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan at the hands of a US airstrike created a vacuum within the broader Sunni militant movement. At a time when AQ central and its Syrian affiliate, *Jahbat al-Nusra*, were both struggling, ISI quickly built its force size and brand name, attracting thousands of recruits in the fight against the ‘apostate’ Shiite regimes in Iraq and Syria (Sedgwick 2015; Barrett 2014).

Changing his organization’s name to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), an emboldened Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi claimed that *Jabhat al-Nusra* should now be considered a Syria offshoot of the core ISI group. *Jahbat al-Nusra’s* leadership rejected this move, and appealed to Ayman al-Zawahiri to intervene in the dispute. Zawahiri found in favor of *Jahbat al-Nusra* and ordered that al-Baghdadi’s forces restrict their activities to Iraq. In a replay of the dispute between AQ’s main leadership and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi nearly a decade earlier, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi rejected Zawahiri’s order, proclaiming “The Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (i.e. Syria) will endure, so long as we have a vein that pulses and an eye that bats” (Bunzel 2015: 25-26). Finally at the end of his rope, Zawahiri disavowed ISIS as an *Al Qaeda* franchise in early 2014 (Barrett 2014: 12).

ISIS scored a number of major military advances in 2014, the most spectacular and infamous of which took place in Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city, where the Iraqi army simply threw down its arms and fled in the face of a much smaller advancing ISIS force. In the aftermath of the Mosul victory, al-Baghdadi declared the end of the Sykes-Picot state borders and proclaimed the establishment of the caliphate, taking the name Caliph Ibrahim. In addition, in a move that was clearly designed to signal that he did not intend to stop with Iraq and Syria, the name of the organization was changed to the Islamic State (IS), with the caliphate’s capital being established in Raqqa, Syria (Barrett 2014: 12).

Even as IS attempted to creates the roots of a proto-state with all the typical responsibilities of providing security and services that come with statehood in the contemporary system, it continued to work to attract new recruits while also courting international attention and outrage through its tactic of publicized beheadings and mass executions (Caris and Reynolds: July 2014). In Sinjar in August 2014 (Sedgwick 2015), the Islamic state slaughtered thousands of men from the minority Yazidi sect, while thousands of Yazidi women and girls were raped and sold into slavery. In response to stepped-up US air strikes (*New York Times*, August 19, 2014) IS beheaded American journalist James Foley. Similarly, in early 2015 IS responded to an increase in coalition air strikes by uploading a video on the internet showing the live immolation of a captured, caged Jordanian pilot (Bunzel 2015: 35).

Since the autumn of 2014, the military fortunes of IS have generally arched downward. Although IS has remained in the spotlight as a result of a series of spectacular terrorist attacks in Tunisia, the Sinai Peninsula, Beirut and Paris, as well as the IS-inspired attack in California, its guerilla army has been driven from Kobani in Syria as well as Takrit in Iraq. After seizing Ramadi in May 2015 (Sedgwick 2015), Islamic State forces were finally rooted out of the Iraqi city in early 2016 (“How Iraq Recaptured Ramadi and Why It Matters,” *Al-Jazeera*, January 3, 2016).

It is reported that at least partially due to these strategic setbacks the Islamic State’s ranks have been thinned. According to an intelligence estimate issued by the White House in early February 2016 (*The Guardian*, February 4, 2016), the total number of IS fighters had declined from approximately 31,000 to around 25,000, a report which if true chronicles a 20% decline in the Islamic State’s fighting force. And yet, the widespread perception among US politicians and the American masses is that the Islamic State’s fortunes are still on the rise. Moreover, there is overwhelming evidence (The Soufan Group, December 2015) that during the period of time between the declaration of the new Caliphate in June 2014 and the end of 2015, the number of foreign fighters flocking to Iraq and Syria doubled. These developments underscore the Islamic State’s ability to frame its securitizing moves in such a way that they resonate with and mobilize at least parts of those audiences whose active support IS seeks, while also continuing to spark fear in the active enemies of the Islamic State’s religious, political and military agenda. This then leads us to undertake a deeper analysis of the securitizing moves and framing actions of the Islamic State.

Securitization Moves and Framing by the Islamic State

Securitization is a two-step process: a securitizing move by an actor claiming the right to ‘speak security’ on behalf of a particular referent object, followed by the acceptance or rejection of that move by a critical target audience or audiences. The first stage of the securitization process can be conceptualized as being comprised of three core framing tasks: diagnostic framing (i.e. the identification of a threat or threats); prognostic framing (the presentation of a proposed strategy for defeating the threat or threats); and motivational framing (the enunciation of a rationale for why individuals should contribute to defeating the threat or threats). Success in the second stage (i.e. audience acceptance) relies on the ability of would-be securitizers to anchor their religious-oriented securitizing actions in moves that are religiously, historically, and culturally resonant. As will be revealed in the discussion that follows, “At the core of (the Islamic State’s) narrative are themes familiar to most Muslims” (Schmid: June 2014).

*Diagnostic Framing*

Analyzed through the prism of diagnostic framing, IS identifies several threats to the group’s salafist-takfiri doctrine. This section defines those threats and then examines the manner in which IS frames those threats in order to achieve resonance with its core Sunni audience. First, the Islamic State sees the West as posing a potential existential threat (Ramahi 2014; Bunzel 2015: 10). In the twelfth issue of the official Islamic State magazine *Dabiq*, IS celebrates the Paris attacks, while also addressing both the strategic threat which the is posed by the West through its military involvement in the Middle East as well as the threat to Islamic values that Muslims living in the West face on a daily basis. To IS and its supporters, the US-led military campaign in Iraq and Syria is seen a providing “further evidence that that there is a Western-led onslaught on their religion and independence” (Barrett 2014: 6).

In addition, IS focuses on the threat that is posed by apostate political rulers who claim authority over the ummah living within existing secular state territories, and more generally by the kafir (those in society who are ‘disbelievers’). Prior to his death, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi stated “The rulers of the Muslim lands are traitors, unbelievers, sinners, liars, deceivers and criminals.” He went on to make the case that “fighting them (local rulers) is of greater necessity than fighting the occupying crusader” (Bunzel 2015: 10). As depicted by IS, the category of apostate actors in the region includes the governments of Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan (among others). Moreover, IS considers groups such as al Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas to be apostates. For example, in 2014 nine high-level clerics formerly linked with al-Qaeda issued a scathing rebuke of AQ for, among other shortcomings, failing to grasp the degree of threat which Shi’a Islam poses to the salafist doctrine and the Sunni ummah more generally (Habeck 2015).

The hyper-focus of IS on those it considers as having being guilty of kufr (disbelief) sets it apart from other salafist-based radical groups. In particular, the takfiri strand within the IS’s doctrine is used to justify the application of violent means in punishing the disbelievers, regardless of sect. In a letter reportedly authored by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and released by IS in November 2014 (Schatchtel, November 13, 2014), the self-proclaimed ‘Caliph Ibrahim’ (i.e. al-Baghdadi) says that jihad against the kafir is an obligation in which all capable Sunni Muslims should partake. He concludes the letter by exclaiming “O Allah, all the armies of kufr from amongst the Jews, Crusaders, atheists, and apostates gathered against us. They did so in opposition to your religion. … O Allah, support your soldiers and bring your religion triumph.”

The Islamic State’s stance toward Shi’a Islam and other religious sects combines characteristics of defensive and offensive securitization. The threat from Shi’a Islam is said to exist at multiple levels. On the military and political level, the so-called ‘Shi’a-crescent’ is seen as binding the regimes of Iran, Iraq and Syria, along with Hezbollah in Lebanon, in a potent anti-Sunni coalition. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Bunzel 2015: 14) argued that “while the Crusader forces will disappear from sight today or the day after . . . (the Shi’a will be) the proximate, dangerous enemy of the Sunnis.” In a similar vein, according to an article in the official Islamic State online magazine *Dabiq* (Issue 13: 41), “Shiism is the immediate danger and the real challenge. May Allah destroy them (sic).”

On a doctrinal level, Shiites are accused of *shirk* (i.e. idolatry and polytheism). Thus, the IS doctrine defines Shiites and their holy sites as being legitimate targets of acts of violence—i.e. offensive securitization. Destroying Shiism is argued to be the sacred duty of all pious Sunnis. In addition, IS practices offensive jihad against other religious communities which it encounters, including Yazidis and Christians. The violence that IS perpetrates against such communities—mass killings, enslavement, rape, the destruction of cultural heritage—has led the United States government to accuse IS of being guilty of genocide (CNN, March 17, 2016).

IS carefully frames its depiction of the major threats to its doctrinal vision in language that is designed to carry deep religious, historical, and cultural resonance to its followers. Regarding the West, each issue of *Dabiq* begins with the following quote from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi: “The spark has been lit in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify—by Allah’s permission—until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq.” In Issue 12 of *Dabiq*—an issue titled simply “Just Terror”—the question is posed to the reader “So when will the crusaders end their hostilities towards Islam and Muslims? When will they realize that the (Caliphate) is here to stay?” In fact a word count of that issue of *Dabiq* reveals that the word ‘crusader’ is used a total of 84 times in 66 pages.

In its diagnostic critique of apostasy IS *(Dabiq*, Issue 7) argues that a stark line—what it refers to as ‘The Greyzone’—currently exists between the ‘true believers’ who side with IS and the camp of apostates, a category. In an article attributed to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi himself (*Dabiq* Issue 7: 17-18), the self-proclaimed caliph of the Islamic State warns of the threat posed by apostates and demands that they be killed “in a severe manner.” Later in the same issue (*Dabiq* Issue 7: 55) an article laments that “the fiery (post-9-11) zeal of the broken Muslim Ummah began to cool by the hazy events of the ‘Arab Spring’ as well as the lack of a body representing Islam (the Caliphate) then.” Muslims living in the West are told that their choice is simple: either “apostatize” by absorbing and assimilating fully into Western culture or perform the hijrah and relocate to the new caliphate (*Dabiq* Issue 7: 62).

Sunni Islam has long viewed the minority Shi’a sect with deep suspicion, with many Sunnis considering Shiites to be heretics to the faith. An article that was published in *Dabiq* (Issue 13: 39) provides a litany of sins that are seen as being inherent to Shi’a doctrine and which are said to threaten the true path of pious Sunni Islam, including idolatry, the rejection of the *Sahabah* (close compatriots of the Prophet Muhammad), and “their fanatical love for the twelve imams.” More generally, there is a growing concern among Sunnis that the active support which Iran provides to Shiites across the region proves that the Persian-oriented component of Shi’a identity trumps the Arab identities of Shiites living in Arab countries (The Council on Foreign Relations: *The Sunni-Shi’a Divide*). The sectarian violence that has erupted in Iraq, Syria and Yemen is taken as further evidence that a rising Shi’a tide poses an existential threat to Sunni Islam in the region. Steeping its depiction of the Shi’a threat in religious and historical references, the *Dabiq* issue devoted to the threat from Shiism (13: 12) warns of the “Rafidi (those who reject the first three caliphs—i.e. Shi’a Muslims) aim of eradicating Ahlus-Sunnah (Sunni Muslim community) and replacing them with a population of apostasy.”

*Prognostic Framing*

As Laustsen and Waever (2000: 719) note, “Religion easily becomes high politics. But still never automatically; it takes political action to articulate a threat in the political realm.” In this case, the Islamic State offers a simple and powerful prescription for addressing and defeating the threats to its doctrine and vision: the creation of the new caliphate. The quest for the caliphate creates the religious justification for offensive jihad. Wood (March 2015) cites Anjem Choudary, a militant Islamist in London who is sympathetic to the Islamic State, as saying that “Hitherto, we were just defending ourselves.” However, with the creation of the caliphate, Choudary argues that expansion of the caliphate through offensive jihad is a required duty.

As early as 2004, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Bunzel 2015: 15) cloaked his movement in Iraq with the aura of the caliphate by stating “I am currently in Iraq waging *jihad* with my brothers to establish for Islam a homeland and for the Qur’an a state.” Two years later, following Zarqawi’s death, al Qaeda in Iraq announced that it had changed its name. Although the new name of the group was supposed to be *Dawlat al-Iraq al-Islamiyya* (the ‘Islamic State **of** Iraq’), it also used the name *al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi’l-Iraq* (the ‘Islamic State **in** Iraq’). Each name served a useful purpose: whereas the Islamic State of Iraq was so named to attract support from the Sunni population inside Iraq, the Islamic State in Iraq served notice that the group intended to use Iraq as a launching point for its grander vision of the creation of the new caliphate.

A successful claim on being the caliph rests on several necessary conditions (Wood, March 2015), including “being a Muslim adult male of Quraysh descent; exhibiting moral probity and physical and mental integrity; and having *’amr*, or authority. This last criterion . . . is the hardest to fulfill, and requires that the caliph have territory in which he can enforce Islamic law.” In June 2014 ISI officially adopted the name ‘*al-dawla al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic State, or IS). In doing so, the organization was delivering a very intentional clarion call to the Sunni ummah that the caliphate had been established, with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi at its helm under the name of Caliph Ibrahim (Bunzel 2015: 15-16; 31). The first issue of *Dabiq*, titled “The Return of the Khilafah (Caliphate)” included excerpts from al-Baghdadi’s speech declaring the establishment of the Islamic State (*Dabiq* Issue 1: 7). “Oh Muslims everywhere,” said al-Baghdadi, “glad tidings to you and expect good. Raise your head high, for today – by Allah’s grace – you have a state and Khilafah (caliphate), which will return your dignity, might, rights, and leadership.” Baghdadi went on to proclaim that “It is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers.”

On a practical level, IS has attempted to establish its legitimacy by reaching out to Sunni tribal leaders in those areas under IS control. For example, as described by IS in the first issue of *Dabiq*, the Islamic State’s head of Tribal Affairs met with Sunni tribal leaders in the territories under IS control to trumpet the group’s successes, including the physical demolition of the Sykes-Picot colonial boundaries (an event which IS also heralded in an online video uploaded to Youtube), the freeing of Sunni prisoners previously held by the Iraqi regime, and the seizure of Mosul. The IS official also pointed to a series of benefits that the caliphate was delivering to ‘its’ civilians, such as the return of private property that had been seized by the Iraqi state, the provision of services, security and stability, and the increasing availability of basic foodstuffs, all of which was establishing a “flourishing relationship between the Islamic State and its citizens” (*Dabiq* Issue 1: 13).

As has been noted, in conjunction with the founding of the new caliphate in June 2014 the Islamic State began publishing a glossy, sophisticated magazine whose title, *Dabiq*, references the town in Syria where the hadiths teach that a battle between the forces of Islam and those of “Rome” will spark the countdown to the apocalypse. Many of the arguments found in *Dabiq* are clearly intended to ground the Islamic State’s core demands of ‘true believers’ in traditional salafist doctrine, including the reestablishment of the caliphate (*Dabiq*, Issue 1) and the requirement of *hijrah*, which calls on all Muslims relocate to the new caliphate (*Dabiq*, Issues 1 and 3). “The world today,” says an article in the first issue of *Dabiq*, “has been divided into two camps . . . The camp of Islam and faith, and camp of kufr (disbelief) and hypocrisy . . . Therefore rush O Muslims to your state . . . Hijrah to the land of Islam is obligatory.”

The Islamic State, and in particular its official spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, has a history of seeking to motivate individual Muslims to either join the group directly on the ground in Iraq and Syria or to carry out IS-inspired attacks around the world. For example, in September 2014 al-Adnani called on Muslims around the world to attack any and all infidels, through any means necessary, including attacking individuals with rocks and poisoning the crops of those countries that were opposed to IS. Interestingly, the exhortation to poison crops represents an effort to frame the call to jihad in classic Islam, as it references Muhammad’s argument that the poisoning of water sources and crops is justifiable when Islam is under assault (Wood 2014).

*Motivational Framing*

The nature of the Islamic State’s referent object of security (salafist-takfiri doctrine and by extension the caliphate which represents that doctrine) lends itself rather easily to embedding the Islamic State’s call to action in language that is religiously, culturally and historically authentic. Repeated references to salafist and takfiri principles as well as to historical events bolsters the resonance of the group’s prognostic call for the creation of the new caliphate, and is designed to add religious legitimacy the demand that pious Sunnis have a sacred obligation to defend—and if possible migrate to—the caliphate. Moreover, IS has used a sophisticated mixture of modern technologies and traditional doctrine to motivate its followers to embrace the use of violence in general, and terrorism in particular.

The Islamic State framed its announcement of the creation of the caliphate in 2014 in language clearly intended to motivate Muslims around the world to action. In the words of IS spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani (*Dabiq* Issue 1: 8) “The time has come for those generations that were drowning in oceans of disgrace, being nursed on the milk of humiliation, and being ruled by the vilest of all people, after their long slumber in the darkness of neglect – the time has come for them to rise.” He goes on to proclaim “The sun of jihad has risen. The glad tidings of good are shining. Triumph looms on the horizon. The signs of victory have appeared.”

We have seen that one of the primary goals of the IS has been to motivate pious Sunnis to emigrate (*hijrah*) to the Islamic State. Harkening back to the hadiths in making its case for *hijrah* to the contemporary caliphate IS (*Dabiq* Issue 3: 9) quoted Muhammad as saying “I saw as if a pillar of the Book was taken from underneath my pillow, so I looked and it was a shining light extending towards Sham. Verily faith, at the time of tribulations, is in Sham.” Quoting the renowned Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyyah (*Dabiq* Issue 3: 10), IS makes the case that “Islam in the end of times will be more manifest in Sham . . . So the best of the people on the earth in the end of times will be those who keep to the land of Ibrahim’s (i.e. Abraham in Christianity and Judaism) *hijrah*, which is Sham.”

Framing the requirement of hijrah in religiously potent language is one thing; the issue of *how* to emigrate to the caliphate from other countries is no small challenge. In order to address this issue, in 2015 IS uploaded on the internet a *Guide Book to Hijrah to the Islamic State*. The *Guide* addresses such practical issues as how to get into Syria (e.g. buy a two-way tourist ticket to a country such as Spain or Greece as the first step; from there move on to Turkey where one makes contact with someone in Syria via Twitter who travels to Turkey to meet with the new recruit; then travel to areas where Turkish border security is lax and “if the coast is clear . . . (you) run as fast as you can into Syria”); what to pack (it is most important, according to the *Guide*, to pack light, limiting oneself to items such as plane tickets, a passport, a wallet or purse, cash, a cell phone, phone charger, and ear plugs); and special instructions for ‘sisters’ who wish to undertake hijrah, the language of which seems to infer that women are more likely to make fundamental mistakes that might tip authorities as to their true intentions than are men (e.g. women making the hijrah are reminded that it is not a good idea to list contact numbers on their phones under such false entries as ‘Osama Bin Laden,” and in fact are reminded that they need a cell phone to make the journey, with the mocking comment added “duh . . . Please don’t attempt to make *hijrah* if your parents confiscated your phone”).

The publication online of the *Guide Book to Hijrah to the Islamic State* is illustrative of the degree to which IS uses the internet and social media as tools of motivational framing. Farwell (2015: 49) observes that, “as it (IS) has attempted to build credibility and establish legitimacy, it has shown deftness for propaganda, using social media and cyber technology to recruit fighters and intimidate enemies.” In comparing the Islamic State with other jihadist groups, Farwell (2015: 49) makes that case that

ISIS stands apart for its sophisticated use and understanding of social media to achieve its goals. Its communication strategy aims to persuade all Muslims that battling to restore a caliphate is a religious duty. The group’s narrative portrays ISIS as an agent of change, the true apostle of a sovereign faith, a champion of its own perverse notions of social justice, and a collection of avengers bent on settling accounts for the perceived sufferings of others.

Zakaria (2015: 24) notes that actors such as IS, the Nigerian-based jihadist group Boko Haram, and the Taliban in Pakistan consciously set out to convey intentionally barbaric images and messages via social media in order to cause shock and outrage in the West, while also making the case to their core audience that “their fanciful reenactments of pre-colonial purity represent acts of moral reclamation.” The posting online of images ranging from the execution of IS prisoners (Friis 2015) to the destruction of archeological heritage (Harmansah 2015) is intended both to terrorize the enemies of IS and to draw support—and hopefully (from the Islamic State’s perspective)—new recruits from the pious Sunni masses.

Based on their analysis of an IS-produced video that highlights a 2007 ISI terrorist operation, Perry and Long (2016: 1-2) find that such videos serve two purposes in recruiting new members. First, through the videos the group “offers potential adherents the opportunity to enter a narrative that specifically recapitulates Islamic history and develops a compelling new identity based on that history.” Second, the group “promises the jihadist that should he be killed, he becomes a martyr, leaving a powerful story that recaptures religious history and inspires others.” The arguments put forward by Perry and Long parallel Joplin’s research (September 2015), who finds that individuals who support and participate in acts of terror are driven by “the active desire to *contribute* to the vision of the group because it is seen as a noble pursuit” (emphasis in the original).

Clearly, as suggested in an online policy brief published by The Soufan Group, “The Islamic State’s media effort is an integral and essential part of its operations, on a par with its military and administrative efforts.” In particular, the Islamic State’s deliberate targeting of journalists creates “information free zones . . . and the resulting lack of outside reporting sets the stage for social media to take over, where IS has a huge advantage given its violent imagery and messages tailor-made for impressionable youth.” The Islamic State’s advantage in this area “has allowed each of its supporters effectively to create and operate his or her own ministry of information, echoing a party line as well as creating and spreading IS’s messaging. In effect, IS is crowdsourcing its own propaganda.”

In print, one of the most powerful aspects of *Dabiq* magazine is the colorful, often violent photographic images that appear throughout each edition. For example, Issue 12, which celebrates the Paris terrorist attacks of November 2015, includes several graphic photos of the aftermath of the attack, while bragging that “the Islamic State dispatched its brave knights to wage war in the homelands of the wicked crusaders, leaving Paris and its residents ‘shocked and awed” (note the appropriation of the title used by US officials for the early stages of the 2003 invasion of Iraq). “The eight knights brought Paris down on its knees, after years of French conceit in the face of Islam” (*Dabiq* Issue 12: 2). Furthermore, supporters of IS are reminded that it is their sacred duty to strike at the “kafir and the apostate enemies near them.” “They did not use the obstacles laid down by the kuffar on the path to hijrah as an excuse to abandon jihad against the enemies,” notes IS (*Dabiq* Issue 12: 3). “They did not use a younger age or lack of training as an excuse to be mere bystanders. They sacrificed their souls in the noblest of deeds in pursuit of Allah’s pleasure. We consider them such, and Allah is their judge.” The message is clear: whether via hijrah to the land of the Islamic State, or through violent operations carried out against the ‘enemies’ of IS in their own backyards, all pious Sunni Muslims have a solemn duty to defend the caliphate and the doctrine for which it stands and to spread the salafist-takfiri vision wherever, whenever, and however possible.

Conclusion

In late 2014, US Major General Michael K. Nagata admitted “We don’t understand the movement (i.e. the Islamic State), and until we do we are not going to defeat it.” He went on to say “We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea.” On the other side of the coin, in 2012 IS spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani offered the following simple suggestion to those who want to understand the Islamic State’s ideological vision and goals: “If one wants to get to know the program of the (Islamic) State, its politics, and its legal opinions, one ought to consult its leaders, its statements its public addresses, its own sources” (Bunzel 2015: 4).

Among other sources, this paper has mined the statements, publications, and imagery employed by IS in order to gain a deeper understanding of the group’s efforts at framing its securitization moves in ways that resonate with key audience members of the IS message and vision. The analysis undertaken here highlights the utility of an integrated securitization/framing theory approach in examining how religious groups such as IS successfully frame their securitization moves. In particular, the findings presented in this paper shed light on the unique contextual advantage possessed by social actors who embed their securitization moves in religious framings. Generally speaking, adept actors operating within the religious securitization sector are in a position to draw clear linkages between contemporary security challenges and religious, historical and cultural precedents that resonate with key audiences. Such has been the case with the Islamic State.

It is important to keep in mind that the rest of the world—including the vast majority of Muslims—find the security moves that IS takes in the name of ‘Islam’ to be completely abhorrent. On this point, it is instructive to note that of the world’s 1.6 million Muslims (close to 90% of which are Sunnis), a mere 20,000-30,000 have heeded the Islamic State’s call for hijrah to the new caliphate. Even taking into account additional ‘lone wolf/IS-inspired’ militants who live outside the current boundaries of IS-controlled territory, the overwhelming evidence points to the fact that the vast majority of Sunni Muslims, as well as (quite understandably) Muslims from other sects within the faith, reject the radical salafist-takfiri doctrine that is put forward by IS.

This is not to say, of course, that the world should ignore the Islamic State and its doctrine. IS has demonstrated (at least until recent setbacks) an impressive capacity to seize and hold a large swath of territory in Iraq and Syria. Moreover, the group’s influence is spreading across the Middle East from Libya on the Mediterranean Sea eastward to Yemen in the Persian Gulf region, as well as outside the Middle East (e.g. the Boko Haram’s public allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015). And, we have seen from Beirut to Paris to the Sinai to San Bernardino, that IS has been able to organize or inspire large-scale acts of terror.

The US and its allies have been drawn into a military campaign against IS, while at the same time Russia has engaged in a full-blown military assault against anti-Assad rebel groups inside Syria.[[3]](#footnote-3) In the short run, robust military operations can debilitate and degrade IS, as is illustrated by the fact that it is estimated that IS has had to withdraw from approximately one thousand square miles of territory previously under its control (*NBC Nightly News*, March 14, 2016). However, because the securitization claims of groups like IS rest on a particular doctrine as much if not more than on the defense of a delimited geo-political entity, in conjunction with military operations it is crucial that *Muslims* in the region and around the world take the lead in providing an alternative vision to the Islamic State’s radical salafist-takfiri doctrine, one which both debunks the doctrinal claims of IS while also making the case for Islam as a religion based on peace and cooperation. Just as IS has had success in framing its securitization moves using religious, historical and cultural references that resonate with some Muslims, so it is essential that religious and political elites in Islamic societies offer a compelling counter-narrative that resonates with the vast majority of the ummah. Only then will the radical salafist-takfiri doctrine for which groups like IS stand be truly defeated.

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1. The self-proclaimed caliphate that labels itself the ‘Islamic State’ has also been variously branded in different quarters as “ISIS,” “ISIL,” and “*Daesh*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Other scholars have focused their rehabilitative work on the problems surrounding ST’s theoretical and conceptual bias towards developed democratic states, charging that this bias closes the door on using ST to analyze the securitizing moves of both non-state actors and non-democratic states (Barthwal-Datta 2009; Vuori 2008; Wilkinson 2007). Another line of argument criticizes ST for ignoring the non-speech modalities by and through which actors “speak” security and seeks to expand the theory’s analytical net to include visual and other forms of non-verbal securitization (McDonald 2008; Wilkinson 2007; Williams 2003; Hansen 2015 and 2011). In addition, a series of scholars have critiqued (McDonald 2008; Balzacq 2005) and offered specific corrections to (Roe 2008; Salter 2008) problems related to the under-specification of the concept of audience within the ST literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. On March 14, 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia would remove the “main part” of its military forces from Syria. See “Putin Orders Military Pullout, Citing Gains.” *New York Times*, March 15, 2016, A1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)