Research Paper

Netanyahu's Rhetoric on Iran: Securitization or Sincere Expression of Fear

Mohammad Soltaninejad[1]

1. Assistant Professor of West Asian & African Studies, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran (soltaninejad@ut.ac.ir)   iD 0000-0002-4995-6340

Abstract

Studies on securitization theory have neglected the fact that securitization is in place only when it is proven that expression of fear is insincere. A number of indicators can be retrieved from the literature on deception detection in social sciences to verify sincerity in fear expressions by political leaders. Application of these indicators in this paper demonstrates that former Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu's expression of fear from Iran in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2014, was more a case of constructing an existential threat, than expressing genuine apprehensions. A complete examination of Netanyahu's claims about Iran establishes their contradiction with the known realities. The inconsistency between truth and Netanyahu's goals, the knowledge available about Netanyahu's negative beliefs about Iran, the implausibility of some of his assertions, their judgmental nature, as well as the disclosure of their incorrectness over time all support the idea that Netanyahu was insincere in his expression of fear from Iran in this particular case, and that he was constructing an existential threat about Iran in the midst of negotiations to reach a nuclear deal with Iran, which he vehemently opposed.

Keywords: Fear Expression, Iran, Netanyahu, Securitization, Sincerity, Truth Verification

1. Introduction

There is abundant evidence that security issues are often result of political leaders' efforts to shape the world rather than being reflective of the objective and material circumstances (Balzacq, 2015, p. 495). Securitization theory aims at explaining the reasons and mechanisms of this reality (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). Securitization is "a technique of government which retrieves the ordering force of the fear of violent death by a mythical replay of variations of the Hobbesian state of nature. It manufactures a sudden rupture in the routinized everyday life by fabricating an existential threat" (Huysmans, 1998, p. 571). Securitization occurs when a securitizing actor uses rhetoric of existential threat to take an object out of normal politics and to make it a subject of extraordinary politics (Williams, 2015, pp. 114-120). This crystalizes the fact that securitization moves are about threat construction rather than being a response to real existing threats. Even in definitions that do not separate normal from extraordinary politics, securitization act is seen as tied with intentions, objectives and the choices of securitizing actors. According to Balzacq (2015), "securitization combines the politics of threat design with that of threat management" (Williams, 2015, p. 495).

Security politics are conceptualized as negative and reactionary (McDonald, 2008, p. 564). The negativity and immorality of securitization has led securitization studies to pay considerable attention to the moral value of desecuritization (Floyd, 2011, pp. 427–439; Aradau, 2004, pp. 388-413). Ole Wæver, who is a flagbearer of the securitization theory, positioned the normative imperative of desecuritization as a central concern in his early studies (Wæver, 1995, pp. 46–86). The characterization of security and securitization as a failure of normal politics and as a

normatively regressive development was not abandoned in later research (McDonald, 2008, p. 566). Scholars have also critiqued securitization as an immoral process of inauthentic fear generation (Huysmans, 1998). As suggested by Taureck (2006, p. 57), this criticism is about securitization as a normative practice, rather than securitization as a theory.

Despite the acceptance of the fact that "many security utterances counter the rule of sincerity" (Balzacq, 2005, p. 171), and that a distinction should be made between moral desecuritization and immoral securitization, no attention is paid, thus far, to the much more fundamental issue of distinguishing securitization from genuine fear expression. In fact, not all acts of alarming and warning can be inauthentically utilized to serve political and strategic purposes. If actors/political leaders are sincerely fearful of an object on tangible and objective grounds, their action in alarming others or expressing their own fear is moral and legitimate. This situation can be termed as the *dilemma of sincerity in fear expression*.

The literature about fear and securitization has focused on the causal relation between fear and securitization (Buzan & Wæver, 2009, p. 264; Aradau, 2004, p. 400; Barthwal-Datta, 2009, pp. 277-300), arguing whether fear is a sign of securitization or its generator. None of the existing works have substantially engaged with the problem of sincerity in threat expression. They are not concerned about the fact that states may have a real fear of an object, and that they try to make it known to others, which is different from the pretention of being apprehended, which lies in the core of securitization. For example, Rythovern has engaged the problem of neglecting emotions (fear) in the securitization theory, which he calls ontological slippage (Van Rythovern, 2015, p. 3);

however, his engagement targets emotions generation in audience rather than in potential securitizer.

Floyd (2011) is an exception in addressing the question of sincerity/insincerity in the existing literature on securitization. She suggests distinguishing sincerity in securitization by examining whether the language and statement of the speech act resonates with the securitizing move that follows. To determine the morality of a certain securitization act, Floyd suggests searching for an objective existential threat: Securitization is morally right if there is an objective existential threat, the referent object of security is morally legitimate and security response is appropriate to the threat in question (Floyd, 2011, pp. 427-439). The problem with Floyd's sincerity determination is that it ignores the context and intentions of the securitizer and confines itself to the intentions and capabilities of the aggressor- if after all there is any act of aggression. Securitizers may design the entire securitization process to meet their interests through diversion of reality, misinterpretation of facts or unjustifiably prioritizing some facts over others. I try to remedy this shortcoming by addressing the sincerity of securitization from the perspective of the securitizer, rather than that of the potential aggressor. This necessitates referring to tools outside the securitization theory for determining sincerity.

To access the necessary tools to examine sincerity, the author makes a review of the literature in International Relations (IR) about sincerity. Given the assumption that states are not bound by ethical rules, there is not much expectation that the IR literature would lend enough of such tools and therefore I look beyond the realm of international politics. A thorough review of the literature on deception detection and sincerity determination results in a

range of analytical instruments. I will then discuss which of them can be used to study sincerity in the expression of fear at the inter-state level, and I will conclude with a certain number of indicators that are most reliable for this purpose. To examine their practicality, they are applied to study Iranophobia, which I understand as an obsessive expression of fear about Iran. Since Iranophobia is a general concept, I analyze one particular case of talking about Iran in an alarming tone by the former Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2014. Analysis of this speech, through the application of the mentioned indicators, tests whether Iran has been securitized or the fear expressed about Iran is genuine. This would be the first application of this advancement in securitization studies to study fear expressions in IR, which can be applicable to other similar cases in future studies.

2. Sincerity Verification

To be sincere is to believe in the veracity of what one says/claims. As indicated by Bok (1999, p. 13), sincerity is not to deceive others or make others believe what one does not believe. It is interesting that in IR, the literature on sincerity and deception is not much developed. Mearsheimer (2010) explains this in terms of the paradoxical low level of trust that characterizes IR. Political leaders seldom lie to each other because what they say is unlikely to be believed by other leaders unless they are verified. In light of this reality, the literature in sincerity in IR is confined to a few concepts, most important among them, being costly signaling (Kertzer, Rathbun, & Rathbun, 2019). Costly signaling discusses the willingness of a security seeker to unveil its peaceful intentions.

If the security seeker manages to prove to a would-be adversary that it only seeks security and means no aggression, the fear of that adversary would be assuaged and conflict would be prevented (Kydd, 1997, pp. 139-140). Real security seekers perform acts that are not performed by the aggressors that mimic them, because they are too costly. They, in fact, show that they are ready to pay for their sincerity.

With the critical turn in IR and opening up of its domain to perceptive and social factors in response to the post behaviorist/post rationalist developments, measuring sincerity in IR has gone beyond the rational notion of costly signaling. Building on the literature on interstate communication, perceptions and neuroscience, Hall and Yarhi-Milo show that personal impressions are taken as credible indicators to prove sincerity in IR. These impressions are not limited to explicit judgments; they also include unconscious elements in the affective level (Hall & Yarhi-Milo, 2012, pp. 560–573). Jervis (1989, p. 26) considers costly signaling as one criteria for sincerity, but draws our attention to those criteria immune to manipulation by actors. Regardless of costs, when trying to ascertain the sincerity of others, actors pay attention to those factors that others are unable to control.

In contrast to the scarcity of research on sincerity in IR, some other fields in social sciences, particularly cognitive psychology, communication sciences, linguistics and criminology, have extensively dealt with lie-detection and sincerity verification (Vrij, 2015; Vrij, Fisher, & Blank, 2015; Brennen & Magnussen, 2020; Frank & Svetieva, 2013; Vicianova, 2015, pp. 522-534). Newman, Pennebaker, Berry and Richards (2003, pp. 665-675) investigated linguistic features that discern true from false stories. They concluded that compared to truth-tellers, liars exhibit lower

cognitive complexity, use fewer self-references and other-references, and show a tendency towards more negative emotive words. Zhou, Burgoon, Twitchel, Qin and Nunamaker (2004, pp. 139-166) divided cues to deception into the three categories of verbal, nonverbal, and physiological. They have based their study on the assumption that deceivers' number of words, verbal self-distancing tactics, and use of adjective and adverb increase during a conversation. Zuckerman, DePaulo and Rosenthal (1981), specify four factors that can be used to predict cues to deception: generalized arousal, the specific affects experienced during deception, cognitive aspects of deception, and attempts to control behavior so as to maintain the deception. Ekman (1992) argues that liars who prepare their deceptions inadequately or cannot keep their stories straight produce inconsistencies that betray their deceits. Those who over-prepare produce stories that seem rehearsed.

The cues-reliant approach in deception detection has certain shortcomings and the meta-analyses have demonstrated that the links between lying and nonverbal cues are weak, influenced by a set of intervening and moderating factors. Since deception is an individual psychological process, no cue or cues to deception could be accurate (Masip, 2017, p. 150). This insufficiency and inaccuracy of the cue based approach has led the study on lie detection to take a turn towards context that is more objective, more understandable and less dependent on the unobservable individual level signs of deceiving. The information that an observer can receive from the context is more readily available than the information inside the mind and heart of a potential deceiver. Realization of this fact has opened a way for a new approach to deception detection, which relies on the situation and the context in which statements are delivered.

The two most well-known context-based theories of deception detection are Adaptive Lie Detector Theory (ALIED) (Street, 2015, pp. 335-343) and Truth Default Theory (TDT) (Levine, 2014). Contextual information involves aspects such as physical evidence, third-party information, liar's confession, and inconsistencies with prior knowledge. In fact, since the link between the veracity of the statement/message and the behavior of the sender is weak (with the exception of some obvious lies), deception cannot be detected accurately by observing the behavior of the sender; it is rather discovered later through their confessions, outer evidences and inconsistency with their previous behaviors or statements (Park, Levine, McCornack, Morrison, & Ferrara, 2002). It could be said that people decide about the correctness of the statements that they receive by using diagnostic cues; yet, the fewer these cues are, the more people use context-general information to assess the veracity of statements. According to ALDT, people usually believe in the veracity of what others say, but they heed the intention and the goal of the sender. If telling the truth is inconsistent with the intentions and goals of senders, people doubt the correctness of what they hear (Street, Bischof, Vadillo, & Kingstone, 2016).

Levine's Truth Default Theory (2014) elaborates on the contextual factors that are used to verify truthfulness of an actor. According to TDT, most people do not lie if their goals can be attained by telling the truth. Therefore, when the truth is inconsistent with the sender's goals, people may doubt veracity. Other "triggers" that raise suspicion consist of lack of coherence (internal logical consistency) in message content, discrepancies between the message and the known reality, and third-party information revealing deception. If these triggers are strong, the person will scrutinize the message to assess veracity. Deception

triggers may not occur at the time of the deception because (except for a few transparent liars) the relationship between veracity and behavior is poor. Deception is not accurately detected by passively observing the senders' behavior at the time the lie is told; instead, whenever deception is detected, this occurs later in time via the liar's confession, external evidence, or correspondence (Masip, 2013, p. 151).

3. Assessment of Sincerity in Fear Expression in the Inter-State Level

In the previous section, we presented a number of criteria for deception detection from both inside and outside IR. In this section, we will select few of these criteria to propose a series of coherent standards that would enable us to decide whether truth is told when introducing a subject as an existential threat, or rather it is lie to securitize the subject and justify the adoption of extraordinary measures against it. Apparently the literature on deception inside IR has little to tell us about lying. This is, in part, because deceiving and insincerity is assumed as common and normal in international politics. In fact, one assumption generally agreed upon in IR is that states as the primary actors in the international realm are not bound by ethical standards. From Machiavelli to Hobbs and beyond, states are supposed to follow their own logic of action, which distances them from ethics. In this atmosphere, there is little room to talk about sincerity and as revealed by a review of the related literature, the closest we achieve sincerity in the rationalist IR theory is the notion of costly signaling, which is particularly concerned with intentions of states under conditions of negotiations rather than correspondence of what they say with the reality in a general sense. The arguments of those who have

brought perception into equation in IR are also hardly relevant to our study on sincerity in fear expression. They have looked into the problem of sincerity and trust to analyze state decision-makers' reaction to the situations of trust-distrust dichotomies. This is apparently different from what we are seeking here in sincerity measurement.

This leaves us with the approaches out of IR in cognitive psychology, linguistics and communication sciences, which have developed tasks specifically designed to distinguish truth from lie. As made clear earlier, there are generally three approaches to lie-detection: physiological, behavioral and contextual. From these approaches, the physiological ones are of the least relevance and applicability in this context. Politicians are not available for any physiologic examination to verify their words against their bodily reactions when they speak. The same is true about behavioral cues. Although behaviors of statesmen can be observed, there are limitations in the extent to which a researcher can detect their deceptive words. Politicians' manipulation of realities is different from casual lies that people tell in their daily lives in a number of ways. First, the stories that politicians tell and are designed to securitize an object are normally a part of and in continuation of some grand narratives that their states have developed. These stories are not the creation of those politicians. They could be just a single episode in seasons of stories that are told about an object. This protects those politicians not only from being questioned about the veracity of what they say, but also from the feelings of shame and fear that ordinary liars endure. Second, the lies told about an adversary or competitor are told in the name of the state and ostensibly to protect values that are dear to a nation. Lies told to guarantee national security and national interests are seen as

justified lies. They are not told to fulfill personal gains and therefore telling them would be easier. In fact, there are two different attitudes toward international and domestic lying. "While domestic lying is generally considered morally wrong, international lying or lying that occurs between representatives of different states tends to be largely accepted" (Baiasu & Loriaux, 2017, p. 7). Third, these lies are told by a great number of people. It is a sin, that the committer shares with many and therefore its weight is divided. All these make distinguishing politicians' lies using behavioral traits very difficult if not impossible.

The belief about politicians and political decision-makers, which claims that they are less personally and emotionally-engaged while conveying deceptive messages under the name of their respective states or governments also means that cues other than those of personal nature should be given priority to verify the veracity of the words expressed by significant figures. Now that diagnostic cues are not available and the subjects are not basically expected to show behavioral signs when they are insincere, context demonstrates its significance in our judgment regarding whether or not truth is being told.

The two major theories of ALIED and TDT demonstrate a number of criteria that the receivers use to determine whether or not truth is being told. These criteria can be summarized as follow: physical evidence; third-party information; liar's confession; inconsistencies with prior knowledge; lies detected long after they are told; considering what is normal or possible in a given situation; knowledge about the sender's normal activities; beliefs about how a given situation typically unfolds; the laws of physics and nature; information about how people normally perform in a given situation; doubting veracity when the truth is inconsistent

with sender's goals and lack of coherence (internal logical consistency) in message content. These criteria are interrelated and could be overlapping. Therefore I make a categorization of them into the following aggregated list: 1. consistency with the known realities; 2. consistency between truth and the sender's goals, 3. knowledge about the sender's normal activities and beliefs, 4. normalcy and plausibility of assertions, 5. truth disclosure overtime, 6. degree of being judgmental, subjective and negative about the object. In the following sections, these criteria will be applied to study how sincere the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu is when he talks about the threats posed by Iran.

4. Netanyahu on Iran: Sincerity or Threat Construction?

As illustrated before, Iranophobia is assumed in this paper as a case of securitization. This draws a line of distinction between the real fear that Iran's adversaries feel about it, and the exaggeration they make about the threats that Iran may pose on them (Chubin, 2009, p. 165). Having an adversary is accompanied by fear from their adverse/hostile measures; however, when this fear is inflated and applied to serve political purposes, it transforms into a securitization act. The phobia of Iran, which is an exaggerated and illogical fear from Iran, is a result of securitizing Iran. This implies that some levels of fear perceived by Iran's rivals from Iran is real, as the same applies the other way around. The problem is the exaggeration of this fear and investing on it as an instrument to reach political and strategic purposes. The major task remained unaccomplished is to distinguish Iran's securitization from cases of sincere fear expressions about Iran. In fact, the securitization of Iran cannot be proven unless it is demonstrated that the rhetoric about Iran as an existential threat is insincere and embodies some

levels of exaggeration, misrepresentation and manipulation of facts. For this purpose, in this section former Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu's remarks with respect to Iran will be analyzed, focusing on the speech that he delivered in 2014 in the United Nations General Assembly. The criteria for analysis are the six refined criteria, selected and presented in the previous section, based on the standards for deception detection. To do the analysis, I bring all cases of referral to Iran in Netanyahu's speech and categorize them according to their main theme. I will then mention the six criteria and discuss how sincere/insincere Netanyahu is about Iran in light of these criteria. The themes and the exact quotes on Iran are presented in the following table:

Theme	Quote
Iran as a base for militant Islam	The question before us is whether militant Islam will have the power to realize its unbridled ambitions. There is one place where that could soon happen: The Islamic State of Iran.
Export of Iran's revolution	For 35 years, Iran has relentlessly pursued the global mission, which was set forth by its founding ruler, Ayatollah Khomeini, in these words: We will export our revolution to the entire world. And ever since, the regime's brutal enforcers and Iran's Revolutionary Guards, have engaged in that.
Iran's global terror campaign	Iran's President Rouhani stood here last week, and shed crocodile tears over what he called "the globalization of terrorism." Maybe he should spare us those phony tears and have a word instead with the commanders of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. He could ask them to call off Iran's global terror campaign, which has included attacks in two dozen countries on five continents since 2011 alone.
Iran subverts countries	Now, some still argue that Iran's global terror campaign, its subversion of countries throughout the Middle East and well beyond the Middle East, some argue that this is the work of the extremists.

Theme	Quote
Iran building a nuclear bomb	So don't be fooled by Iran's manipulative charm offensive. It's designed for one purpose, and for one purpose only: To lift the sanctions and remove the obstacles to Iran's path to the bomb. This would effectively cement Iran's place as a threshold military nuclear power. In the future, at a time of its choosing, Iran, the world's most dangerous state in the world's most dangerous region, would obtain the world's most dangerous weapons.
Iran is like ISIS	Imagine how much more dangerous the Islamic State, ISIS, would be if it possessed chemical weapons. Now imagine how much more dangerous the Islamic state of Iran would be if it possessed nuclear weapons. Once Iran produces atomic bombs, all the charm and all the smiles will suddenly disappear. They'll just vanish. It's then that the ayatollahs will show their true face and unleash their aggressive fanaticism on the entire world.

Table 1: Iran in Netanyahu's speech at the UNGA year 2014[1]

4. 1. Consistency with the Known Realities

In case of Iran's support of militant Islam, Netanyahu claims that what he considers as the ambitions of militant Islam, are realized in Iran. This picture of Iran is in stark contrast to the prior knowledge we have about Iran's society and politics. A simple review of the "profusion of literature" (Maloney, 2009) on Iran's polity demonstrates that Iran's politics is complex, consisting of elected and non-elected bodies, divided between democrat and liberal forces versus conservatives and nationalist-Islamist ones (Kurun, 2017; Mahmood, 2006). Political power in Iran is distributed among a number of institutions that represent competing political and social forces. This marks Iran's "political system with [a]

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1. See the full text of Netanyahu's speech at: Netanyahu (2014, Sep. 29)

myriad and overlapping centers of power" (Buchta, 2000), which has survived through "systematic building of a legitimate Islamic political culture" (Farsoun & Mashayekhi, 1992), anything but a scene for materialization of militant Islam. Netanyahu's intention to distort and simplify the image of a political system that is "in many ways a puzzle to the political scientist" (Chehabi, 2014) is best reflected in his change of the internationally recognized name of Iran from the Islamic republic of Iran to the Islamic state of Iran.

The way Netanyahu expresses his point of view about Iran's export of its revolution contradicts our prior knowledge about what Iran makes of the export of revolution notion. The literature on Iran's export of revolution demonstrates varying interpretations of this concept in Iran's polity (Dehghani Firoozabadi & Tajik, 2003; Dehghani Firoozabadi & Radfar, 2009). It also points to the fact that this motto of the early years of Iran's revolution of more than forty years ago has been rarely materialized and local and international realities have been directing Iran's foreign policies rather than an ideal of the universalization of Iran's revolution (Barzegar, 2009; Barzegar 2008; Walt 2009). In the early years of the victory of the revolution, there was a demand for the promotion of revolutionary ideas oversees. This, in the words of Sick (1995), is a common experience for revolutionary societies, which in the end wane and become subordinate to traditional objectives, a process that has been quicker in Iran than many other revolutionary societies (Sick, 1995, p. 148). Even then, there was no general acceptance that the export of the revolution should be pursued using hard power or financial support of the revolutionary movements in the region, let alone the entire world, as claimed by Netanyahu. "Virtually every major figure in the Islamic Republic has at one time or another insisted that export of the revolution is

not intended to be conducted by the sword" (Sick, 1995, p. 148). Ram (1996) shows that Iran's export of Islamic revolution is always watered-down by nationalism, which is not less potent of the pan-Islamic vision. For a long time, the prevailing view is that Iran should promote its ideas oversees through their inspirational power, rejecting interference in the internal affairs of other states.

Regarding Netanyahu's speech vis-à-vis Iran's *global terror campaign,* it should be noted that Iran officially supports anti-Israel groups of Hamas and Hezbollah (*Tehran Times*, 2021), which are regarded by the US as terrorist organizations. (Katzman, 2020). It is also demonstrable that Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as a part of Iran's armed forces, have extensive activities abroad and have been engaged in the fight against Israel and the United States (Majidyar, 2018). These facts, however, do not reach the level of launching a *global terror campaign,* as asserted by Israel's prime minister. This is exactly what distinguishes the objective, measurable and observable realities that are terrifying, and the subjective, judgmental, immeasurable and unobservable assertions that produce excessive fear. The IRGC is a formal organization, officially recognized as part of Iran's military[1] forces with mandates overseas. This makes IRGC no different from the Israeli or U.S intelligence/military organizations, with the former being known for its killing of civilians in Palestine[2], apparent involvement in the assassination of Iran's nuclear scientists (Meisels, 2014; Bunkall, 2021) and acts of sabotage in Iran (Bergman, Gladstone, & Fassihi, 2021). This could be an explanation for the fact that for a long time, the US did not consider

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1. Article 150 of Iran's constitution recognizes IRGC as a part of Iran's military. See the constitution at: Constitutional Council (2021, Jun.,2)

2. For facts about killing of Palestinians by Israeli army and violation of their rights see: Amnesty International (2021)

IRGC as a terrorist organization until 2019 and Trump's administration (US Department of State, 2019) designation due to the political motive of exerting maximum pressure on Iran (Maloney, 2019). Netanyahu's claim of *two dozen countries* in them IRGC has conducted attacks is unspecified and points even further towards the exaggeration of IRGC threat.

Netanyahu's claim that Iran *subverts countries* also contradicts our prior knowledge. There is no example of the subversion of a political system, let alone a country by Iran. Israeli prime minister's assertion could be interpreted in view of the widespread objection against Iran's involvement in the region, particularly in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, which is seen by an eye of suspicion not only in Tel Aviv but also in Washington and many of the capitals of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf particularly Riyadh. Iran's presence in Iraq in the aftermath of the fall of Saddam Hussain in 2003 "transformed the logic behind Iran-Saudi Arabia relations from one of cooperation to one that was geared toward competition for regional power and influence" (Soltaninejad, 2019). In a similar vein, Iran's alliance with Bashar al Assad in Syria has faced opposition from Israel, United States and Iran's Arab rivals, leading to their direct or indirect confrontation with Tehran in the Syria civil war (Martini, York, & Young, 2021). Adding Yemen to this list as a third scene over which Iran receives disapproval, one could take it as a fact that Iran's overall involvement in the region is a source of contention for Iran's regional and trans-regional rivals. Detached from reality, though, is the assertion that Iran's involvement in these countries is subversive for other nations. In Iraq, with all controversies surrounding Iran's presence, one result has been the prevention of the fall of Baghdad into the hands of the ISIS (Ryan & Morris, 2014). Despite the belief that Iran's involvement in Syria has served significant strategic purposes, a

persistent fact remains to be that Iran's involvement has helped the survival of the Syrian government (Terrill, 2015) rather than its subversion, which is another demonstration for the inauthenticity of Netanyahu's claim. In Yemen also, Iran's presence is exaggerated (Al Muslimi, 2017). Houthis are not Iran's proxies (Juneau, 2015) and Iran's presence in Yemen is marginal, compared to the Saudis.

Netanyahu's claim that Iran wants to *build nuclear weapons* also contradicts observable reality. The fact is that the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, which was "an impressive collection of restrictions, restraints, and monitoring provisions applied to the Iranian nuclear program" (Nephew, 2015) "placed significant restrictions on Iran's nuclear program" (Robinson, 2021). The deal that Netanyahu called a "historic mistake" (Kershner, 2015) limited Iran's break out time from a few month to one year or more (Gordon & Sanger, 2015). It also reduced the number of operational centrifuges in the most important uranium enrichment facility of Iran in Natanz to 5060 from 19000 and limited the enrichment degree to only 3.67%. According to the deal, Iran would stop enriching uranium in Fordow[1]. Iran also signed with the IAEA a "Roadmap for Clarification of Past and Present Outstanding Issues[2]", leading to the Director General's report to the Board of Governors in 15 December 2015, indicating that the outstanding issues about the possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program are resolved (Quevenco, 2015).

Netanyahu's drawing parallels and comparisons between the ISIS and Iran is also distanced from reality. Addressing Iran as the

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1. See the full text of Iran's nuclear deal at: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (2015, Jul., 14).
2. See the Road-map for the Clarification of Past and Present Outstanding Issues regarding Iran's Nuclear Programme at: IAEA Board of Governors (2015, Sep., 21).

Islamic State of Iran instead of the internationally recognized name for the country, that is, the Islamic Republic of Iran, is another piece in the fabrication of an image about Iran that is far from reality. Iran and the ISIS are fundamentally different in their nature as political entities, their ideologies, their strategies and modus operandi. The ISIS is a recognized terrorist organization (United Nations, 2020), while Iran is an established nation state and a member of the United Nations. Iran beholds a Shia ideology, practiced through material-strategic considerations, which puts it in contradiction to a Salafi- Takfiri anti-Shia ISIS. Iran's foreign policy is, according to its constitution, centered on the preservation of Iran's independence and territorial integrity, in line with such ideals as rejection of dominance, non-alignment with the hegemonic powers, defending the rights of Muslims and maintaining peaceful relations with all non-belligerent countries[1]. The ISIS is, by contrast, an expansionist non-state terror organization that seeks occupation of lands to create a pre-modern caliphate (al-Tamimi, 2015). Iran's armed forced conduct their mission through the known norms for activities of national militaries, similar to what, for example, the US, Russian or Israeli forces do. The ISIS, in contrast, uses violent attacks to create a network of "regions of savagery" (Wrigh, 2014) to make people submit to its will.

4. 2. Consistency between Truth and the Sender's Goal

Another criterion against which the veracity of the Israeli prime minister's claims about Iran can be verified is the relation between the truth and Israel's objectives regarding Iran. Since the

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1. See article 152 of Iran's constitution at: Constitutional Council (2021, Jun., 2).

exaggeration of Iran's threat serves Israel's repeatedly stated objective of countering Iran, one could doubt the accuracy of assertions made by Israeli officials about Iran. In case of the nuclear deal, Netanyahu stated that Israel commits itself to stopping Iran from arming itself with nuclear weapons (Goldman & Bruton, 2015). In another occasion, former Israeli prime minister said that Israel would not be bound by the agreement, to which he referred as a historic mistake (Kershner, 2015). Claiming that Iran has never given up efforts to obtain nuclear weapons, Netanyahu pledged that Israel would never allow Iran to build them (*Reuters*, 2021). Such very clear expression of animosity to Iran supports the view that Netanyahu's ultimate strategy regarding Iran is to encourage a US escalation with Iran (Kaye & Efron, 2020, p. 5). This strategy falls in line with Israel's goal of preventing Iran from developing its nuclear program and containing Iran's influence in the region, particularly in the areas where Iran's presence endangers Israel's security. Such objectives could lead Israel's officials not to express the truth about Iran when they have general judgments about Iran or oppose the nuclear deal. The insincerity of Netanyahu's rhetoric on Iran can also be seen in the very fact that the nuclear deal, which Netanyahu opposed, was an effective instrument to curb Iran's nuclear activities. If he was genuinely fearful of Iran's nuclear program, he should have welcomed the deal that would postpone the threat of Iran's nuclearization until 2030.

4. 3. Knowledge about Sender's Normal Activities and Beliefs

Another criterion for examining the reliability of Netanyahu's statements about Iran is the knowledge we have about his beliefs regarding Iran, which is discernable in the obvious positions he takes regarding Iran. As claimed by Scheindlin (2017), the most

important existential threat against which Israel commits itself is Iran. Netanyahu's obsession about Iran is even distanced from the view of Israel's security establishment about Iran. For the latter, Iran is a serious threat that needs to be managed, for Netanyahu, fearing Iran is like a religion (Kaye & Efron, 2020). This belief is manifested in Netanyahu's repeated positions vis-à-vis the nuclear deal, which he constantly regards a 'bad deal' without sufficient provisions for its effective enforcement (Busse, Santini, Nathanson, Pasch, & Weiss, 2018). In fact, Netanyahu was against the deal before it was reached; he remained hostile to it when it was in work, and supported the US withdrawal from it. In April 2018, days before Donald Trump withdrew the US from the deal, Netanyahu exposed some materials that, he claimed, proved that Iran had lied about its nuclear program (Halbfinger, Sanger, & Bergman, 2018). International and expert community reactions to Netanyahu's presentation were largely dismissive of its informational value, and suspicious that the timing and theatrics of the event were intended to persuade President Trump to withdraw from the JCPOA (NTI, 2020). After the US withdrew from the deal, Netanyahu hailed Trump's decision, saying the nuclear deal was a recipe for disaster (Reuters, 2018).

4. 4. Normalcy and Plausibility of Assertions

Netanyahu's description of Iran as a threat to Israel is implausible in many ways. It is unlikely that Iran could be a base for militant Islam. It cannot be believed that the Islamic Republic, working in the boundaries of a modern nation-state, would pursue such goals as the annihilation of Israel through military force for ideological purposes. Even if one would believe that Iran is truly an ideological actor, it is still inconceivable that Iranian decision-makers are lost

in their wishful thinking, in a way that they cannot foresee the result of a crusade against Israel. In contrast to what Netanyahu pictures about Iran, Iran's strategy has been primarily focused on deterrence (Ajili & Rouhi, 2019). The radical militant Islamist groups are a threat to the territorial integrity and physical security of Iran. Iran has been in fight with such groups inside and outside its borders. The Jaish al-Adl organization that operates in Southeastern Iran is an example (*Radio Farda*, 2020). Outside Iran, the ISIS is the militant group with which Iran has been fighting for years now. These realities make it impossible to imagine Iran as a scene for activities of militant Islam, as claimed by Netanyahu.

It is also implausible to see Iran trying to export its revolution to the *entire world*. The impracticality of such an aim speaks for itself. How could Iran, under the constant containment strategy of the US, be able to export its revolution even to nations in which there could be an acceptance for it, let alone the entire world?! The same is true about the *global terror campaign* of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, whose domain of activities is mainly restricted to West Asia. *Subversion of countries* by Iran is also far from plausible, given its undesirability and impracticality. It is also very difficult, if not impossible, for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon under strict and robust check and control mechanisms set forth by JCPOA. Netanyahu's warning of Iran as *the most dangerous state* that once acquired nuclear weapon, and *would unleash its aggressive fanaticism on the entire world* is also far from reasonable. All these statements about Iran, as the most dangerous state that seeks to export its revolution to the entire world, will unleash its aggressive fanaticism to the entire world, launches a global terror campaign, and subverts countries, are demonstrations that there is a considerable amount of exaggeration and insincerity in describing Iran.

4. 5. Truth Disclosure over Time

Netanyahu's policy of diversion of realities to securitize Iran and introduce it as an existential threat to Israel can also be established by seeing how his speculations about Iran and particularly the nuclear deal he vehemently opposes proved wrong. Many of his assertions about the nature of Iran's political system as irrational and utterly ideological are so subjective and speculative that would need no time passage to be proven wrong. They are simply unbelievable. However, there are other judgments made by Netanyahu about Iran, which can be verified over time. Netanyahu's opposition to both the 2013 Geneva interim agreement, and the 2015 JCPOA can be clearly judged for their soundness through making a comparison between the time Iran was bound by the deal and when Iran reduced its commitments in response to the US withdrawal from the JCPOA. The bad deal, against which Netanyahu was constantly warning, had limited the purity grade of Iran's enriched uranium to 3.67%. With the US withdrawal from the deal, Iran increased the purity level to 4.5% in July 2019, (MPR News, 2019) 20% in January 2021 (World Nuclear News, 2021a) and 60% in April 2021 (World Nuclear News, 2021b). While the nuclear accord had limited Iran to the use of IR-1 centrifuges, after 2018 Iran installed much more powerful centrifuges of IR-2m, IR-4 and IR-6 (Lincy & Milhollin, [2021]) and started testing IR-9 centrifuges (CNBC, 2021). This inauthenticity of Netanyahu's claims about Iran's nuclear program follows a long tradition of the former Israeli prime minister's absurd warnings about the immanency of an Iranian nuclear bomb, which goes back to 1992 (Hussain, 2015).

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4. 6. Being Judgmental, Subjective and Negative

The way Netanyahu talks about Iran is far from objectivity. He is mostly judgmental about Iran and uses negative emotive words to address it. Calling Iran, an Islamic state instead of Islamic Republic is the first of such negativity, which distances Iran from any democratic element and reduces it to its Islamic foundations. Israel's prime minister also uses negative words to describe Iran's IRGC, naming it a *brutal force* that *relentlessly pursues the export of Iran's revolution*. When it comes to Iran's president, Netanyahu uses words and phrases with negative connotations. His referral to Rouhani as *shedding crocodile tears* is much like the way he described Rouhani as a *"wolf in sheep's clothing"* sometime earlier (Aljazeera, 2013). His attempt to discredit Iran's moderate president and foreign minister goes beyond this when he accuses them of presenting a *manipulative charm offense*. He even addresses the leaders of other countries as *fooled* by Iran's manipulation. Accusing Iran, which he again describes as *the most dangerous state*, of launching a *global terror campaign* and *subverting countries* are not factual either. *Unleashing an aggressive fanaticism* by Iran's ayatollahs is also a truly vague, immeasurable, subjective and unsubstantiated way of describing Iran's ruling elites and their capabilities and intentions.

5. Conclusion

Securitization theory has made it clear that security utterances are about threat design. Speaking of existential threats is the manipulation of realities to push a subject out of normal politics, in a way that it would be seen and reacted through extraordinary politics. The developments in securitization studies have failed to

address a very basic matter, which is separating securitization form sincere expression of fear. Not all acts of alarming are inauthentic designs to serve political purposes. Security utterance can be sincere. Securitization happens only when it is proven that talking about a threat is insincere and manipulative. To distinguish securitization from sincere expression of fear, one should refer to the literature on deception detection in social sciences. Such a referral is made in this paper and a set of indicators are extracted and used to study Benjamin Netanyahu's fear expressions from Iran for their authenticity.

An examination of former Israeli prime minister's speeches at the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2014 demonstrates that the creation of an unrealistic Iranian threat is real and what Netanyahu expressed about the dangers of Iran to Israel does not correspond with the real threat that Iran can pose to the Jewish state. Netanyahu's assertions about Iran as a base for militant Islam, the export of Iran's revolution, Iran's global terror campaign, Iran's subversion of countries and Iran's building of a nuclear bomb do not correspond to our prior knowledge about Iran. It is also demonstrable that truth about Iran contradicts Israel's goals in countering Iran, which is further convincing that Netanyahu tries to securitize Iran. There is also evidence that for Netanyahu Iran should not only be contained, but always feared. He has a significantly negative attitude towards Iran, which is reflected in his constant negativity expressed about Iran and its intentions. This negative belief and attitude towards Iran results in expressing statements about Iran that are exaggerated and distanced from reality. More convincing about the inauthenticity of Netanyahu's claims about Iran is that many of them are clearly implausible. Iran simply does not have the capacity to export its revolution to the entire world, nor can it unleash its aggressive

fanaticism on the entire world or launch a global terror campaign. The passage of time has also proven Netanyahu's statements about Iran nuclear deal wrong. A deal that Netanyahu vehemently opposed was a functioning instrument to curb Iran's nuclear program; a program that grew out of control after the US withdrew from it. Netanyahu's choice of words and phrases about Iran is truly judgmental, subjective and negative, which further distances his statements about Iran from neutrality and objectivity. Describing Iran's IRGC as a brutal force, talking about the manipulative charm offense of Iran's president, labeling Iran as the most dangerous state that unleashes an aggressive fanaticism are all unsubstantiated judgments loaded by negative emotions, which demonstrates that Netanyahu attempts to securitize Iran.

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