



# LUND UNIVERSITY

## 0 to 100 / The Catch Up

The Securitization and Desecuritization of the Iranian  
nuclear program in U.S. Presidential Discourse

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# Abstract

From 2002 to 2015, the Iranian nuclear program was a central issue of U.S. foreign policy. This issue was addressed by the administrations of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama who had significantly different approaches to said issue. Consequently, the discourse used to address the issue was also different. This study argues that in addressing the issue of the Iranian nuclear program, there was a process of securitization under President Bush and a process of desecuritization under President Obama. This study aims to highlight how these processes took shape in the presidential discourse by focusing on how the presidents perceived the threat of the Iranian nuclear program, portrayed Iran and which responses they proposed. In order for the discourse analysis to be fully understood, the study presents the context in which the presidential discourse was uttered. The study then reviews the main features of securitization and desecuritization in the presidential discourse before comparing them. The results of this study show that despite President Bush and President Obama's significantly different approaches on the Iranian nuclear program, there are as many similarities as there are differences in the presidents' discourse on the Iranian nuclear program.

**Key words:** *President George W. Bush, President Barack Obama, Securitization, Desecuritization, Iranian nuclear program*

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# 1. Introduction

*“You don’t protect Israel and deter Iran by simply talking tough in Washington”*  
Barack Obama (2008:5)

In the fall of 2002 The National Council of Resistance of Iran, an exiled Iranian opposition group revealed that Iran was building two secret nuclear facilities (Nikou, 2015). The United States of America (U.S.) saw this revelation as an indication that Iran was trying to obtain the technology required to create nuclear weapons and consequently gave this issue high priority in U.S. foreign policy. The issue of the Iranian nuclear program would not be resolved until in 2015 when Iran and P5+1<sup>1</sup> countries signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), an international agreement that put limits on the Iranian nuclear program (IAEA, 2017). In the period from 2002 – 2015 the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama used two notably different approaches towards the Iranian nuclear program.

Bush and his administrations followed a policy which aimed to pressure Iran to abandon its nuclear program through international sanctions, political pressure and cutting Iran off from the international financial system (Cirincione – Grotto, 2007:25). While the Bush administrations did engage with Iran through diplomatic negotiations they often failed to take Iran’s concerns into consideration and preferred to try and force Iran to accept the terms put forward by the U.S. or face further isolation and sanctions by the international community (Cirincione – Grotto, 2007:26). One of the notable distinctions of the Bush administrations was the language that aimed to highlight and/or dramatize the risk of Iran obtaining nuclear technology that could be used to create a nuclear weapon (Ibid). This can be seen as an act of securitization, which means the process where an issue is framed as an issue of security in order to receive public and political support to use whatever means necessary to stop Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear weapon. Barack Obama and his administrations took a different approach for finding a solution to the issue of the Iranian nuclear program. Obama’s administrations were determined to find a diplomatic solution in which the U.S. would offer Iran economic and political benefits if Iran would meet international demands to limit the Iranian nuclear program (Limbert, 2015:1-3). The Obama administrations diplomatic ambitions faced multiple challenges both domestically and internationally from allies in the Middle East. In order for any possible agreement to be accepted, the Obama administrations had to change the highly securitized view of the Iranian nuclear program that was dominant during the Bush administration and therefore initiated a process of desecuritization where a previously securitized issue no longer is perceived as a security issue.

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<sup>1</sup> The **P5+1** refers to the UN Security Council’s five permanent members + Germany. It is also referred to as the E3+3 by European countries meaning Germany, France and Great Britain + Russia, China and the U.S.

## 1.1 Research question

While the Bush and Obama administrations had different views and approaches towards the Iranian nuclear program, both administrations used language or discourse to either frame the Iranian nuclear program as an existential threat that needed extraordinary measures to be solved or as an issue that could be solved through political means. Building on these insights, this study will first focus on how the securitization and desecuritization of the Iranian nuclear program was reflected in the presidential discourse. Then, the study will compare President Bush and President Obama's discourse and highlight the main differences and similarities. My research question is as follows:

***How did the process of securitization and desecuritization of the Iranian nuclear program take shape in the discourse of President Bush and President Obama?***

This issue is of relevance for several reasons. First, the thesis aims to contribute to existing research on securitization and desecuritization and how it takes form in political discourse. Secondly the issue of the Iranian nuclear program and JCPOA is today facing renewed scrutiny under the Trump administration and therefore it has extra disciplinary relevance (Teorell – Svensson, 2007:18-19). The aim of this study is to add to existing research on U.S. – Iran relations with focus on the Iranian nuclear program while also applying securitization theory to empirical cases where use of military force is not in focus.

## 2. Previous Research & Securitization theory

### 2.1 Previous Research

Within the field of U.S. - Iran relations there exists a significant amount of research. However, a large amount of this research has focused on how Iran and the U.S. portray each other, the clash of U.S. and Iranian discourse and the Iranian nuclear program (Izadi - Saghaye-Biria, 2007). Concerning the Iranian nuclear program research has also focused on the Iranians nuclear policy and how various actors reacted to the program (Bahgat, 2006) (Santini, 2010). Finally a large amount of research has focused on U.S or Iranian policy in the regional context of the Middle East (Edwards, 2014) (Wright, 2010). While this study builds on other studies about the issue of securitization and the Iranian nuclear program, it focuses on the Presidential discourse towards the Iranian nuclear program from 2003-2015. Research that has been done on the shift in foreign policy between the Bush and Obama administrations has for the most part focused on U.S. policy in the Middle East as a whole and focus has been on U.S. military engagement in the region (Kreig, 2016). Few, if any studies concerning the Iranian nuclear program and U.S. – Iran relations have put focus on the discourse used by the Bush and Obama administrations in describing the Iranian nuclear program. With this in regard, this study will add to existing research by studying the discourse of U.S. presidents Bush and Obama towards the Iranian nuclear program. In addition to this I will study the presidential discourse using securitization theory in order to better comprehend how the Iranian nuclear program was framed as a security issue from the U.S. perspective. I argue that the study will fill a gap in existing research by focusing on a subject that has not received much attention and combining it with a theoretical framework that has not been applied to said empirical case before.

Since the 1990's the Copenhagen school, of which Buzan and Weaver are the two most influential scholars, have challenged traditional approaches to security and the emergence of threats in security studies (Buzan – Hansen, 2009:212-213). In the chapter "*Securitization and Desecuritization*" (1995) Wæver stated that security problems were usually occurrences that threatened the state in rapid fashion and therefore demanded a mobilization from the state in order to respond to them. However, the state could claim a special right to respond to certain issues by naming them a security issue (Wæver, 1995:54). Threats to an actor's security thus can be created if the actor names an issue as a security problem. As Wæver puts it:

*What then is security? With the help of language theory, we can regard "security" as a speech act. In this usage, security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance itself is the act. By saying it, something is done (as in betting, giving a promise, naming a ship). By uttering "security" a state-representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it."* (Wæver,1995:55).

In 1998, Buzan together with Wæver and de Wilde published “*Security: a new framework for analysis*” (1998) where they deepened and widened the concept of security by shifting focus to other levels of analysis than the state and developing the concepts of *securitization* and *desecuritization* (Åtland, 2008: 291). In this book Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde identified three units of analysis in securitization theory: *referent objects*, *securitizing actors* and *functional actors*. The *referent objects* are the things that are perceived to be under threat with a legitimate right to survival that are in need of being protected and/or saved. The *securitizing actors* are those who perform the ‘*speech act*’ that declare a certain issue a security problem and thus attempt to securitize said issue. The *functional actors* are the actors that affect the issue that is being securitized. An example of such an actor can be a polluting company in a situation where the environment is the referent object that has been securitized (Buzan et al, 1998:36).

Since the 1990’s securitization theory has become one of the most dominant approaches in security studies with a wide range of contributing scholars. While security studies traditionally has focused on military threats, Balzacq notes in his article “*Securitization revisited: theory and cases*” (2016) that much of the modern empirical research of securitization have included new subjects such as energy and environment, religion, identity and migration, cybersecurity and global health (Balzacq, 2016:507-508) While securitization has expanded security studies to new issues, in the decade since the publication of the original securitization framework, many scholars have also criticized the original securitization framework for various shortcomings that have been found in the theory. Balzacq notes that much of the criticism levelled at the Copenhagen schools original framework surround the concepts of; the audience, the context, power relations and practices and instruments (Balzacq, 2016:499). Balzacq also states that while securitization theory used to focus on the explicit verbal speech act, it has gradually shifted towards investigating practices to support the study of the speech act (Balzacq, 2016:506-507). Williams echoes Balzacq’s thoughts on the concept of context in the article “*Words, Images, Enemies*” (2003) where he argues that the approach developed by Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde is too narrow to fully grasp the different context and complex processes of securitization in politics (Williams, 2003:528). Williams also criticizes the lack of a discussion about the ethics of securitization and a better methodological framework that also can critically evaluate the claims of threat and emergency that securitization creates (Williams, 2003:520-522). Another common criticism of the original framework concerns what is called the ‘conceptual twin of securitization’, desecuritization. In her article “*Reconstructing desecuritization: the normative-political in the Copenhagen School and directions for how to apply it*” (2012) Hansen reviews the status and content of desecuritization and also presents four forms of desecuritization. Hansen also argues that desecuritization was not properly developed by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde and is in need of further work to make it less problematic to apply empirically (Hansen, 2012:526-527). While having its flaws, desecuritization has been used by scholars such as Åtland to analyze the desecuritization of interstate relations in the arctic (Åtland, 2008) and Roe to apply desecuritization to the sphere of minority rights (Roe, 2004).

This thesis will use the original theoretical framework developed by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde’s for securitization while adding more modern thoughts from Balzacq and the scholars mentioned earlier. The motivation for focusing on the original framework is that since the thesis will focus on the discourse of President Bush and President Obama, focus will be on the speech act which is also the main focus point for the original framework. For the framework of desecuritization the work of Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde will be used but focus

will here be on the articles of Hansen, Åtland and Roe in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of desecuritization.

## 2.2 The process of securitization

Within a state, public issues receive different amount of attention depending on what kind of issue it is. In theory all public issues can be placed on a spectrum from non-politicized to politicized to securitized (fig.1.). When an issue is non-politicized, it receives no attention from the state and it is not made an issue of public debate or decision. A politicized issue is given attention by the state and is a part of public policy that requires a decision and resource allocations. The final aspect of the spectrum is when an issue is securitized and framed as a threat to the existence of the state. Here the issue requires emergency measures that justify actions that normally would not be obtainable in the political procedure (Buzan et al, 1998:23-24). Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde define securitization as:

*[..] the move that takes politics beyond established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics. Securitization can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicization (Buzan et al. 1998:23).*



Fig 1: The political spectrum of issues.<sup>2</sup>

While an actor can try to securitize an issue, simply framing an issue as a security concern does not mean that it becomes a securitized issue. The process of securitization is a negotiation between the *securitizing actor* and the *audience*. In order for the *securitizing actor* obtain the power and recourses to attend to an issue by means over the ordinary, the audience must give it's permission for the securitizing actor to take actions beyond what is considered normal politics (Buzan et al, 1998:26). The audience that the *securitizing actor* is dependent on can be one or several different groups such as the general public, politicians that are part of the government, political elites with power and *functional actors*. For the securitization to be successful the following three components must take place: first, framing of something as a security concern with a *referent object* being threatened. Second, there should be a call for emergency action. Third, the call should be accepted and the breaking free of limiting rules takes place (Buzan et al, 1998:26). On the process of securitization Roe summarizes the process as follows:

*Securitization is thus a kind of 'call and response' process: an actor makes a call that something is a matter of 'security', and the audience must then respond with their acceptance of it as such. The argument has to be framed in such a way as to achieve the level of resonance required to legitimize emergency measures. If there is no such level of acceptance, then securitization will have failed. (Roe, 2004:281)*

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<sup>2</sup> All figures in this study are made by the author.



Fig 2: the process of securitization

In contrast to traditional security studies that focus almost solely on military force at the center of security analysis, Balzacq points out that in securitization theory a *securitizing actor* can frame almost anything as a security concern with the acceptance of the securitizing actor’s audience. Balzacq continues that the responses to insecurity used by a *securitizing actor* are not solely limited to the use of military force, but can take various forms depending on the threat and context (Balzacq, 2016:496).

## 2.3 The process of Desecuritization

As mentioned earlier, desecuritization is the ‘conceptual twin’ of securitization (Hansen, 2012, 526). Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde describes desecuritization as moving issues that have been securitized out of ‘emergency mode’ and back into the normal sphere of politics (fig.2) (Buzan et al, 1998:4). Åtland describes the difference between desecuritization and securitization as follows:

*Whereas securitization can be characterized as a form of depoliticization, desecuritization usually implies some form of repoliticization. Instead of framing an issue in terms of security, the purpose of a ‘desecuritizing move’ is to take the ‘securityness’ out of the issue and reintroduce it to the sphere of everyday politics.* (Åtland, 2008:292)



Fig 3: The process of desecuritization.

An actor will desecuritize issues for different reasons. Åtland states that desecuritization is likely when the threat that caused the securitization process is believed to have disappeared or weakened to the extent that it no longer is perceived as an existential threat. If this has taken

place, the extraordinary measures introduced in the securitization process may no longer be needed and hard to justify (Åtland, 2008:292).

There are various theories as to how this shift takes place. Roe describes three possible options as to how an issue can be brought back into being politicized. The first option is that the desecuritizing actor can avoid talking about issues as security problems. The second option is that the desecuritizing actor gives responses that do not generate security dilemmas and thus avoids reinforcing the process of securitization. The third option is that the desecuritizing actor actively moves issues back into being politicized instead of being securitized (Roe, 2004:284). Åtland describes similar options as Roe but presents the options for desecuritization as ‘*desecuritization through avoidance of security-speak*’, ‘*desecuritization through management*’ and ‘*desecuritization through transformation*’ (Åtland, 2008:292). Hansen on the other hand identifies four different forms of desecuritization. The first form, *change through stabilisation* is when an issue is framed in non-security terms and is similar to Roe and Åtland’s first option of desecuritization (Hansen, 2012:529). The second form, *replacement* is when an issue is removed from being a security issue while another issue takes its place. The third form, *rearticulation* is when an issue is moved back to being a politicized issue by presenting a political solution to the issue in question in a similar way as Roe and Åtland’s third option of desecuritization (Hansen, 2012:542-543). The fourth form, *silencing*, is when an issue fails to take place in the security discourse (Hansen, 2012:544-545). For the purpose of this thesis, focus will be placed on Hansen’s third form of desecuritization; *rearticulation*. Hansen describes *rearticulation* as:

*Desecuritizations that remove an issue from the securitized by actively offering a political solution to the threats, dangers, and grievances in question. [...] rearticulation suggests a more direct, radical form of political engagement: there is no conflict looming in the background as with change stabilisation through, and the issue is rearticulated rather than just replaced (Hansen, 2012:542-543).*

*Rearticulation* comes across as inherently positive, since it aims to fundamentally transform the relationship between the actor under threat and the threatening actor. By transforming not only the issue that is a threat but also the identities and interests of self and other, an actor can thus also prevent new securitizations from appearing in the future (Hansen, 2012, 543).

## 2.4 Theoretical definitions

For the purpose of this study the original securitization framework of Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde is sufficient. However there is a need to shortly discuss the two concepts that Balzacq argues need to be integrated to securitization theory; audience and context (Balzacq, 2011:35). Since this study aims to focus on the ‘speech act’ of President Bush and President Obama, how the arguments resonated with the audience of the discourse is not of interest to this study. Including discussions like that of Balzacq on audience acceptance and how the securitizing moves resonated with the audience would move the focus of the study beyond the intended research question (Balzacq, 2016:499) (George – Bennett, 2005:70). While audience acceptance is a complex concept that is hard to define, this study will interpret the implementation of the President’s policies and agreements as audience acceptance. For example, in the case of the JCPOA in 2015, there were several members of congress and the senate that stated their opposition to the deal. However the opponents of the JCPOA did not

gather enough support to block the implementation of the agreement, therefore the agreement was accepted by the audience. While the same argument can be made for context, it is needed in order to better understand the empirical material. But as noted earlier in order to keep the focus of the study on the discourse of securitization and desecuritization, context has been added as a complement to the empirical material instead of being added to the analysis of the security discourse. A theoretical expansion of securitization that would also put focus on new concepts would also become a problem due to limitations on thesis length.

In order for the analysis of security discourse, the units of the analysis need to be described. The first unit, *the referent object* will in this study is the peace and stability in the Middle East, which is a crucial interest of the U.S. and the global financial system. The *securitizing/desecuritizing actor* in this study will be President Bush and President Obama. While this study will focus on the discourse solely of the presidents they as political leaders represent the U.S. government. In order to avoid confusion between the role of the legislative branch of government, the senate and congress, this study will view them not as part of the securitizing actor (i.e. the executive government) but as an extension of the people who elected them. Therefore the politicians in the congress and the senate form *the audience* whose acceptance is needed for a successful securitization. *The functional actors* in this study will be other actors that are relevant in the issue of the Iranian nuclear program such as Iran, the EU3, Russia, China and Israel among others.

## 3. Methodological framework

The methodological framework of this thesis will rest on a structured focused comparison of the Bush and Obama administrations' discourse. The comparison will have a set of questions in the discourse analysis that will enable a structured comparison of the two cases (George – Bennett, 2005:69). The two cases in the study, the Bush and Obama administrations, were chosen because of their relevance to the Iranian nuclear program and their use of speech acts that can be described as securitization and desecuritization. Thus these two cases are optimal for this study that aims to study the shift from securitization and desecuritization on the Iranian nuclear program (George – Bennett, 2005:83).

### 3.1 Discourse analysis

The motivation of discourse analysis as the method for this study is quite clear. As Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde stated, if one wishes to study securitization and desecuritization, one should study discourse, political constellations and how actors through the 'speech act' convince an audience of the need of extraordinary measures that otherwise would be off limits (Buzan et al, 1998:25). Discourse analysis however, is not a straight forward method. Today discourse analysis is a disputed method with a large variation of approaches (Bergström & Boréus, 2012:355). Jørgensen and Phillips argues that discourse analysis as a concept has become vague partly due to the fact that in some cases it means almost nothing and in other cases its precise but focuses on different aspects. Despite these challenges, Jørgensen and Phillips describe discourse analysis as a specific method of talking about and understanding the world or an aspect of it. (Jørgensen – Phillips, 2002:1) In their book, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (2002), Jørgensen and Phillips present a methodological framework that is based on three approaches to discourse analysis within social constructivism: Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, discursive psychology and critical discourse analysis (Jørgensen – Phillips, 2002:1-2). For this thesis however these theories of discourse analysis are too broad as they focus on discourse transformation through contact with other discourses, the investigation of discourse change and how people use discourse to create and negotiate views of the world and identities (Jørgensen – Phillips, 2002:6-7). For the purpose of mapping the discourse of securitization and desecuritization I will instead use the approach of Gill from her chapter "*Discourse analysis*" (2000) in order to have an approach that enables a focus on the 'speech act'. Additionally, Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde advocated an approach to discourse analysis that studied discourse as a subject by its own right over a sophisticated linguistic approach that studies discourse as an indicator of something else (Buzan et al., 1998:176).

In line with Jørgensen and Phillips, Gill states that discourse analysis is an umbrella term to a variety of different approaches that are unified by the rejection of the realist notion that language is nothing more than a neutral means of reflecting or describing the world (Gill, 200:172). Despite these differences Gill identifies four main themes in discourse analysis.

First, discourse analysis focus on the texts in their own right, rather than focusing at some other reality that lies behind the discourse. Second, discourse analysts view language as constructive, meaning that discourse is created by the speaker that chooses from a selection of utterances form the way we view the world. For example, the way a speaker presents a certain issue affects the way the people relate to said issue. Third, discourse is viewed as social practice which means that people use discourse to do things. In the context of this thesis, the practice that discourse is used for is to make an issue a security concern (Gill, 2000:174-175). The fourth and final theme in discourse analysis is that social life is seen to be filled with various kinds of conflict. In this field of conflict and competition, discourse is a central part in the creation of competing views of the world. Within the sphere of politics this becomes quite evident as politicians use discourse to persuade voters that their policies are best suited for the voter's view of the world and their grievances (Gill, 2000:176).

In the method presented by Gill, the focus of the analysis is on the text or transcript of a parliamentary debate, interview, speech or press conference. Before the analysis can begin, questions that will guide and improve the discourse analysis should be articulated. These questions should also be connected to the research question that the study wishes to answer (Gill, 2000:177). When the analysis questions have been articulated a coding of the material is needed. The categories used for coding will be dependent by the research question. If for example a study wants to study the discourse used towards female politicians in a newspaper, the coding process would single out all instances where female politicians are mentioned in said newspaper (Gill, 2000:179-180). With the analysis questions formulated and initial coding done, the proper analysis can be performed. The discourse analysis phase is made up of two phases. First the study will search for certain patterns in the discourse by focusing on the variation and consistency of the used discourse, Secondly, the study will form preliminary hypotheses about the functions that particular features of the discourse have and examine said hypotheses against the data (Gill, 2000:180).

Applying the method of Gill on this study, the empirical material that will be used for the discourse analysis is: speeches, remarks, interviews and comments from President Bush and President Obama. Since the study focuses on the presidential discourse towards the Iranian nuclear program, the coding will focus on instances where the Iranian nuclear program is mentioned or issues directly related to the Iranian nuclear program. Then, the analysis will form tentative hypothesis based on the reviewed material. The analysis questions that will be used in the discourse analysis are:

- How did the President portray the threat that the Iranian nuclear program posed?
- What options (to address the issue) did the President suggest or highlight?
- How did the President portray Iran?

The first two questions are used because they are central to the process of securitization as the threat posed to the *referent object* and the extraordinary measures that the *securitizing actor* wishes to use in order to deal with the threat. The third analysis question is of importance since the portrayal of Iran as the *functional* is a central part in the process securitization. Beyond these three analysis questions, the study will also look for arguments uses security rhetoric and logic.

The material that this study will rely upon for the discourse analysis is official transcripts of Presidential speeches, interviews, press conferences and remarks to the press. The primary source for this material will be the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) which is the federal government's official digital, secure resource for producing, procuring cataloging,

indexing, authenticating, disseminating and preserving the official information products of the U.S. government (GPO, 2017). The Miller Center, a nonpartisan affiliate of the University of Virginia that specializes in presidential public policy among other issues, will provide additional transcripts of presidential speeches (Miller Center, 2017). In addition to this, The American Presidency Project (APP), a non-profit and non-partisan database of the University of California, Santa Barbra, will be used as a ‘search engine’ to find relevant presidential documents (APP, 2017). In order to have enough material for a proper discourse analysis, 4 presidential documents per year will be used. The selection of said documents will be based on relevance to the Iranian nuclear program. For the empirical background and context previous research in the field of U.S. – Iran relations and the Iranian nuclear program, official government reports, think tank reports and news articles will be used.

## 3.2 Delimitations

This study will perform a discourse analysis of various speech transcripts of the Bush and Obama administrations. In order to narrow the amount of empirical material the study will focus solely on the discourse by President Bush and President Obama. The decision to focus solely on President Bush and President Obama is based on two main factors. First, including speeches, statements and remarks from other figures in the administrations such as secretary of state, defense or director of national intelligence would have increased the empirical material that needs to be reviewed significantly. Second, while other members of the president’s administrations are important figures when it comes to shaping U.S. foreign policy, the president remains the most important figure that also has final say to whether a specific policy should be continued, changed or terminated. The time frame that will be used in this study is 2003-2015. The motivation behind this is that the revelation of the existence of secret Iranian nuclear facilities happened during the fall of 2002 and therefore 2003 would be a suitable time to review how the issue was approached after the U.S. had time to gather more intelligence about the revelations. 2015 was chosen as the end of the time frame due to the fact that it is during this year that the JCPOA was reached and consequently the Presidential discourse no longer focused on the Iranian nuclear program itself, but why the agreement that was reached was a diplomatic resolution that answered U.S. concerns on the nuclear program.

## 4. Empirical background & context

Since the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran after the 1979 revolution, the regional interests of Iran and the U.S. have been in conflict. While Iran has viewed U.S. engagement in the region as a close threat partly due to the presence of U.S. forces in the Middle East, the U.S. has endlessly aimed to minimize Iran's influence in the region (Edwards, 2014:81-82). A central piece in this antagonistic relationship between the countries has been Iran's nuclear program. The program has its beginning in 1957 when Iran, who at the time was an important U.S. ally in the region, signed a civil cooperation agreement with the U.S. This cooperation however ended in 1979 with the Iranian revolution (Nikou et al., 2015:1-2). Much to U.S. annoyance, Iran continued to develop their nuclear program during the following 20 years with assistance from other countries with nuclear capabilities such as China and Russia (Edwards, 2014: 69-70) (Nikou et al., 2015:2-3). The relationship between the U.S. and Iran would however evolve when the first Bush administration took office.

After the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, U.S. foreign policy focused on the 'War on Terror' (WOT) and the threat that terrorism and rogue states that would assist and/or harbor these terrorists posed to U.S. national security. The Bush administration also stated that the most viable way to prevent terrorist attacks with 'weapons of mass destruction' (WMD) was to preemptively deny terrorists access to WMD:s (Tunç, 2009:1-4). In 2001, the U.S. focused on the Al-Qaeda, the Taliban in Afghanistan and Iraq as the largest threats to U.S. and global security (Gray, 2006:564). In Afghanistan, Iran and the U.S. would cooperate to create a new government after the removal of the Taliban in 2001 (Hadley, 2010:1-2). In this cooperation the U.S. benefited from Iran's important relationships with key actors in Afghanistan while Iran on the other hand saw the cooperation partly as a necessity in order to be 'on the right side' of the war on terror but also as a possible diplomatic opening to improve U.S. – Iran relations (Leverett, 2006:11-12). In 2002 however, this cooperation faced several challenges. First in his state of the union speech, President Bush bundled Iran together with Iraq and North Korea as 'an axis of evil' because of the countries connections to terrorism and WMD. Later in 2002 the revelation of secret Iranian nuclear sites once again raised not only U.S. but international concerns about the Iranian nuclear program (Hadley, 2010:3). The two countries would however continue to cooperate in Afghanistan in 2003. Despite threatening U.S. rhetoric, Iran did also seek cooperation in Iraq after the U.S. led invasion but during mid-2003 it became clear that the Bush administration did not seek the same broader, strategic dialogue as Iran did (Leverett, 2006:12). Part of this reluctance was due to the internal conflict within the Bush administration regarding its policy towards Iran (Leverett, 2006:14). While some in the administration advocated simply managing the Iranian nuclear issue through negotiations, others opposed using any incentives to convince Iran to join negotiations and instead advocated coercive

methods to force Iran to comply to U.S. demands (Leverett, 2006 15). This internal conflict hampered U.S. negotiations with Iran and led to the U.S. being on ‘the sidelines’ as the EU3<sup>3</sup> managed to reach an agreement to temporarily suspend Iran’s uranium enrichment program in a deal that was formalized in 2004 (Cirincione – Grotto, 2007:25). The success of the agreement was short lived as Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected as President in 2005. The EU3 did offer Iran a new deal in 2005, but it lacked (from an Iranian perspective) crucial security guarantees from the U.S. (Leverett, 2006:15). With nothing to gain from the 2005 offer, President Ahmadinejad attacked the nuclear negotiation process and resumed Iran’s nuclear activities in 2006 breaking the agreement reached in 2004 (Hadley, 2010:4). In 2006 the U.S. announced that they would join the EU3 together with Russia and China to form the EU3+3 or P5+1 and would offer Iran a new deal on their nuclear program (Ibid). The new deal did not however include the same security guarantees as the 2005 deal did since the U.S. would only accept deal if the security guarantees were removed. The U.S. thus ignored Iran’s security concerns, which lead Iran to reject the offer (Leverett, 2006:15-16) (Cirincione – Grotto, 2007:26). With Iran’s rejection of the offer by the P5+1 countries the U.S. managed to convince the EU3, Russia and China on imposing tougher resolutions on Iran and negotiations entered a stalemate. The U.S. also launched a rare international campaign that aimed to get important foreign banks to halt doing business with Iran and thereby isolating Iran further (Hadley, 2010:4-5). At the same time, Iran became the focal point of U.S. national security strategy as nuclear proliferation and sponsorship of terrorism became the focus (USDS, 2006:20) (Gray, 2006:564). By the time the second Bush administration left office in 2009, the administration had developed a strong international framework of sanctions and agreements that could encourage positive actions from Iran as well as punish Iran if it failed to comply.

President Obama took office with a promise of changing U.S. – Iran relations despite the history between these two countries. President Obama placed the Iranian nuclear program at the center of U.S. – Iran relations from which all other issues depended on (Limbert, 2015:1). President Obama also aimed to change the U.S. foreign policy of his predecessor by focusing less on aggressive, coercive and unilateral action that put U.S. national interests first, and instead put emphasis on global interests on equal terms with other countries (Feith – Cropsey, 2011:12). In 2009 the U.S. and EU3 imposed new sanctions on Iran due to its refusal join negotiations and follow international agreements. However, unlike previous sanctions imposed on Iran, the Obama administration convinced the EU3 countries to include the long promised incentives to Iran if it cooperated with the International community (Limbert, 2015:5). Due to internal conflicts in Iran in 2009 with the re-election of president Ahmadinejad, negotiations once again went into a stalemate. By 2010 the U.S. was no longer the actor pushing for sanctions as the EU3 imposed severe sanctions on Iran that went beyond the requirements of UN Security Council resolutions (Clawson, 2015:4). The stalemate in negotiations reached its end in 2013 when Iran elected Hassan Rouhani as their new

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<sup>3</sup> The EU3 are France, Germany and the United Kingdom, all members of the European Union at the time.

president. After years of tough sanctions and a crippled economy, the Rouhani administration aimed to relieve Iran of the tough economic sanctions and avoid a confrontation with the U.S. and West by responding to the offers made by President Obama in 2009 (Limbert, 2015:6-7) (Barzegar, 2014:2). With an administration in Iran that was willing to negotiate, the negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 countries got momentum and in 2013 an interim nuclear deal that suspended aspects of the Iranian nuclear program in exchange for moderate sanctions relief was reached (IAEA, 2017). In parallel to these negotiations there was a process of confidence building between Iran and the U.S. in order to tackle the long history of mistrust between them. On the Iranian side transparency and verification of the nuclear program was central as Iran complied with the demands of the P5+1 countries. For the U.S. these measures by Iran gave grounds for the Obama administration to counteract the critical voices in congress that were influenced by Israeli and Saudi lobbies and called for new sanctions on Iran (Barzegar, 2014:4-5). As the negotiations continued, both Iran and the U.S. realized through direct talks that the historical view of Iran as a threat to U.S. regional interests and the U.S. as a threat to Iranian national security could be changed (Barzegar, 2014:5-7). With the agreement between Iran and the P5+1 countries in 2015, the U.S. and Iran found grounds on which they could argue in favor of the agreement to their respective constituencies.

In conclusion, the approach of the Bush and Obama administrations towards the Iranian nuclear program can be summarized by a collection of characteristics. The Bush administration's policy towards Iran was to contain and minimize Iran's influence in the Middle East. Despite cooperation in Afghanistan to oust the Taliban, the U.S. continued to view Iran as a threat to U.S. interests in the region and did not seek further diplomatic openings. The Bush administration's approach to Iran can be characterized as coercive. Despite the U.S. first supporting and later joining diplomatic negotiations with Iran diplomacy was more used as a tool to keep Iran in check than a means to solve the issue of the Iranian nuclear program. When the U.S. demonstrated its willingness to act preemptively and unilaterally without the approval of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in, the threat of unilateral U.S. military action loomed over negotiations. When the U.S. refused to take Iranian security concerns into account in negotiations, the possibility of a confrontation between Iran and the U.S. only grew stronger. The Obama administrations in contrast stated that they wished to find a diplomatic solution that did not aim to marginalize or contain Iran. Despite offers from the U.S. and the P5+1 countries, Iran continued uranium enrichment and faced further sanctions. What was different with the Obama administration's approach to Iran and use of sanctions was that the sanctions under President Obama were meant to force Iran to negotiate. The Obama administration also convinced the other members of P5+1 to include long promised incitements and guarantees to Iran. In many ways the Obama administration's approach to Iran was similar to the Bush administrations concerning sanctions and use of political pressure. The significant difference between them however is that while the Bush administrations were divided and at times incoherent, the Obama administrations had a clear goal and way to find a diplomatic solution to the issue. The Obama administrations also offered Iran a significant package that would benefit Iran in exchange for eliminating the possibility of an Iranian nuclear weapon.

## 5. The Presidential discourse

In order for this study to map the securitization and desecuritization of the Iranian nuclear program, the discourse of the presidents will be analyzed. The basis of this analysis will be the following three discourse analysis questions:

- How did the President portray the threat that the Iranian nuclear program posed?
- What options (to address the issue) did the President suggest or highlight?
- How did the President portray Iran?

### 5.1 President George W. Bush

*How did the President portray the threat that the Iranian nuclear program posed?*

After the revelation of the secret Iranian nuclear sites, President Bush described the threat of the Iranian nuclear program in a variation of ways. In the beginning of negotiations with Iran, President Bush often highlighted that if Iran would obtain the technology and knowledge to create a nuclear weapon it would make Iran more dangerous, and it would be a threat to not only the U.S. but also other countries (Bush, 2003c) (Bush, 2003d). President Bush also argued that the proliferation of WMD:s was not in the U.S. or the worlds interests (Bush, 2003c) (Bush, 2003d, see also: Bush 2005d, 2007b). Around 2006/2007 however, President Bush's discourse changed to a more dramatic discourse that argued that the Iranian nuclear program was not only a threat to the peace and stability of the Middle East, but to global security (Bush, 2006b) (Bush 2007a, see also: Bush, 2008a, 2008c). While arguing that the Iranian nuclear program was a threat to global security, the President also gave several striking examples of the risks of Iran with a nuclear weapon. I the two most striking statements made by President Bush, he first warned about a potential 'nuclear holocaust':

*And Iran's active pursuit of technology that could lead to nuclear weapons threatens to put a region already known for instability and violence under the shadow of a nuclear holocaust. Iran's actions threaten the security of nations everywhere. (Bush, 2007a:1126)*

And later the potential of a third World War:

*So I've told people that if you're interested in avoiding world war III, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing them from have the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon. (Bush, 2007b:1355)*

Despite the shift towards more radical examples to highlight the threat of the Iranian nuclear program, the aspect that was most consistent in President Bush's discourse was the notion that the Iranian nuclear program was a threat global and regional security, and that Iran with nuclear weapons capabilities was not in the U.S or the worlds interest (Bush 2003c, see also: Bush, 2003d, 2004c, 2005d, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008c)

*What options (to address the issue) did the President suggest or highlight?*

When the existence of the nuclear program became public knowledge President Bush's approach first focused on making it clear that neither the U.S. nor other countries would allow Iran to pursue nuclear weapons (Bush, 2003c, see also: Bush, 2003d, 2004c, 2004d, 2005a, 2006a, 2006b). In addressing this issue President Bush spoke of the importance of working multilaterally together with the EU3, IAEA and other actors to put pressure on Iran:

*We are working with our friends to keep the pressure on the mullahs to listen to the demands of the free world. [...] We're working with the IAEA to keep the pressure on Iran, and the secretary is working very closely with the foreign ministers of France, Great Britain, and Germany, who are taking upon themselves to make it clear that the demands of Europe are also equal to – the same as the demands of the United States, that we expect for there to be full disclosure, full transparency of their nuclear weapons programs (Bush, 2004c:1428, see also: Bush, 2004d, 2005a, 2005c, 2006b).*

On solving the issue President Bush consistently stated that the U.S. preferred to solve the issue diplomatically but that there also was a need consequences if Iran failed to comply with the demands of the international community (Bush, 2004b, 2005c, see also: Bush, 2005d, 2006d, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). After the U.S. joined the diplomatic negotiations with Iran President Bush stated the options for solving the issue was that either Iran would voluntarily suspend parts of its nuclear program and engage in diplomatic negotiations or be forced to suspend parts of its program due to political and economic sanctions from a unified international community:

*Iran's leaders have a clear choice. We hope they will accept our offer and voluntarily suspend these activities, so we can work out an agreement that will bring Iran real benefits. If Iran's leaders reject our offer, it will result in action before the Security Council, further isolation from the world, and progressively stronger political and economic sanctions (Bush, 2006c:1181, see also: Bush, 2006b, 2006d, 2007a, 2007d, 2008a, 2008b).*

While President Bush stated that his administration aimed to solve the issue through diplomacy, the president also stated that preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons was the U.S. top priority and that no options, including military action would be taken 'off the table' (Bush, 2004a, 2008a, 2008b).

### *How did the President portray Iran?*

During his entire presidency, President Bush consistently used dramatic language in describing Iran in order to highlight the threat that Iran posed:

*He's concerned about Iran, as am I. That's why early in my administration I talked about Iran in vivid terms* (Bush, 2004d:1512)

President Bush often described Iran as dangerous by highlighting Iran's support for global terrorism and argued that it would only worsen if the regime was allowed to develop nuclear weapons (Bush, 2003a, 2005a, see also: Bush, 2006c, 2006d, 2007a, 2007b). President Bush also described the Iranian government as an oppressor of its people:

*Today, Iran remains the world's primary state sponsor of terror, pursuing nuclear weapons while depriving its people of the freedom they seek and deserve* (Bush, 2005a:131, see also: Bush, 2003a, 2004d, 2006c).

In addition to believing that the regime in Iran was dangerous, President Bush often stated his administrations mistrust of Iran due to Iran's failure to meet its obligations of nuclear treaties and defiance of the IAEA (Bush, 2004d) (Bush, 2006c) (Bush,2008b). This mistrust was evident in his discourse where President Bush described the Iranian regime as being untrustworthy due to its previous illicit nuclear activities:

*In other words, the Iranians said they were in compliance with certain international rules, and yet we found out they weren't in compliance of those rules. And so we're very deeply suspicious of their desires* (Bush, 2005c:1269, see also: Bush, 2003b, 2006c, 2007b, 2008a, 2008c)

Similar to the change in discourse on what kind of threat the Iranian nuclear program posed, President Bush's discourse became more dramatic and alarming. Iran was portrayed not only as a supporter of terrorism and oppressor of its own citizens but also as a force of extremism and radicalism that opposed any democracy in the region:

*We're also standing against the forces of extremism embodied by the regime in Tehran. Iran's rulers oppress a good and talented people. And whenever freedom advances in the Middle East, it seems the Iranian regime is there to oppose it* (Bush, 2008d:123, see also: Bush, 2006d, 2007a)

### *Summary*

In conclusion, President Bush's discourse focused to highlight the threat of the Iranian nuclear program using alarming examples such as a potential world war III and a 'nuclear holocaust'. The options that the President suggested were multilateral diplomacy through negotiations and coercive pressure in the form of economic and political sanctions. Finally in portraying Iran as the threatening actor, the discourse often focused on Iran's illicit activities that also posed a threat to U.S. interests and in a way also to delegitimize the government of Iran by highlighting the oppression the government subjected its citizens to.

## 5.2 President Barack Obama

*How did the President portray the threat that the Iranian nuclear program posed?*

President Obama consistently spoke of the Iranian nuclear program as a threat to the region due to the potentially destabilizing effects that it could cause (Obama, 2009a) (Obama 2010c). Another consistent feature of President Obama's discourse was that Iran obtaining nuclear weapons would spark a nuclear arms race in the Middle East:

*The peace of the region will also be advanced if Iran forgoes any nuclear weapons ambitions. Now, as I made clear in Prague yesterday, no one is served by the spread of nuclear weapons, least of all Turkey. You live in a difficult region, and a nuclear arm race would not serve the security of this nation well. This part of the world has known enough violence. It has known enough hatred. It does not need a race for an ever-more powerful tool of destruction (Obama, 2009b:4, see also: Obama, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2010c, 2011c, 2013a, 2014d).*

Despite limiting the threat of the Iranian nuclear program to the region, President Obama did point out that an Iran nuclear activities combined with its military capacities would not only be a threat to Iran's neighbors and U.S. allies, but ultimately could also be a threat to the U.S. (Obama, 2009c, see also: Obama 2011c, 2014c). Within the context of nuclear nonproliferation, the President also stated that Iran obtaining nuclear weapons would go against interests of the world community if Iran were to obtain nuclear weapons and could possibly lead to terrorists obtaining nuclear weapons (Obama,2010b, see also: Obama 2010d, 2012c, 2013a).

*What options (to address the issue) did the President suggest or highlight?*

President Obama came into office with the campaign promise of solving the issue of the Iranian nuclear program using 'direct diplomacy'. During his time in office, President Obama consistently stated the goal to solve the dispute by finding a diplomatic solution (Obama, 2009a, see also: 2010b, 2010c, 2011c, 2912b, 2012c, 2013d). The diplomatic solution envisioned by Obama would prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon while allowing Iran to have a civilian nuclear program that couldn't be weaponized:

*With respect to Iran, I very much want to see a diplomatic resolution to the problem. I was very clear before the campaign, I was clear during the campaign, and I'm now clear after the campaign: We're not going to let Iran get a nuclear weapon. But I think there is still a window of time for us to resolve this diplomatically. [...] There should be a way in which they can enjoy peaceful nuclear power while still meeting their international obligations and providing clear assurances to the international community that they're not pursuing a nuclear weapon (Obama, 2012d:11, see also: Obama, 2013b, 2014a).*

President Obama also highlighted that his policy towards Iran was not containment through diplomacy, but rather diplomacy that could engage Iran and assure that the issue would be resolved peacefully:

*Now, I have made it clear to the people and the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran that the United States seeks engagement based on mutual interest and mutual respect. We want Iran to play its rightful role in the community of nations. Iran is a great civilization. We want them to engage in the economic and political integration that brings prosperity and security. But Iran's leaders must choose whether they will try to build a weapon or build a better future for their people (Obama 2009b:4, see also: Obama 2012c, 2012b, 2013a, 2015d).*

In his diplomatic approach, President Obama stressed the importance of a multilateral diplomatic effort together with the other P5+1 country to find a solution to the issue (Obama, 2009d, see also: 2010a, 2010b, 2014c, 2015c). Through a multilateral approach the U.S. could both unilateral and multilateral sanctions on Iran (Obama, 2010a, see also: 2011a, 2012c, 2012d, 2015a). Despite preferring multilateral cooperation and diplomacy on Iran, the President highlighted that in preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, no option would be 'off the table' (Obama, 2011c, see also: 2011a, 2013a, 2012b). When discussing the various options for addressing the issue President Obama also discussed the possibility of a military confrontation with Iran. Here the president was clear that a diplomatic and peaceful solution was not only the more preferable option but also more sustainable:

*I do believe that all of us have an interest in resolving this issue peacefully. Strong and principled diplomacy is the best way to ensure that the Iranian Government forsakes nuclear weapons. Peace is far more preferable to war. And the inevitable costs, the unintended consequences that would come with war means that we have to do everything we can try to resolve this diplomatically (Obama, 2013a:4, also see: Obama, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015c).*

In addition to being critical of using military force, President Obama argued that a diplomatic and peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear program could be a stepping stone in improving the antagonistic relationship between the U.S. and Iran:

*The United States and Iran have been isolated from one another since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. This mistrust has deep roots. [...] I don't believe this difficult history can be overcome overnight; suspicions run too deep. But I do believe that if we can resolve the issue of Iran's nuclear program, that can serve as a major step down a long road towards a different relationship, one based on mutual interests and mutual respect (Obama, 2013b:4-5)*

President Obama's discourse on the options changed however with the interim agreement in 2013 between Iran and the P5+1 countries. After the agreement, President Obama highlighted the fact that the administrations diplomatic approach had given results and enabled the possibility of a final diplomatic resolution on the Iranian nuclear program

The President also stated that the P5+1 would halt new sanctions as long as Iran fulfilled its obligations. On this issue President Obama argued that imposing new sanction on Iran would only risk the diplomatic breakthrough that had been achieved. (Obama, 2013c, see also: Obama 2013d, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a).

### *How did the President portray Iran?*

President Obama often described Iran using the illicit activities/actions that the Iranian government was involved in. The two activities that were most consistently presented were Iran's support of terrorism and the oppression of the Iranian people:

*Because whether it is threatening the nuclear nonproliferation regime or the human rights of its own citizens or the stability of its own neighbors by supporting terrorism, the Iranian Government continues to demonstrate that its own unjust actions are a threat to justice everywhere (Obama, 2010b:2, see also: Obama, 2011a, 2011b, 2013a, 2015a, 2015d).*

Another way in which President Obama described the Iranian Government was by stating how it had failed to live up its international obligations and requirements concerning its nuclear program and therefore was not abiding by international rules (Obama, 2011c see also: 2010b, 2010c, 2011d, 2013a). After the 2013 agreement however, President Obama's discourse changed. After the agreement, President Obama began to highlight the fact that Iran was taking the right steps and fulfilling their commitments under the new deal. However, President Obama did also state that despite the agreement with Iran, there were still a wide range of issues in which the U.S. and Iran had their differences:

*We have a chance to resolve the nuclear issues peacefully. And I should point out also, by the way, that if – even if we get a nuclear deal and we are assured that Iran doesn't possess nuclear weapons, we've still got a whole bunch of problems with Iran on state-sponsored terrorism, their rhetoric towards Israel, their financing of Hizballah. We've got differences with respect to Syria. It's not as if suddenly we've got a great relationship with Iran. It solves one particular problem that is urgent, and it solves it better than the other alternatives that might present themselves (Obama, 2015a:10, see also: Obama, 2014c, 2014a, 2014d.)*

### *Summary*

In conclusion, President Obama's discourse focused on highlighting why a diplomatic and peaceful resolution on the Iranian nuclear program was preferred while recognizing the threat that Iran would pose to the region and U.S. allies if it was to obtain nuclear weapons. The President also consistently highlighted the various illicit activities that Iran was part of when describing the regime. The President's discourse slightly changed due to the 2013 agreement. The President's discourse then focused on highlighting the significant progress that had been made and the possibility of solving a major issue of U.S. foreign policy.

## 6. Analysis

### 6.1 Securitization & Desecuritization in the Presidential Discourse

With the previous section providing an overview of the Presidential discourse the study will now how President Bush's discourse can be viewed as securitization and President Obama's discourse as desecuritization.

#### *Securitization under President Bush*

Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde define securitization as when a *securitizing actor* frames an issue as a threat to the existence of a *referent object* and requires emergency measures that justify actions that normally would not be obtainable in the political procedure. In the case of securitization under President Bush, it should be noted that due to the antagonistic relationship between the countries, U.S. – Iran relations were already in a way securitized. With the Iranian revolution of 1979 the U.S. would constantly view Iran as a threat to U.S. interests and consequently often frame issues relating to Iran as issues of security and U.S. national interest. When the revelation of the secret Iranian nuclear sites happened, the perception of Iran as a threat to U.S. interests was already strong.

In the first stage of securitization, naming an issue as a security concern, President Bush's discourse was quite clear: not only was the Iranian nuclear program a threat to the peace and stability in the Middle East but to the entire world. By expanding the *referent object* under threat to include the entire world, the Bush administration sought to dramatize the threat that the Iranian nuclear program posed. In addition to widening the object under threat from the Middle East to the entire world, President Bush also highlighted the potential consequences if Iran was to obtain nuclear weapons such as potential conflict, suffering and destruction. The president also used striking descriptions of the Iranian Government in order to enforce the alarming idea of a dangerous and radical government in Iran with access to nuclear weapons.

The second step in the process of securitization is the call to emergency action. Here, President Bush often stated that the U.S. would prefer if the issue was solved diplomatically. When reviewing only the Presidential discourse, it gives the impression that no extraordinary measures were suggested. However a few aspects need to be taken into account. First, when President Bush stated that the U.S. wished for the issue to be resolved diplomatically, The President meant that his administration aimed to force Iran to comply with U.S. and international demands or face further isolation. The U.S. ignored Iranian security concerns on several occasions and refused to eliminate the possibility of unilateral military action towards Iran even if Iran met the international demands on the Iranian nuclear program. Second, despite not calling for a specific set of

extraordinary measures, the President on several occasions stated that to meet the threat of the Iranian nuclear program, ‘all options were on the table’. By refusing to eliminate any option, even unilateral military action was still considered to be a legitimate response to the threat. In sum despite the U.S. not clearly suggesting an extraordinary measure to deal with the Iranian nuclear program it did so indirectly by stating that ‘all options were on the table’ and claimed a right to use whatever means deemed necessary to handle the issue.

The third and final step of the securitization process is audience acceptance and breaking free of existing rules. The extraordinary measure that the Bush administration used was not military action, but an international campaign that aimed at isolating Iran further while significantly increasing the economic pressure on Iran. In order to better enforce various sanctions, the Bush administration created an office in the U.S. treasury for this purpose. The campaign first sought to convince major foreign banks to cease doing business with Iran. Later the U.S. treasury also convinced not only banks but also international companies that dealing with Iranian banks or the Iranian government included significant risks due to the Iranian government’s links to terrorism and defiance of nuclear nonproliferation treaties among other things. In combination with various sanctions, this campaign caused several major international companies to terminate contracts with the Iranian government and increased the pressure and isolation that Iran faced.

#### *Desecuritization under President Obama*

Of Hansen’s four forms of desecuritization, *rearticulation* is the most positive form of desecuritization. *Rearticulation* aims not only to take a securitized issue back into being a politicized issue, but also fundamentally change the relationship between the securitizing actor and the functional actor to prevent future securitizations of issues. In the Presidential discourse this form of desecuritization can be identified in the Obama administration’s approach to the Iranian nuclear program. In contrast to many of his predecessors including President Bush, President Obama did not aim to contain Iran but instead strived for a diplomatic agreement where the P5+1 would offer Iran something in exchange for the Iranians to abandon their pursuit of a nuclear weapon. In addition to this, President Obama also saw the resolution of the Iranian nuclear program as an important step in changing U.S. – Iran relations that was characterized by mistrust and demonization of the other. In order for the desecuritization process to succeed however, President Obama also needed to respond to the securitization under President Bush.

In responding to the discourse of President Bush, President Obama aimed to change both the *referent object* under threat and the portrayal of Iran. In the change of the *referent object*, President Obama changed the focus on the Middle East region and Iran’s neighbors as the *referent object* under threat. In order to emphasize that the Iranian nuclear program was an issue of interest to not only the U.S. and its allies in the region, President Obama spoke of the Iranian nuclear program as something that was of interest to the international community. On the portrayal of Iran, President Obama did not describe Iran in the alarming way as President Bush. President Obama instead focused to talk about Iran as a country that had failed to meet its obligations to both the international community and its own people. Despite ‘toning down’ on the hostile description of Iran, President Obama did continue to note that the Iranian

nuclear program was only one of several issues in U.S. – Iran relations that the countries disagreed on. And while a diplomatic solution to said issue would be welcomed, it would not resolve all the other disagreements that the countries had with each other such as Iran's support to terrorism.

## 7. Conclusion & Discussion

For over 13 years the Iranian nuclear program was one of the most important issues in the Middle East for U.S. foreign policy. This study sought to understand the discourse of President Bush and President Obama using securitization theory and answering the research question:

*How did the process of securitization and desecuritization of the Iranian nuclear program take shape in the discourse of President Bush and President Obama?*

The analysis has shown that President Bush's securitization of the Iranian nuclear program focused on highlighting the threat of the Iranian nuclear program by vilifying Iran and claiming that the program threatened global security. While President Bush did state a preference to use diplomacy, it was used as a tool to put significant pressure on Iran without having a clear policy or will to actually find a diplomatic solution. By claiming to try diplomacy the Bush administration also claimed the right to use whatever means possible and with the incoherent diplomatic approach of the Bush administrations, diplomacy was unlikely to succeed.

President Obama's discourse of desecuritization focused to reinforce the notion that a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear program was not only possible but also the best alternative. At the same time, President Obama also highlighted the possibility of improved U.S. – Iran relations that would be of benefit to both countries. Besides presenting his own solutions to the problem, President Obama also had to address the discourse of President Bush and change the perceptions of Iran and the Iranian nuclear program. While President Obama state that the U.S. would use all options possible in preventing Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon, Obama also noted that before any other approach all diplomatic options would have to be exhausted.

Despite the President Bush and President Obamas significantly different approaches to the Iranian nuclear program, there are almost as many similarities as there are differences in their discourses. As President Bush sought to dramatize the risks of the Iranian nuclear program, President Obama was more restrained and empathized that the issue could be solved diplomatically. Despite the different tone in describing the Iranian threat, both Presidents stated that the top priority for the U.S. was to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon and all options were 'on the table'. While President Bush used dramatic language to describe the Iranian government, President Obama focused on the shortcomings of the government. Both Presidents did however highlight the illicit activities that the Iranian government was active in, such as support of terrorism and oppression of its own population. Both Presidents also stated their willingness to find a diplomatic solution where Iran could avoid further isolation over a military confrontation, but while President Bush rarely talked about why a diplomatic solution was significantly better than any military confrontation, President Obama often highlighted de superiority of a diplomatic solution over military action.

The central finding of this study is that despite the two significant differences between the president's approaches, there are several similarities in their discourse when it comes to the portrayal of Iran and the options suggested for resolving the Iranian nuclear program. Contrary to the common perception of President Bush and President Obama, The differences between the two President's discourse is not as large as one would imagine. There are several suggestions to how a continuation of this study would look like. First of all, one continuation would be to expand the theoretical framework to include the concept of audience and investigate how argument from the presidential discourse resonated with the audience. Another continuation of this study could look into how the discourses in support and opposition of the 2015 JCPOA took shape. Within the field of U.S. – Iran relations there is plenty of empirical material that can be used for further studies within a securitization framework, and with the election of Donald Trump as President of the U.S. there are plenty of indications that in the coming years, the U.S. will view plenty of issues as security problems that need extraordinary measures.

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