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## The U.S. Securitization and Desecuritization of Iran: An Analysis of the American Presidential Rhetoric on Post-Revolutionary Iran (1979-2021)

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### Abstract

This article examines the U.S. presidents' securitization and desecuritization of post-revolutionary Iran. Employing securitization theory as its theoretical framework and qualitative content analysis as its research method, it analyzes 104 paramount instances of U.S. presidential rhetoric including State of the Union addresses, speeches delivered during the United Nations General Assembly's General Debates, and National Security Strategy reports. The analysis shows how successive U.S. presidents have framed Iran as an existential threat across multiple security sectors—military, political, societal, economic, and emerging cybersecurity—to justify their extraordinary policies regarding the country. A key finding of the research is the distinction between U.S. presidents' securitization of the Iranian state and the Iranian nation, which first emerged during George W. Bush's first term. Moreover, the study identifies both continuity and change in U.S. securitization and desecuritization of Iran over the past four decades, conceptualizing them into two overarching frameworks: the Realist approach and the Constructivist approach. This research introduces the novel concept of Positive Securitization, or Desecuritizing Securitization, as a new addition to the theoretical framework of securitization theory, and highlights its application during the Obama administration. Positive securitization refers to the use of securitizing discourse to justify the desecuritization of dialogue and political engagement within a specific context. It does so by claiming that even extreme exceptional measures—military or economic—would prove inadequate in addressing a perceived threat, thereby presenting diplomacy as the only viable solution. The article offers a comprehensive exploration that provides a detailed understanding of U.S. presidential rhetoric and the gradual construction of Iran's image as a threat.

**Keywords:** Desecuritization, Iran, Presidential Rhetoric, Securitization Theory, United States

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past half a century, U.S.-Iran relations have been marked by animosity and crises, continuously reinforced and reproduced through hostile representation. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, a U.S. securitizing discourse has persistently framed Iran as an existential threat to American national interests, as well as those of its allies. As a result, Iran has been subjected to ongoing U.S. securitization, culminating in the implementation of exceptional policies and coercive measures. The consequences of this prolonged securitization have been both ideational and material. What began as a largely bilateral conflict, has evolved into a broader international posture against Iran, as securitizing rhetoric expanded the circle of adversarial actors—from the United States and Europe to a wider range of regional and global stakeholders. Simultaneously, the U.S. securitizing narrative has sought to diminish the symbolic appeal, influence, and prestige of Iran and its Islamic Revolution. Once regarded by some as a source of hope, inspiration, and resistance, Iran is now more frequently portrayed as a source of instability, terrorism, and threat—a shift that has intensified the discourse of Iranophobia and legitimized extraordinary anti-Iran policies on the global stage (Raji, 1391 [2013 A.D.]). A key question in securitization theory concerns who holds the authority to speak about security and to construct certain issues as national security threats (Buzan et al., 1998). In the context of the United States, presidents—by virtue of their pivotal federal role and institutional powers—possess the discursive capacity to shape foreign policy realities through language. They do so by constructing interpretations of international developments and influencing public understanding of global dynamics (Edwards, 2008; Hoyt, 2015). Moreover, the U.S. presidency is often enacted through discourse. As Hoyt (2015, p. 9) notes, “Presidential deeds

are done in words”, emphasizing the performative function of presidential rhetoric. For example, while presidents do not directly engage in military operations, they play a critical role in articulating the justification for war and in continuously reinforcing the perceived legitimacy and moral righteousness of the nation’s actions (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008).

Over the past four decades, U.S. presidential rhetoric has been instrumental in framing Iran as an urgent existential threat across the five security sectors identified by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies—namely, military, environmental, economic, societal, and political (Buzan et al., 1998)—as well as the emerging cybersecurity sector (Balzacq et al., 2016; Deibert, 2002; Denning, 2003; Hansen & Nissenbaum, 2009; Hundley & Anderson, 1995; Saco, 1999). Analyzing the patterns of securitization and occasional desecuritization within presidential discourse not only provides deeper insights into the enduring U.S.-Iran crisis, but also suggests potential discursive pathways for de-escalation and conflict management.

Employing *securitization theory* as its theoretical framework and *qualitative content analysis* (QCA) as its research method, this study analyzes 104 paramount cases of U.S. presidential rhetoric, i.e., State of the Union (SOTU) addresses, speeches delivered during the United Nations General Assembly's General Debates (UNGA GD), and National Security Strategy (NSS) reports across an extended period from 1979 to 2021 to provide a comprehensive understanding of U.S. presidential speech acts regarding post-revolutionary Iran.

This research attempts to answer the following questions by examining both the securitization and desecuritization of Iran within American presidential rhetoric:

### **Major Question:**

How have U.S. presidents securitized and desecuritized Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution?

### **Minor Questions:**

1. What are the elements of continuity and change in U.S. presidents' approaches to securitizing and desecuritizing post-revolutionary Iran?
2. How have U.S. presidents converged and diverged in their securitization and desecuritization of post-revolutionary Iran, particularly regarding the security domains they emphasized and the audiences they targeted?

## **2. Literature Review**

The U.S. securitization of post-revolutionary Iran has been the subject of many scholarly works. A major aspect explored in the literature is the securitization of Iran's nuclear program. Zarif and Afjehi (2023) assessed the Trump administration's *maximum pressure* campaign, concluding that Iran's countermeasures, through de-securitizing speech acts, reversed attempts to re-securitize its nuclear program. Beck (2018) argued that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) led to a reinforced threat image of Iran by emphasizing a *horror scenario* of nuclear escalation, while ignoring Israel's nuclear weapons.

Thomson (2014) and Rubaduka (2017) examined the U.S. securitization of Iran's nuclear program under George W. Bush and Barack Obama, noting that both presidents shared the priority of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons despite differences

in their rhetoric. Amin (2020) revealed ideological divides in American media portrayals of Iran's nuclear program, with anti-deal outlets emphasizing existential threats and pro-deal outlets seeking de-securitization. Analyzing declassified U.S. intelligence documents and media reports, Homayounvash (2012) argued that Iran's allegedly revisionist actions reinforced the U.S. securitization of Iran's nuclear program.

The U.S. securitization of post-revolutionary Iran in areas beyond its nuclear program has been investigated in various studies. Yuting and Yuanyuan (2023) noted that the American elite's discourse on Iran became heavily ideological after 9/11, while Hashemi et al. (1401 [2022 A.D.]) observed that the U.S. securitization of Iran has aimed at its representation as a threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of West Asian states. Similarly, Alikhani et al. (2022) pointed out U.S. concerns over Iran's potential for regional hegemony. Gheisari and Bagheri (1399 [2020 A.D.]) highlighted the U.S. framing of Iran's space program as a global security threat, with a focus on its missile capabilities.

Shewmake (2016), explored the differing U.S. responses to the activities of Iran and Hezbollah in the Middle East and Latin America, attributing differences to role ambiguity. Javan Shahraki (2013) attributed the U.S. securitization of Iran during the Iran-Iraq War to fears over oil access and Iran's determination to export its revolution. Semati and Rahnavard (1388 [2009 A.D.]), building on Vuori's research (2008), emphasized U.S. concerns about Iran's technological advancements and regional influence as drivers of its securitization.

Marandi and Halalkhor (2016) identified shifts in American securitization strategies toward Iran from low-securitization during

the Cold War, to hyper-securitization thereafter. Emphasizing sectarian and regional rivalries between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Mabon (2018a, 2018b) examined Saudi Arabia's influence on U.S. perceptions of Iran.

Several studies address the role of audiences in the U.S. securitization of post-revolutionary Iran. Bakhtiari et al. (2022) categorized audiences into general, elite, scientific, and technocratic groups, while Gheisari and Bagheri (1400 [2021 A.D.]) investigated the U.S. securitization of Iran during Trump's presidency as a *two-level strategy*. According to the authors, the first level aimed to represent Iran as a threat to regional stability to discredit its regional status in the eyes of Middle Eastern and European audiences. In the second level, the U.S. tried to obtain its allies' assent to implement countermeasures, including economic sanctions, to alter Iran's behavior and diminish its regional influence.

Barzegar and Bakhtiari (1400 [2021 A.D.]) analyzed U.S. media's role in shaping public opinion on Iran and hypothesized that, through policy-making and the provision of financial support, various U.S. administrations employed the media to gain the target audience's approval for imposing international sanctions on Iran.

Bagheri and Gheysari (2019) and Takhshid and Hatamzadeh (1397 [2018 A.D.]) explored the impact of U.S. securitization of Iran on European Union policies, emphasizing the U.S. and the EU alignment on sanctions. Cavusoglu (2020) highlighted how U.S. counterterrorism rhetoric blended Iran's threat with broader frames of *Islamic fundamentalist threat*. Coen (2017) examined U.S. Senate rhetoric, noting increased negativity toward Iran in the post-9/11 era.

Campion (2020) asserted that Chinese companies' alleged role in transferring sensitive technology to Iran and their violations of U.S. sanctions intensified the constructed threat image of China. This research provides new insights into how the securitization of Iran has the potential to impact U.S. securitization efforts against other rivals, particularly in the economic sector of security.

Comparative studies have offered additional insights into the securitization of Iran by the United States. Hayes (2009) contrasted U.S. responses to the nuclear programs of India and Iran, attributing differences to identity perceptions, with India's democratic image fostering desecuritization and Iran's authoritarian portrayal intensifying its threat perception. Adiong (2012) highlighted the American and Israeli strategies in shaping international consensus on Iran's nuclear threat, while Pour-Ahmadi and Mohseni (2012) linked the Obama administration's intensification of Iran's securitization to regional developments in 2011, focusing on human rights and terrorism narratives.

While the existing literature provides valuable insights, it shows notable gaps. Previous studies narrowly focus on the U.S. securitization of Iran without taking note of its possible desecuritization of Iran. This research fills that gap by analyzing both phenomena within American's presidential rhetoric. Furthermore, it distinguishes between the U.S. securitization of the Iranian state and its nation. Previous works predominantly emphasize the military sector, particularly Iran's nuclear program, neglecting other sectors. This study incorporates all five Copenhagen School security sectors—military, environmental, economic, societal, and political—and the emerging cybersecurity sector.

Furthermore, previous studies often lack systematic methodologies and rely on small datasets. By conducting a qualitative content analysis of 104 key documents from 1979 to 2021, this research offers a detailed examination of U.S. presidents' narratives on Iran. Finally, while U.S. presidents are key securitizing actors, their rhetoric on post-revolutionary Iran is not sufficiently explored. This article addresses this gap by offering insights into how presidential discourse has framed Iran within the American national security.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Securitization theory stands “at the intersection of three streams of IR theory namely realism, poststructuralism and constructivism” and their debate about “the extent to which threats primarily have a material or institutional quality” (Balzacq et al., 2015, p. 518). This theory originally emerged as a reaction to realist political theories of the Cold War era that assumed objective conditions as the basis for international relations. Securitization theory contrasts these realist theories by claiming that threats are constructed discursively in a subjective manner. Developing from Buzan's *People, States and Fear* (1983), securitization theory holds that actors are capable of influencing their surroundings through their discourse.

Securitization is a discursive process or a *speech act*, through which a securitizing actor, who is usually a political leader, governmental body, or pressure group, frames a domestic or international issue as an existential threat of supreme priority in order to justify the use of extraordinary measures in the form of secrecy, levying higher tax rates, restricting individual rights and liberties, or mobilizing national or international resources on a

specific task like war, to handle the threat (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). In other words, if a securitizing actor, “by means of an argument about the priority and urgency of an existential threat”, successfully manages “to break free of procedures or rules he or she would otherwise be bound by, we are witnessing a case of securitization” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 25).

Securitization is based on the premise that the existence and management of certain issues as security problems does not necessarily depend upon objective or purely material conditions; something acquires a security status as a result of an intersubjective process involving a securitizing actor and an audience (Balzacq & Guzzini, 2015, p. 99).

In this sense, “security has a particular discursive and political force and is a concept that does something – securitize” (Buzan & Hansen, 2009, p. 214). A key consequence of this notion is that “once established, securitization enables policymakers to immediately adopt whatever means they deem appropriate to curb the threat” (Balzacq & Guzzini, 2015, p. 99). According to securitization theorists, the transition from an ordinary phenomenon to a securitized threat is a product of discourse. In securitization theory, there is no objective relationship between the actual seriousness of a threat and its perception as a security issue. Escalation via securitization occurs through the separate and intentional choices of elite actors; therefore, securitization is not a product of material reality (Thoma, 2018).

According to Balzacq et al. (2016), securitization theory “is based on the premise that the word ‘security’ has a performative character – that is, it does not only describe the world but can also transform social reality” (Balzacq et al., 2016, p. 495). They list the

main concepts of securitization theory as: *the securitizing actor* (i.e., the agent who frames an issue as a threat through a securitizing move); *the referent subject* (i.e., the entity that is threatening); *the referent object* (i.e., the entity that is threatened); *the audience* (whose agreement is necessary to give an intersubjective status to the threat); *the context*; and *the adoption of distinctive policies*.

*Desecuritization* is another crucial concept of securitization theory. It describes the process by which an issue is moved away from the security sphere, where it is framed as an existential threat requiring extraordinary measures, and returned to the realm of normal political discussion. While securitization is the process through which political actors, such as states or influential leaders represent an issue as an existential threat that justifies the use of exceptional measures, desecuritization occurs when the issue is no longer considered a security threat and is reframed as a matter of normal politics (Buzan et al., 1998). Desecuritization is conceptualized as a reversal of the securitization process, wherein issues are shifted “out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining process of the political sphere” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 4). In desecuritization, political actors often try to persuade the public and other stakeholders that a previously securitized issue is no longer an existential threat (Wæver, 1995).

Securitization theory has played a key role in the development of critical approaches to security, and has added two major contributions in this area (Nyman, 2012). First, it has offered a *constructivist operational method* for understanding and studying how and when public issues transform into security issues. Second, securitization theory has sought to expand security beyond the traditional political and military sectors by introducing five sectors

of security: military, environmental, economic, societal, and political (Buzan et al., 1998).

This study adopts the core principles of securitization theory, diverging only on the distinction between *normal* and *exceptional* policies. Following Basaran (2010) and Balzacq (2011), this research considers securitizing actors as employing immediate, distinctive, and customized policies, whether exceptional or not, to address existential threats. The analysis also integrates the cyber sector, recognized by scholars such as Balzacq et al. (2016), Deibert (2002), Hansen and Nissenbaum (2009), Hundley and Anderson (1995), and Saco (1999), as the sixth security sector, to examine U.S. presidential rhetoric on post-revolutionary Iran.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4. 1. Method**

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) systematically describes and interprets the manifest and latent meanings of various types of material, both verbal and visual, that require some degree of interpretation. This may include materials generated by the researcher for his/her research or sampled from other existing sources, such as interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, speeches, diaries, websites, entries on social networking sites, television programs, and newspaper articles (Julien, 2008; Kuckartz, 2014; Mayring, 2000; Schram, 2014).

A majority of methodologists consider QCA as an umbrella term under which several variants have been gathered, ranging from basically descriptive analyses of manifest content followed by frequency counts to mainly interpretive analyses of latent content

(Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). However, according to Schreier (2012), every qualitative content analysis method has three important characteristics: it is *systematic*, it is *flexible*, and it *reduces* data.

Regardless of the material or the research question, qualitative content analysis always follows the same series of steps (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) which respectively are: determining the research question; choosing the material; developing a coding frame that typically includes several main categories or dimensions, each with its own subcategories; dividing the research material into units of coding; evaluating and modifying the coding frame through the process of double-coding; performing the main analysis by coding all the material using the revised version of the coding frame, and transforming the information to the case level; and finally, interpreting and presenting the findings (Schreier, 2012).

Sometimes even if the researcher has a clear research question, he/she may encounter a substantial amount of material to analyze, resulting in what is referred to as *getting lost in the data* (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The special advantage of QCA is that it helps researchers avoid this state of confusion. “Instead of trying to keep track of everything all at once and becoming confused in the process, the method forces you to select certain key aspects of your material and to focus on those” (Schreier, 2012, pp. 58–59). These aspects are the ones around which the researcher creates their coding frame. In the QCA literature, these aspects are named the *dimensions* or *main categories* of the coding frame. Usually, some of these categories or dimensions are already parts of the research question (Schreier, 2012).

A coding frame is a structure or a type of analytical filter, through which the researcher analyzes his/her research material. It

is composed of main categories or dimensions, which determine the relevant aspects of the material. Each main category, in turn, consists of a group of subcategories that specify the meaning of the research material based on the main categories. The coding frame should be designed in a way that it appropriately answers the research question (Chenail, 2008; Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019; Saldaña, 2011; Schreier, 2012).

Before testing the coding frame, the researcher should divide his/her material into smaller units, called *units of coding*. This process is known as *segmentation* (Kuckartz, 2014; Schreier, 2012). Segmenting the research material requires dividing it into units in a way that each segment/unit fits into one category of the coding frame (Schreier, 2012). The units of coding will subsequently be coded using the coding frame.

When segmenting research material into units of coding, the researcher can use one of the two types of criteria—either *formal* or *thematic*—to determine where one unit of coding ends and another begins. Formal criteria, such as chapters, paragraphs, or sentences, rely on the inherent structure of the material, making them particularly useful for segmenting material with a clear internal structure, such as newspaper articles. In contrast, thematic criteria involve identifying shifts in the topic, where each shift signals the transition from one unit of coding to the next (Kuckartz, 2014; Saldaña, 2011; Schreier, 2012).

After conducting a QCA, the researcher should interpret and present the findings. There are two basic approaches to presenting the results of a QCA research: 1. presenting the research results in a qualitative style, and 2. presenting the research findings in a quantitative style. For qualitative presentation, there are three

main strategies: using *continuous text*, employing *text matrices*, and performing *additional qualitative data exploration and analysis* (Kuckartz, 2014; Schreier, 2012).

When presenting research findings using a quantitative style, the researcher typically focuses on the categories in the coding frame rather than on the cases. There are three strategies for presenting results quantitatively: reporting *absolute frequencies*, performing *descriptive group comparisons*, and applying *inferential statistics* (Krippendorff, 2004; Ratcliff, 2008; Saldaña, 2011; Schreier, 2012; White & Marsh, 2006).

#### 4. 2. Sample

To examine the U.S. securitization and desecuritization of post-revolutionary Iran, this study focuses exclusively on U.S. presidential rhetoric securitization of Iran. This choice is grounded in the U.S. president's pivotal federal role and authority within the American political system, which includes responsibilities as chief executive, chief legislator, Commander-in-Chief, chief diplomat, primary agenda-setter, top crisis manager, and symbol of national leadership and unity. Through these roles, the president holds ultimate authority in shaping and executing U.S. foreign policy (McKay, 2021; Schubert et al., 2015).

From a substantial body of U.S. presidential rhetoric, this study specifically examines State of the Union (SOTU) addresses, annual speeches at the United Nations General Assembly's General Debates (UNGA GD), and National Security Strategy (NSS) reports. These sources were selected because they exhibit three key characteristics: (1) they receive extensive media coverage, (2) they aim to influence a broad range of domestic, regional, and

international audiences, and (3) they enable systematic analysis and comparison.

Table 1 summarizes the research sample according to each presidential term. It should be noted that this research includes only the relevant documents from the first year of Biden’s presidency.

**Table 1.** Summary of Research Sample by U.S. Presidential Term and Document Type (1979-2021)

Presidential Terms	NSS Report	SOTU Address	UNGA GD Speech	Total
Jimmy Carter’s Only Term	-	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	4 (100%)
Ronald Reagan’s First Term	-	4 (50%)	4 (50%)	8 (100%)
Ronald Reagan’s Second Term	2 (20%)	4 (40%)	4 (40%)	10 (100%)
George H. W. Bush’s Only Term	3 (27.27%)	4 (36.36%)	4 (36.36%)	11 (100%)
Bill Clinton’s First Term	3 (27.27%)	4 (36.36%)	4 (36.36%)	11 (100%)
Bill Clinton’s Second Term	4 (33.33%)	4 (33.33%)	4 (33.33%)	12 (100%)
George W. Bush’s First Term	1 (11.11%)	4 (44.44%)	4 (44.44%)	9 (100%)
George W. Bush’s Second Term	1 (11.11%)	4 (44.44%)	4 (44.44%)	9 (100%)
Barack Obama’s First Term	1 (11.11%)	4 (44.44%)	4 (44.44%)	9 (100%)
Barack Obama’s Second Term	1 (11.11%)	4 (44.44%)	4 (44.44%)	9 (100%)
Donald Trump’s Only Term	1 (11.11%)	4 (44.44%)	4 (44.44%)	9 (100%)
Joe Biden’s Only Term	1 (33.33%)	1 (33.33%)	1 (33.33%)	3 (100%)
Total	18 (17.30%)	43 (41.34%)	43 (41.34%)	104 (100%)

Source: Authors

### 4. 3. Coding Frame

The coding frame employed in this research is one with high complexity and a hierarchical structure, comprising three primary

dimensions (main categories) that extend across multiple coding levels. A combined approach was utilized to develop the coding frame, integrating both concept-driven and data-driven strategies. The main categories and their immediate subcategories, the first and second levels of the coding frame, are concept-driven (deductive), as they are based on concepts from securitization theory. In contrast, the rest of the subcategories are data-driven (inductive), derived through an examination of the research material.

The authors reviewed all cases within the research sample to build the data-driven (inductive) part of the coding frame, which generates the subcategories. This comprehensive examination was necessary because a key goal of the research is to trace the evolution of U.S. presidents' representations of Iran, particularly from a chronological perspective. Consequently, the presence or absence of each (sub)category in a given document or group of documents holds distinct analytical significance.

In this research, U.S. presidents' representations of Iran are organized into three primary codes (dimensions or main categories): 1) Securitization of Iran, 2) Desecuritization of the Iranian state, and 3) Desecuritization of the Iranian nation. These three dimensions encompass 852 codes assigned to 1,349 units of coding. Each main category contains six subcategories (subcodes), developed based on the concept of security sectors from securitization theory. These subcategories, in turn, include their own additional subcategories derived from the research material. Table 2 summarizes the number of codes within the main categories and their immediate subcategories.

**Table 2.** Code Distribution across Main and Second-Level Subcategories

Main Categories	SECURITIZATION OF IRAN						DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE						DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION					
Second-Level Subcategories	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	CYBER SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ECONOMIC DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	SOCIAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ENVIRONMENTAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	CYBER DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	ECONOMIC DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	SOCIAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	ENVIRONMENTAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	CYBER DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION
Number of Subcodes in Each Subcategory	254	217	102	67	2	3	37	115	12	10	1	1	1	13	1	14	1	1
Total	645						176						31					
	852																	

Source: Authors

The units of coding (the coded segments) in this research were determined using thematic criteria, meaning a change in topic served as the criterion for identifying the boundaries of each unit. Consequently, the coding units in this research vary in length, ranging from paragraphs and sentences to clauses or even a single word.

## 5. Results

Table 3 and Figure 1 present the frequency of U.S. presidents' representations of Iran across each presidential term from 1979 to 2021. The data indicate that Iran received the most attention in U.S. presidential rhetoric during Donald Trump's single term

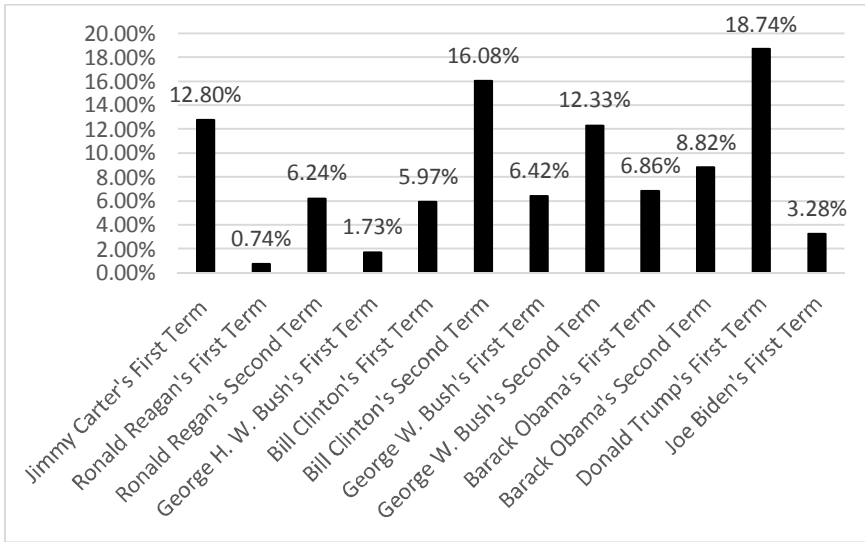
(accounting for 18.74% of all representations of Iran), followed by Bill Clinton's second term (16.08%) and Jimmy Carter's single term (12.80%). In contrast, Iran was given the least attention as a foreign policy issue during Ronald Reagan's first term (0.74% of all representations of Iran), George H. W. Bush's single term (1.73%), and Joe Biden's single term (3.28%). Additionally, the findings suggest that U.S. presidents who served two terms—namely, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama—tended to address Iran more prominently during their second terms.

**Table 3.** Representations of Iran across U.S. Presidential Terms (1979-2021)

Presidential Terms	Number of Documents	Representations of Iran	Standardized Frequency of Representations of Iran	Percentage of Representations of Iran	Rank
Jimmy Carter's Only Term	4	78	19.50	12.80%	3
Ronald Reagan's First Term	8	9	1.13	0.74%	12
Ronald Reagan's Second Term	10	95	9.50	6.24%	8
George H. W. Bush's Only Term	11	29	2.64	1.73%	11
Bill Clinton's First Term	11	100	9.09	5.97%	9
Bill Clinton's Second Term	12	294	24.50	16.08%	2
George W. Bush's First Term	9	88	9.78	6.42%	7
George W. Bush's Second Term	9	169	18.78	12.33%	4
Barack Obama's First Term	9	94	10.44	6.86%	6
Barack Obama's Second Term	9	121	13.44	8.82%	5
Donald Trump's Only Term	9	257	28.56	18.74%	1
Joe Biden's Only Term	3	15	5.00	3.28%	10
Total	104	1349	152.35	100%	

Source: Authors

**Figure 1.** Percentage Distribution of Representations of Iran by U.S. Presidential Term (1979-2021)



Source: Authors

### 5. 1. First-Level Codes: Securitization of Iran, Desecuritization of the Iranian State, and Desecuritization of the Iranian Nation

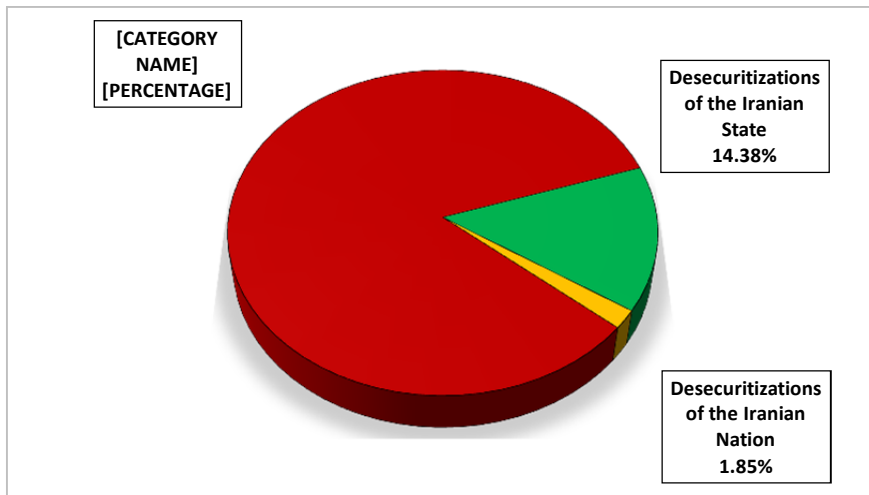
Table 4 and Figure 2 illustrate the overall percentages of the three main categories of the coding frame: 1) Securitization of Iran, 2) Desecuritization of the Iranian state, and 3) Desecuritization of the Iranian nation. The data indicate that 83.77% (1,130 instances) of U.S. presidential representations of Iran are securitizing, 14.38% (194 instances) aim to desecuritize the Iranian state (i.e., the Iranian government and its nation) and 1.85% (25 instances) focus on desecuritizing the Iranian nation. Overall, U.S. presidential representations of Iran from 1979 to 2021 are predominantly negative, portraying Iran overwhelmingly as a threat.

**Table 4.** Aggregate Overview of Iran’s Representation in U.S. Presidential Rhetoric (1979–2021)

	REPRESENTATIONS OF IRAN	SECURITIZATIONS OF IRAN	DESECURITIZATIONS OF THE IRANIAN STATE	DESECURITIZATIONS OF THE IRANIAN NATION
Frequency	1349	1130	194	25
Percentage	100%	83.77%	14.38%	1.85%

Source: Authors

**Figure 2.** Overview of Trends in U.S. Presidential Representation of Iran (1979–2021)



Source: Authors

Table 5 summarizes the three main categories of U.S. presidential representations of Iran—1) Securitization of Iran, 2) Desecuritization of the Iranian state, and 3) Desecuritization of the

Iranian nation—across each presidential term. The statistics in Table 5 reveal three significant findings.

First, they indicate that ‘Desecuritization of the Iranian nation’, as a distinct form of representing Iran, emerged during George W. Bush's first term and has periodically reappeared since then. Notably, prior to this period, U.S. presidents typically treated the Iranian government and nation as a unified entity, or a nation-state. However, beginning with George W. Bush’s first term, a conceptual distinction developed between Iran as a government and Iran as a nation, with U.S. presidents starting to view the Iranian nation as a separate political entity with perspectives on domestic and foreign issues that did not necessarily align with those of its government.

Second, the data in Table 5 confirm that Republican presidents who served two terms—namely Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush—employed more securitizing representations of Iran in their second terms, indicating a progressively harsher stance on Iran in their foreign policies during these latter terms.

Third, Table 5 shows that during George W. Bush’s second term (7.10% to 2.37%) and Donald Trump’s single term (2.72% to 1.56%), the percentage of ‘Desecuritization of the Iranian nation’ exceeds that of ‘Desecuritization of the Iranian state’. These two terms represent the only instances in which this pattern occurs.

**Table 5.** Securitization of Iran, Desecuritization of the Iranian State, and Desecuritization of the Iranian Nation across U.S. Presidential Terms (1979-2021)

Presidential Terms	Number of Documents	SECURITIZATION OF IRAN			DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE			DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION			Percentage Difference Between SECURITIZATION OF IRAN and DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	
		Frequency	Standardized Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Standardized Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Standardized Frequency	Percentage	Value	Rank
Jimmy Carter's Only Term	4	57	14.25	<b>73.08%</b>	21	5.25	<b>26.92%</b>	0	0	<b>0%</b>	<b>46.15%</b>	<b>11</b>
Ronald Reagan's First Term	8	7	0.88	<b>77.78%</b>	2	0.25	<b>22.22%</b>	0	0	<b>0%</b>	<b>55.56%</b>	<b>9</b>
Ronald Regan's Second Term	10	83	8.30	<b>87.37%</b>	12	1.20	<b>12.63%</b>	0	0	<b>0%</b>	<b>74.74%</b>	<b>6</b>
George H. W. Bush's Only Term	11	28	2.55	<b>96.55%</b>	1	0.09	<b>3.45%</b>	0	0	<b>0%</b>	<b>93.10%</b>	<b>2</b>
Bill Clinton's First Term	11	96	8.73	<b>96.00%</b>	4	0.36	<b>4.00%</b>	0	0	<b>0%</b>	<b>92.00%</b>	<b>3</b>
Bill Clinton's Second Term	12	249	20.75	<b>84.69%</b>	45	3.75	<b>15.31%</b>	0	0	<b>0%</b>	<b>69.39%</b>	<b>7</b>
George W. Bush's First Term	9	81	9.00	<b>92.05%</b>	6	0.67	<b>6.82%</b>	1	0.11	<b>1.14%</b>	<b>85.23%</b>	<b>5</b>
George W. Bush's Second Term	9	153	17.00	<b>90.53%</b>	4	0.44	<b>2.37%</b>	12	1.33	<b>7.10%</b>	<b>88.17%</b>	<b>4</b>
Barack Obama's First Term	9	70	7.78	<b>74.47%</b>	22	2.44	<b>23.40%</b>	2	0.22	<b>2.13%</b>	<b>51.06%</b>	<b>10</b>
Barack Obama's Second Term	9	48	5.33	<b>39.67%</b>	70	7.78	<b>57.85%</b>	3	0.33	<b>2.48%</b>	<b>-18.18%</b>	<b>12</b>
Donald Trump's Only Term	9	246	27.33	<b>95.72%</b>	4	0.44	<b>1.56%</b>	7	0.78	<b>2.72%</b>	<b>94.16%</b>	<b>1</b>
Joe Biden's Only Term	3	12	4.00	<b>80%</b>	3	1.00	<b>20%</b>	0	0	<b>0%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>8</b>
Total	104	1130	125.89		194	23.68		25.00	2.78			

Source: Authors

Calculating the percentage difference between U.S. presidents' 'Securitization of Iran' and their 'Desecuritization of the Iranian state' provides a reliable method for determining whether the overall function of U.S. presidential rhetoric on Iran is to portray it as an existential threat or as a normal member of the international community, with which engagement and even cooperation are possible. This approach also offers a quantitative basis for assessing and comparing the scale of securitizations and desecuritizations of Iran across different security sectors by each U.S. president.

The percentage difference between the values of 'Securitization of Iran' and 'Desecuritization of the Iranian state' in each

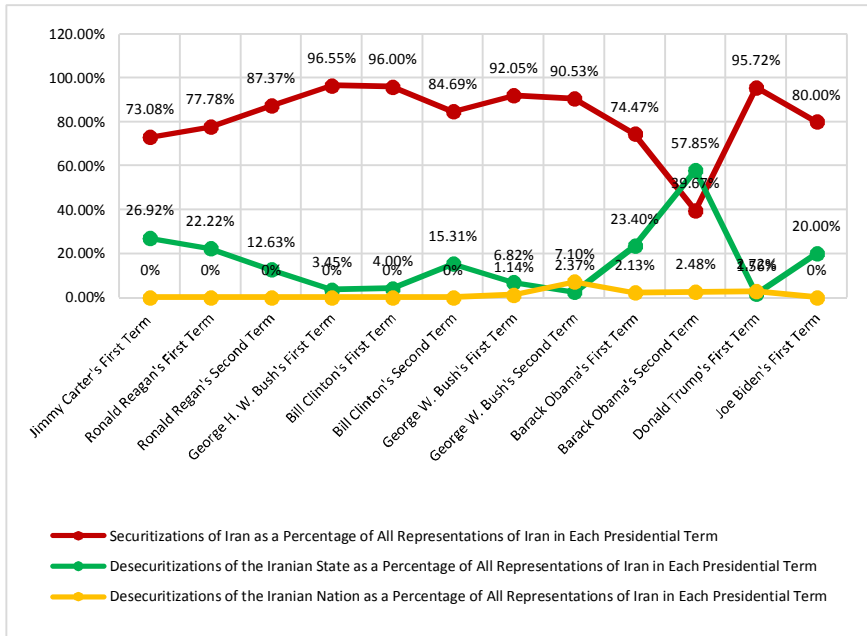
presidential term is presented in Table 5 (with rankings shown in Table 6 and Figure 3). The findings reveal that Donald Trump's single term (94.16%), George H. W. Bush's single term (93.10%), and Bill Clinton's first term (92.00%) constructed the most negative images of Iran, while Barack Obama's second term (-18.18%), Jimmy Carter's single Term (46.15%), and Barack Obama's first term (51.06%) presented the most favorable portrayals of Iran.

**Table 6.** Percentage Comparison of Securitization of Iran, Desecuritization of the Iranian State, and Desecuritization of the Iranian Nation across U.S. Presidential Terms (1979–2021)

Presidential Terms	SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	Percentage Difference Between SECURITIZATION OF IRAN and DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	The rank of Percentage Difference Between SECURITIZATION OF IRAN and DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE
Donald Trump's Only Term	95.72%	1.56%	2.72%	94.16%	1
George H. W. Bush's Only Term	96.55%	3.45%	0%	93.10%	2
Bill Clinton's First Term	96.00%	4.00%	0%	92.00%	3
George W. Bush's Second Term	90.53%	2.37%	7.10%	88.17%	4
George W. Bush's First Term	92.05%	6.82%	1.14%	85.23%	5
Ronald Reagan's Second Term	87.37%	12.63%	0%	74.74%	6
Bill Clinton's Second Term	84.69%	15.31%	0%	69.39%	7
Joe Biden's Only Term	80%	20%	0%	60%	8
Ronald Reagan's First Term	77.78%	22.22%	0%	55.56%	9
Barack Obama's First Term	74.47%	23.40%	2.13%	51.06%	10
Jimmy Carter's Only Term	73.08%	26.92%	0%	46.15%	11
Barack Obama's Second Term	39.67%	57.85%	2.48%	-18.18%	12

Source: Authors

**Figure 3.** Comparative Percentage Analysis of Securitization of Iran, Desecuritization of the Iranian State, and Desecuritization of the Iranian Nation across U.S. Presidential Terms (1979–2021)



Source: Authors

Notably, the Democratic presidents who served two terms—Bill Clinton and Barack Obama—adopted a more positive (desecuritizing) stance on Iran during their second terms. In contrast, the Republican presidents who served two terms—Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush—tended to present more negative (securitizing) portrayals of Iran during their second terms.

Another noteworthy observation from Table 6 is that Barack Obama's second term is the only presidential term in the examined period (1979 to 2021) in which the number of desecuritizations of Iran exceeded the number of securitizations, indicating that

Obama’s representation of Iran during his second term was predominantly desecuritizing.

### 5. 2. Second-Level Codes: Securitization of Iran, Desecuritization of the Iranian State, and Desecuritization of the Iranian Nation Across Various Sectors of Security

Table 7 presents the distribution of securitizing and desecuritizing codes across different security sectors from 1979 to 2021. The data indicate that U.S. presidential representations of Iran were most frequent in the military sector (43.29%), followed by the political (38.92%) and economic (11.64%) sectors. In contrast, the environmental (0.07%), cyber (0.15%), and societal (5.93%) sectors received minimal attention.

**Table 7.** Summary of Securitization and Desecuritization Codes across Security Sectors (1979–2021)

	Military Sector of Security			Political Sector of Security			Economic Sector of Security			Societal Sector of Security			Environmental Sector of Security			Cyber Sector of Security		
	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY DISECURITY OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DISECURITY OF THE IRANIAN NATION	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL DISECURITY OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DISECURITY OF THE IRANIAN NATION	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC DISECURITY OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ECONOMIC DISECURITY OF THE IRANIAN NATION	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL DISECURITY OF THE IRANIAN STATE	SOCIETAL DISECURITY OF THE IRANIAN NATION	ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENVIRONMENTAL DISECURITY OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ENVIRONMENTAL DISECURITY OF THE IRANIAN NATION	CYBER SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	CYBER DISECURITY OF THE IRANIAN STATE	CYBER DISECURITY OF THE IRANIAN NATION
Percentage of Each Code	40.47%	2.82%	0.00%	28.02%	10.16%	0.74%	10.75%	0.89%	0.00%	4.30%	0.52%	1.11%	0.07%	0.00%	0.00%	0.15%	0.00%	0.00%
Frequency of Each Sector	584			525			157			80			1			2		
Percentage of Each Sector	43.29%			38.92%			11.64%			5.93%			0.07%			0.15%		
Frequency of All Codes	1349																	

Source: Authors

The data in Table 7 also reveal that U.S. securitizing rhetoric primarily emphasized the codes ‘Military securitization of Iran’ (40.47%), followed by ‘Political securitization of Iran’ (28.02%), and ‘Economic securitization of Iran’ (10.75%). Conversely, the codes “Environmental securitization of Iran” (0.07%), ‘Cyber securitization of Iran’ (0.15%), and ‘Societal securitization of Iran’ (4.30%) were addressed the least.

Table 7 further illustrates that U.S. presidential Desecuritization of the Iranian state was concentrated on the codes ‘Political desecuritization of the Iranian state’ (10.16%), ‘Military desecuritization of the Iranian state’ (2.82%), and ‘Economic desecuritization of the Iranian state’ (0.89%). However, the codes ‘Cyber desecuritization of the Iranian state’, ‘Environmental desecuritization of the Iranian state’ and ‘Societal desecuritization of the Iranian state’ received minimal attention, with percentages of 0.00%, 0.00%, and 0.52%, respectively.

Moreover, the data indicate that U.S. presidential efforts to desecuritize the Iranian nation have been limited to two specific codes: “Societal desecuritization of the Iranian nation” (1.11% of all representations) and ‘Political desecuritization of the Iranian nation’ (0.74%). Notably, no desecuritization of the Iranian nation was observed in the Military, Economic, Environmental, or Cyber security sectors.

Table 8 provides a detailed summary of the securitization and desecuritization of Iran across various security sectors during each U.S. presidential term from 1979 to 2021. The data reveal that the codes ‘Military securitization of Iran’ and ‘Political securitization of Iran’ consistently occurred across all presidential terms. In contrast, ‘Economic securitization of Iran’ and ‘Societal securitization of Iran’ were observed in every term except President



Ronald Reagan's first and second terms, Bill Clinton's second term, George W. Bush's first and second terms, and Barack Obama's first and second terms. However, this code was absent during George H. W. Bush's single term, Bill Clinton's first term, Donald Trump's single term, and Joe Biden's single term.

Moreover, the data indicate that the codes 'Military desecuritization of the Iranian nation', 'Economic desecuritization of the Iranian nation', 'Environmental desecuritization of the Iranian nation' and 'Cyber desecuritization of the Iranian nation' were entirely absent across all presidential terms. However, the code 'Political desecuritization of the Iranian nation' appeared in three terms: George w. bush's first and second terms, and Donald Trump's single term. Similarly, the code 'Societal desecuritization of the Iranian nation' emerged in four terms: George W. Bush's second term and Barack Obama's two terms, along with Donald Trump's single term.

The data in Table 8 reveal that the code 'Environmental securitization of Iran' was exclusively employed during George W. Bush's second term, while 'Cyber securitization of Iran' was utilized solely in Donald Trump's single term. In contrast, 'Political desecuritization of the Iranian nation' was first introduced during George W. Bush's first term, and 'Societal desecuritization of the Iranian nation' was initiated during his second term.

## **6. Findings**

### **6. 1. Jimmy Carter's Presidency: Reactionary Securitization**

The data indicate that Carter's portrayal of Iran during his presidency emphasized its securitization in the military, political,

and economic security sectors, accounting for 28.21%, 23.08%, and 12.82% of all representations of Iran, respectively. Conversely, his desecuritization efforts primarily targeted the political, military, and economic sectors, with corresponding frequencies of 19.23%, 5.13%, and 1.28% (see Table 9).

**Table 9.** Securitization of Iran, Desecuritization of the Iranian State, and Desecuritization of the Iranian Nation across Security Sectors in U.S. Presidential Terms (1979-2021)

Presidential Terms	Military Sector of Security			Political Sector of Security			Economic Sector of Security			Societal Sector of Security			Environmental Sector of Security			Cyber Sector of Security		
	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ECONOMIC DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENVIRONMENTAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ENVIRONMENTAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	CYBER SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	CYBER DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	CYBER DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION
Jimmy Carter's Only Term	28.21%	5.13%	0%	23.08%	19.23%	0%	12.82%	1.28%	0%	8.97%	1.28%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Ronald Reagan's First Term	33.33%	22.22%	0%	22.22%	0%	0%	22.22%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Ronald Regan's Second Term	50.53%	8.42%	0%	13.68%	4.21%	0%	14.74%	0%	0%	8.42%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
George H. W. Bush's Only Term	55.17%	0%	0%	24.14%	3.45%	0%	13.79%	0%	0%	3.45%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Bill Clinton's First Term	65.00%	0%	0%	19.00%	4.00%	0%	11.00%	0%	0%	1.00%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Bill Clinton's Second Term	49.32%	0.34%	0%	19.05%	13.95%	0%	15.31%	0.68%	0%	1.02%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
George W. Bush's First Term	31.82%	6.82%	0%	45.45%	0%	1.14%	3.41%	0%	0%	11.36%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
George W. Bush's Second Term	27.81%	1.18%	0%	48.52%	0.59%	2.96%	7.10%	0.59%	0%	6.51%	0%	4.14%	0.59%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Barack Obama's First Term	47.87%	1.06%	0%	23.40%	15.96%	0%	2.13%	3.19%	0%	1.06%	3.19%	2.13%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Barack Obama's Second Term	27.27%	11.57%	0%	8.26%	42.98%	0%	3.31%	1.65%	0%	0.83%	1.65%	2.48%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Donald Trump's Only Term	32.30%	0%	0%	42.02%	0.39%	1.56%	14.79%	1.17%	0%	5.84%	0%	1.17%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.78%	0%
Joe Biden's Only Term	73.33%	0%	0%	6.67%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Authors

Carter's representations of Iran were shaped by two pivotal developments in Iran-U.S. relations: the 1979 Islamic Revolution with its yet undefined political alignment, and the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, resulting in the imprisonment of American diplomats. These representations reflect a Realist approach, treating Iran as a nation-state that poses military and economic security threats (see Table 10). While acknowledging these threats, Carter also identified opportunities for diplomatic resolutions, particularly focusing on efforts to secure the release of the U.S. diplomats held hostage in Tehran.

A key aspect of Carter's stance was his deliberate effort to avoid pushing Iran further toward the Soviet bloc. To this end, his securitization of Iran was cautious, limited to the minimum necessary to address immediate concerns without exacerbating tensions. This measured approach underscores Carter's recognition of the Cold War dynamics and his intent to mitigate the risk of Iran aligning with the Communist bloc.

Another notable characteristic of Carter's representations was his apparent lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the political leadership and decision-making processes in the newly established Islamic Republic. For instance, he mistakenly attributed significant authority to the Iranian parliament, believing it held decisive power in resolving the hostage crisis.

The analysis of the third-level subcodes in Table 10 reveals that Carter's securitization efforts targeted specific audiences, primarily U.S. political leaders, allied nations, and regional actors. However, his representations lacked structural clarity and coherence, reflecting a weak and reactionary securitization marked by both concerns and hopes for Iran's future political alignment amid the Cold War and the safety of American diplomats.

**Table 10.** Distribution of the Third-Level Subcodes and Their Frequencies Across Jimmy Carter’s Presidency

First-Level Codes	Second-Level Subcodes	Third-Level Subcodes	Frequency
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE PILLARS OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER	12
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE GLOBAL ENERGY MARKET	9
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	DESECURITIZING THE DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH IRAN	9
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POSING THREAT TO THE INTERNATIONAL OIL MARKET	8
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE CIVILIZATIONAL IDENTITY	6
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SPONSORING TERRORISM	5
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING GLOBAL PEACE AND SECURITY	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	DESTABILIZING THE REGIONS OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE FOR THE U.S.	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT IS A FAILED STATE	3
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. RESPECTS IRAN'S NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' NATIONAL INTERESTS	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	A MILITARILY STRONG IRAN IS NOT A THREAT	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. IS NOT SEEKING WAR WITH IRAN	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE SAFE PASSAGE IN THE INTERNATIONAL WATERS	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL LIBERTIES AND RIGHTS	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EMPLOYING POLITICAL TERRORISM	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSUING ANTI-AMERICAN POLICIES AND DESIRES	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE SAFE PASSAGE IN THE INTERNATIONAL WATERS	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE NATIONAL IDENTITY OF OTHER NATIONS	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. HOPES IRAN ASSUMES ITS INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. HOPES IRAN RESPECTS INTERNATIONAL LAW	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. SUPPORTS IRAN'S INDEPENDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WORLD	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ECONOMIC DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN HELPS THE ECO. SURVIVAL OF THE WEST AGAINST SOVIET THREAT	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. AND IRAN SHARE MANY COMMON IDENTITY FACTORS	1

Source: Authors

Carter’s representations and securitizations of Iran were also influenced by broader Cold War considerations, particularly the superpower rivalry with the Soviet Union. U.S. concerns over Soviet military threats to the Persian Gulf region and the potential disruption of oil flows further shaped Carter’s approach. Throughout his presidency, Carter was acutely aware of the risk of Iran tilting toward the USSR. Consequently, he sought to convey that the United States was not an enemy of Iran or its Islamic Revolution, emphasizing that the real threat to Iran was the Soviet Union.

In sum, Carter's securitization of Iran during his presidency was primarily reactionary, rooted in the transformative developments in Iran-U.S. relations. These included the anti-American revolution, the hostage crisis, and the shifting regional dynamics in the Persian Gulf, as Iran transitioned from being a key U.S. ally to a potential Soviet partner. Carter's cautious approach aimed to address immediate challenges, while navigating the complex geopolitical landscape of the Cold War.

## **6. 2. Ronald Reagan's First Term: Low-Intensity Geopolitical Securitization**

The data in Table 9 indicate that during Reagan's first term, the securitization of Iran was concentrated in the military (33.33%), political (22.22%), and economic (22.22%) security sectors. Desecuritization efforts, however, were solely focused on the military sector, accounting for 22.22% of all references to Iran. Notably, Reagan's military desecuritization percentage is the highest across all reviewed presidential terms, while his economic securitization during this period also marks a high record. Additionally, apart from Biden's single term, Reagan's first term is unique in excluding any securitization of Iran within the societal sector.

Table 11 reveals that Reagan's low-intensity securitization of Iran during his first term was primarily geopolitical, focusing on Iran's perceived threats in the military and economic sectors. This subdued approach can be attributed to two key factors: Iran's role in Reagan's election and its non-alignment with the Soviet Union.

**Table 11.** Distribution of the Third-Level Subcodes and Their Frequencies Across Ronald Reagan's First Term

First-Level Codes	Second-Level Subcodes	Third-Level Subcodes	Frequency
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SPONSORING TERRORISM	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	DESTABILIZING THE REGIONS OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE FOR THE US	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' SECURITY AND PHYSICAL EXISTENCE	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL LIBERTIES AND RIGHTS	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE PILLARS OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF THE WORLD	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF THE IRANIAN NATION	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN SUPPORTS THE DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO END ITS WAR WITH IRAQ	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. SUPPORTS THE POLITICAL AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF IRAN	1

Source: Authors

Iran's decision to delay the release of American diplomats until the conclusion of the U.S. presidential election significantly influenced Reagan's posture toward Iran. The resolution of the so-called hostage crisis not only damaged Carter's reelection prospects, but it also bolstered Reagan's odds of ascending to the presidency. This dynamic likely tempered Reagan's rhetoric and securitization of Iran during his first term, leading him to adopt a restrained approach that avoided immediate escalation or overemphasis on Iran's activities as a major security concern.

### 6. 3. Ronald Reagan's Second Term: Intensified Geopolitical securitization

The data in Table 9 indicate that during Reagan's second term, the securitization of Iran was primarily focused on the military (50.53%), economic (14.74%), and political (13.68%) security sectors. In contrast, desecuritization efforts targeted the military

(8.42%) and economic (4.21%) sectors. These percentages reflect Reagan's emphasis on military securitization, while showing limited attempts at desecuritization within the same sectors.

Tables 9 and 12 indicate that Reagan's second-term securitization of Iran was marked by high-intensity geopolitical concerns, focusing on Iran's perceived threats in the military and economic sectors of security.

**Table 12.** Distribution of the Third-Level Subcodes and Their Frequencies Across Ronald Reagan's Second Term

First-Level Codes	Second-Level Subcodes	Third-Level Subcodes	Frequency
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' SECURITY AND PHYSICAL EXISTENCE	13
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE SAFE PASSAGE IN THE INTERNATIONAL WATERS	8
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE SAFE PASSAGE IN THE INTERNATIONAL WATERS	8
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SPONSORING TERRORISM	7
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE CIVILIZATIONAL IDENTITY	7
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' NATIONAL INTERESTS	6
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	DESTABILIZING THE REGIONS OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE FOR THE U.S.	5
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ADVANCING WARMONGER POLICIES	5
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE PILLARS OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER	5
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EMPLOYING POLITICAL TERRORISM	5
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN SUPPORTS THE DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO END ITS WAR WITH IRAQ	5
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POSING THREAT TO THE INTERNATIONAL OIL MARKET	4
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE GLOBAL ENERGY MARKET	4
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	DESECURITIZING THE DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH IRAN	4
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSUING ANTI-AMERICAN POLICIES AND DESIRES	3
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN HELPS SAFEGUARD PEACE IN THE PERSIAN GULF	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF THE WORLD	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING OTHER STATES' ECONOMIES	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF OTHERS	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. IS NOT SEEKING WAR WITH IRAN	1

Source: Authors

During his second term, Reagan identified Iran as a significant threat to the economic stability of the Western world, which was engaged in a global competition with the Communist Bloc. He

emphasized Iran's role in endangering the safe passage of international waters, posing threats to the global oil market, and destabilizing the regional balance of power in the Persian Gulf—an area of strategic importance to the United States (see Table 12).

Despite this high-intensity securitization, Reagan left room for diplomatic engagement with Iran. He sought to desecuritize diplomatic interactions by declaring that the U.S. was not seeking war with Iran and emphasizing Iran's role in safeguarding peace in the Persian Gulf. This nuanced approach reflected Reagan's effort to balance a firm stance against perceived threats with the need to maintain dialogue for regional stability (see Table 12).

#### **6. 4. George H. W. Bush's Presidency: A Structured Continuation of Geopolitical Securitization**

The data in Table 9 reveal that during George H. W. Bush's presidency, the securitization of Iran was concentrated in the military (55.17%), political (24.14%), and economic (13.79%) security sectors. In contrast, desecuritization efforts were limited to the political security sector, accounting for only 3.45% of all references to Iran.

Tables 9 and 13 demonstrate the consistent continuation of Reagan's geopolitical securitization of Iran during George H. W. Bush's presidency. In the aftermath of the Gulf War and the liberation of Kuwait by a U.S.-led coalition, the U.S. foreign policy agenda in the Middle East primarily shifted its focus to Iraq. However, Bush maintained a stable and well-defined geopolitical securitization of Iran, particularly in the military and economic sectors, although these securitizations were primarily confined to his National Security Strategy report.

**Table 13.** Distribution of the Third-Level Subcodes and Their Frequencies Across George H. W. Bush's Single Term

First-Level Codes	Second-Level Subcodes	Third-Level Subcodes	Frequency
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' SECURITY AND PHYSICAL EXISTENCE	7
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EMPLOYING POLITICAL TERRORISM	6
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE GLOBAL ENERGY MARKET	4
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POSING THREAT TO THE INTERNATIONAL OIL MARKET	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S CONVENTIONAL MILITARY CAPABILITIES ARE THREATENING	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SPONSORING TERRORISM	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	DESTABILIZING THE REGIONS OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE FOR THE U.S.	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' NATIONAL INTERESTS	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE PILLARS OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE CIVILIZATIONAL IDENTITY	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	DESECURITIZING THE DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH IRAN	1

Source: Authors

Table 13 indicates that Bush portrayed Iran as a state that endangered the security and physical existence of other nations, while posing significant threats to the global energy market. He also emphasized Iran's growing conventional military capabilities as a critical concern.

Despite these securitizations, Bush's representations of Iran included room for de-escalation and dialogue. He publicly stated that the U.S. remained open to the possibility of improved relations with Iran, signaling a willingness to engage diplomatically (see Table 13).

### 6. 5. Bill Clinton's First Term: The Inception of Iran's Securitization as an Intentionally Designed Project

The data in Table 9 indicate that during Clinton's first term, the

securitization of Iran was primarily concentrated in the military (65.00%), political (19.00%), and economic (11.00%) security sectors. In contrast, desecuritization efforts were limited to the political security sector, accounting for 4.00% of all references to Iran. Notably, Clinton’s military securitization of Iran ranks as the second highest among all reviewed presidential terms, surpassed only by Biden’s single-term presidency.

Bill Clinton's first term marked the initiation of a deliberately structured project to securitize Iran, supported by the U.S.’s enhanced understanding of the inner workings of Iran’s political system. This securitization effort spanned the military, political, and economic sectors, presenting Iran as a multidimensional threat to U.S. interests and global stability (see Table 14).

**Table 14.** Distribution of the Third-Level Subcodes and Their Frequencies Across Bill Clinton’s First Term

First-Level Codes	Second-Level Subcodes	Third-Level Subcodes	Frequency
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' SECURITY AND PHYSICAL EXISTENCE	21
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	DESTABILIZING THE REGIONS OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE FOR THE U.S.	13
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POSING THREAT TO THE INTERNATIONAL OIL MARKET	9
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE GLOBAL ENERGY MARKET	9
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EMPLOYING POLITICAL TERRORISM	8
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S CONVENTIONAL MILITARY CAPABILITIES ARE THREATENING	6
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSuing WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION	6
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS	6
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' NATIONAL INTERESTS	5
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SPONSORING TERRORISM	4
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	DESECURITIZING THE DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH IRAN	4
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL LIBERTIES AND RIGHTS	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE PILLARS OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ADVANCING WARMONGER POLICIES	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT IS CORRUPTED	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN LEADERS LACK ECONOMIC INSIGHT	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE CIVILIZATIONAL IDENTITY	1

Source: Authors

During his first term, Clinton portrayed Iran as a military threat to the security and physical existence of other states, particularly in regions of strategic importance to the United States. Iran was depicted as a growing danger due to its conventional military capabilities, its alleged sponsorship of terrorism, and, for the first time, its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

Clinton's political securitization of Iran framed the Iranian government as a threat to the Middle East peace process and as an oppressor of individual liberties and rights within the Iranian nation. This narrative emphasized the Iranian government's role in undermining regional stability, while drawing attention to its domestic human rights violations.

In the economic sector, Iran was represented as a destabilizing force in the global energy market. The Iranian government was accused of corruption and criticized for its leadership's lack of economic insight, further bolstering its depiction as a threat to international economic security.

Clinton's securitization of Iran during his first term—and the approach that continued thereafter—was notable for its structured, intentional design and multi-sectoral scope. However, he left room for diplomatic engagement by desecuritizing the potential for dialogue and expressing a willingness to engage in discussions to address and resolve differences between the two nations.

#### **6. 6. Bill Clinton's Second Term: Elite-Focused Securitization of Iran**

The data in Table 9 indicate that during Clinton's second term, the securitization of Iran primarily targeted the military (49.32%), political (19.05%), and economic (15.31%) sectors. Conversely,

desecuritization efforts were directed at the political (13.95%), economic (0.68%), and military (0.34%) sectors. Notably, Clinton's framing of Iran as a threat in the economic sector ranks the second highest among all reviewed presidential terms, following Reagan's first term.

Clinton's second term coincided with the tenure of Iranian reformist President Khatami, fostering initial U.S. optimism for potential shifts in Iran's policies and improved bilateral relations. Clinton's representations of Iran during this period were confined to his National Security Strategy (NSS) reports, as he refrained from securitizing Iran in public addresses such as the State of the Union (SOTU) and the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) debates. This approach underscores Clinton's apparent reluctance to bring his securitizing discourse on Iran into the public domain, focusing primarily on influencing elite decision-makers within the United States.

Despite this restraint in public rhetoric, Table 15 demonstrates that Clinton continued to securitize Iran across military, political, and economic sectors. Militarily, he portrayed Iran as a persistent threat, emphasizing its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, its destabilizing conventional military capabilities, and its desire to endanger the security and physical existence of other states. Furthermore, he accused Iran of threatening the international oil market, destabilizing regions critical to U.S. strategic interests, and sponsoring terrorism. In the political sector, Clinton alleged that Iran utilized terrorism to achieve political objectives, endangered individual liberties and rights, undermined the liberal international order, jeopardized the Middle East peace process, and exhibited characteristics of a failed state. Economically, he described Iran as a threat to the global energy market, a destabilizing force for the

global economy, and a danger to other states' economic security and transportation systems.

**Table 15.** Distribution of the Third-Level Subcodes and Their Frequencies Across Bill Clinton's Second Term

First-Level Codes	Second-Level Subcodes	Third-Level Subcodes	Frequency
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POSING THREAT TO THE INTERNATIONAL OIL MARKET	39
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE GLOBAL ENERGY MARKET	39
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSuing WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION	31
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S CONVENTIONAL MILITARY CAPABILITIES ARE THREATENING	30
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	DESECURITIZING THE DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH IRAN	24
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' SECURITY AND PHYSICAL EXISTENCE	19
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EMPLOYING POLITICAL TERRORISM	16
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	DESTABILIZING THE REGIONS OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE FOR THE U.S.	12
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL LIBERTIES AND RIGHTS	12
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE PILLARS OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER	11
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS	11
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' NATIONAL INTERESTS	9
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THERE ARE SIGNS OF POSITIVE CHANGE IN IRAN'S POLICIES	8
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SPONSORING TERRORISM	5
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT IS A FAILED STATE	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF OTHERS	3
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. SUPPORTS IRAN'S INDEPENDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WORLD	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSuing ANTI-AMERICAN POLICIES AND DESIRES	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE GLOBAL ECONOMY	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING OTHER STATES' ECONOMIES	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN SUPPORTS DIPLOM. EFFORTS TO PROMOTE GLOBAL PEACE&STABILITY	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ECONOMIC DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. HAS ALLOWED IRAN TO EXPORT GOODS TO THE UNITED STATES	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN IS EXPANDING ITS HARMFUL INFLUENCE	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	OPPOSING TERRORISM	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN OPPOSES TERRORISM	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN'S RECORD IN THE WAR AGAINST DRUGS HAS GREATLY IMPROVED	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN IS TRYING TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH ITS P. GULF NEIGHBORS	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN PROTECTS THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN'S TREATMENT OF REFUGEES/MIGRANTS IS ADMIRABLE	1

Source: Authors

Simultaneously, Clinton engaged in significant desecuritization efforts, recognizing areas of potential progress in Iran's policies. Politically, he desecuritized probable diplomatic engagement with Iran as a constructive development, and noted signs of positive change in its policies. He acknowledged U.S. support for Iran's independent global engagements and cited Iran's efforts to improve relations with its Persian Gulf neighbors, promote human rights, and contribute to global peace and stability. Clinton also praised Iran's record in the fight against drug trafficking. Militarily, Clinton desecuritized Iran by recognizing its opposition to terrorism, while in the societal sector, he commended its treatment of refugees and migrants. Economically, Clinton emphasized the easing of restrictions on Iranian goods entering the United States as an indication of improved relations.

Through this dual strategy of securitization and desecuritization, Clinton navigated the complex landscape of U.S.-Iran relations during a period of reformist leadership in Iran, balancing concerns about persistent threats with cautious acknowledgment of potential avenues for engagement.

### **6. 7. George W. Bush's First Term: Demonizing Securitization**

The data indicate that during George W. Bush's first term, his representations of Iran predominantly emphasized the securitization of the Iranian government, focusing on the political, military, and societal sectors, which accounted for 45.45%, 31.82%, and 11.36% of these representations, respectively. In contrast, his desecuritization of the Iranian government was confined to the military security sector, constituting 6.82% of all representations of Iran. Notably, Bush's societal securitization of the Iranian

government represented the highest proportion among all reviewed presidential terms. Additionally, his political securitization of the Iranian government during this period ranked second among all terms analyzed, surpassed only by his own second term. Regarding the Iranian nation, Bush's desecuritization efforts were primarily directed toward the political security sector, accounting for 1.14% of all his representations of Iran (see Table 9).

George W. Bush's first term marked a significant shift in U.S. presidential representations of Iran. For the first time, a U.S. president explicitly differentiated between the Iranian government and the Iranian nation, recognizing them as distinct entities with potentially divergent ideals and values. This distinction represented a theoretical departure from the Realist approach, which had traditionally treated the Iranian government and its people as a unified nation-state. Consequently, this shift required the authors to adapt their analysis of U.S. presidents' securitization and desecuritization strategies by distinguishing between representations of the Iranian government and those of its nation.

While Bush continued to securitize the Iranian government in the political and military sectors, notably emphasizing the perceived military threat of Iran's nuclear program, it was his societal securitization of Iran that defined his first term. He characterized Iran as a *rogue state* and a member of an *axis of evil*, alleging that its so-called ideology of radicalism and murder provided a recruitment base for terrorism aimed at threatening the civilizational identity of the West and the national identity of the United States (see Table 16). This societal securitization, the most intense among all reviewed presidential terms, sought to portray the Iranian government as fundamentally opposed to the identity and values of the West, and particularly those of the United States.

**Table 16.** Distribution of the Third-Level Subcodes and Their Frequencies Across George W. Bush's First Term

First-Level Codes	Second-Level Subcodes	Third-Level Subcodes	Frequency
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL LIBERTIES AND RIGHTS	20
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSuing WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION	18
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE PILLARS OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER	10
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EMPLOYING POLITICAL TERRORISM	7
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE CIVILIZATIONAL IDENTITY	7
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN HAS BEEN A VICTIM OF IRAQ'S MILITARY AGGRESSION	5
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' SECURITY AND PHYSICAL EXISTENCE	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S CONVENTIONAL MILITARY CAPABILITIES ARE THREATENING	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING GLOBAL PEACE AND SECURITY	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ADVANCING WARMONGER POLICIES	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSuing ANTI-AMERICAN POLICIES AND DESIRES	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF THE IRANIAN NATION	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE NATIONAL IDENTITY OF OTHER NATIONS	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SPONSORING TERRORISM	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT IS A FAILED STATE	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT IS CORRUPTED	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EMPLOYING TERRORISM TO THREATEN THE IDENTITY OF OTHERS	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	OPPOSING TERRORISM	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	THE U.S. AND THE IRANIAN NATION CHERISH THE SAME POLITICAL VALUES	1

Source: Authors

Bush's demonizing portrayal of Iran left little room for dialogue or engagement, as his rhetoric depicted Iran as not only adversarial, but also evil and fundamentally different from the U.S. Unlike his predecessors, who maintained some degree of desecuritization across multiple sectors of security, Bush's desecuritization efforts were minimal and confined to the military sector. This limited approach marked a stark departure from the precedent of leaving space for potential dialogue and engagement with Iran.

### **6. 8. George W. Bush's Second Term: Simultaneous Securitization of the Iranian Government and Desecuritization of the Iranian Nation**

The data in Table 9 indicate that during George W. Bush's second term, his representations of Iran emphasized the securitization of the Iranian government in the political, military, and economic sectors, accounting for 48.52%, 27.81%, and 7.10% of all representations of Iran, respectively. Notably, Bush's second term, along with Trump's single term, represent the periods during which the Iranian government was securitized across the largest number of security sectors—five out of six. Furthermore, Bush became the first and only U.S. president to employ environmental securitization of the Iranian government, which accounted for 0.59% of all his representations of Iran. His political securitization of the Iranian government during this term was the highest among all the reviewed presidential terms.

Regarding desecuritization, Bush's efforts toward the Iranian government during his second term focused on the military, political, and economic security sectors, accounting for 1.18%, 0.59%, and 0.59% of all his representations of Iran respectively. In contrast, his desecuritization of the Iranian nation included the political sector at 2.96%, and extended to the societal sector at 4.14%. Notably, Bush's societal desecuritization of the Iranian nation during this term was the highest among all the examined presidential terms.

The distinction between Iran's government and its nation, along with the simultaneous securitization of the Iranian government and desecuritization of the Iranian nation, persisted into George W. Bush's second term and reached new heights. This was particularly evident in the significant desecuritization of the Iranian nation in the societal sector, complementing earlier desecuritization in the political sector (see Table 17).

**Table 17.** Distribution of the Third-Level Subcodes and Their Frequencies Across George W. Bush’s Second Term

First-Level Codes	Second-Level Subcodes	Third-Level Subcodes	Frequency
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE PILLARS OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER	27
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL LIBERTIES AND RIGHTS	21
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EMPLOYING POLITICAL TERRORISM	20
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SPONSORING TERRORISM	15
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM IS THREATENING	11
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSUING WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION	11
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRANS' GOVERNMENT FEEDS ITS PEOPLE LIES&FALSE PROPAGANDA	8
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE CIVILIZATIONAL IDENTITY	6
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' SECURITY AND PHYSICAL EXISTENCE	4
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	FUNDING TERRORISM	4
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF OTHERS	4
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' NATIONAL INTERESTS	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	WASTING THE IRANIAN NATION'S WEALTH TO PURSUE VICIOUS POLICIES	3
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	THE U.S. AND THE IRANIAN NATION CHERISH THE SAME POLITICAL VALUES	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S CONVENTIONAL MILITARY CAPABILITIES ARE THREATENING	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT IS A FAILED STATE	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF THE IRANIAN NATION	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	THE U.S. RESPECTS THE IRANIAN PEOPLE AND THEIR COUNTRY	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	THE U.S. ADMIRES THE IRANIAN NATION'S RICH HISTORY, CULTURE, AND CIVILIZATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ADVANCING WARMONGER POLICIES	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS ARE DAMAGING	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSUING ANTI-AMERICAN POLICIES AND DESIRES	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT IS CORRUPTED	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN LEADERS LACK ECONOMIC INSIGHT	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING OTHER STATES' ECONOMIES	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EMPLOYING TERRORISM TO THREATEN THE IDENTITY OF OTHERS	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM IS A THREAT TO CIVILIZATION	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. IS NOT SEEKING WAR WITH IRAN	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN HAS BEEN A VICTIM OF IRAQ'S MILITARY AGGRESSION	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. RESPECTS IRAN'S PEACEFUL NUCLEAR RIGHTS	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ECONOMIC DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. RESPECTS IRAN'S RIGHT TO ACCESS PEACEFUL NUCLEAR POWER	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	THE U.S. STRATEGY IS TO EXPAND ITS ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH TO THE IRANIAN NATION	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	IRANIAN NATION DOES NOT SUPPORT ITS GOVERNMENT'S MALICIOUS POLICIES	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	THE WORLD BELIEVES IN THE GOODNESS OF THE IRANIAN PEOPLE	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	THE IRANIAN PEOPLE'S ASPIRATIONS AND INTERESTS ARE LEGITIMATE	1

Source: Authors

In the political sector, Bush desecuritized the Iranian nation by asserting that the Iranian people did not support their government's harmful policies. He claimed that the U.S. and the Iranian nation shared common political values and emphasized a U.S. strategy focused on expanding engagement and outreach to the Iranian people.

In the societal sector, Bush further desecuritized the Iranian nation by expressing respect and admiration for its people and culture. He highlighted the global recognition of the Iranian people's goodness, and praised their rich history, cultural heritage, and civilizational contributions. Additionally, he acknowledged the legitimacy of the Iranian people's aspirations and interests, emphasizing their shared universal desires.

These desecuritization efforts were, however, accompanied by an intensified securitization of the Iranian government. In the military sector, Bush accused the Iranian government of sponsoring terrorism, pursuing weapons of mass destruction, and heavily securitized its nuclear program. He characterized Iran as a threat to other states' security and national interests, citing its conventional military capabilities as destabilizing and threatening.

In the political sector, Bush represented the Iranian government as a danger to the pillars of the liberal international order, a violator of individual liberties and rights, and an employer of terrorism for political gain. He accused the Iranian government of spreading lies and propaganda, jeopardizing the Middle East peace process, and conducting nuclear negotiations in bad faith. He further argued that Iran actively pursued anti-American policies and ambitions.

In the societal sector, Bush securitized the Iranian government by portraying it as a threat to the civilizational identity of the free

world. He claimed that Iran endangered the religious identity and freedoms of minority groups within the country by employing violence and repression against them.

Through this dual strategy of desecuritizing the Iranian nation and intensifying the securitization of the Iranian government, Bush sought to draw a clear distinction between the Iranian people and their rulers, positioning the U.S. as an ally of the Iranian nation, while firmly opposing its government.

### **6. 9. Barack Obama's First Term: A Carrot-and-Stick Strategy for Securitization and Desecuritization**

The data in Table 9 indicate that during Obama's first term, his representations of Iran focused on securitizing the Iranian government in the military, political, and economic sectors, accounting for 47.87%, 23.40%, and 2.13% of all representations of Iran, respectively. In contrast, his desecuritization of the Iranian government targeted the political, societal, and economic security sectors, comprising 15.96%, 3.19%, and 3.19% of all representations of Iran.

Notably, Obama's economic securitization of the Iranian government was the second lowest among all presidential terms, surpassed only by Biden's single-term presidency. His political desecuritization of the Iranian government was the second highest across the reviewed terms, following his second term. Furthermore, Obama's societal and economic desecuritizations of the Iranian government during his first term were the highest among all the terms analyzed. Regarding the Iranian nation, Obama's desecuritization efforts during his first term focused on the societal sector, accounting for 2.13% of all representations of Iran.

During Barack Obama’s first term, the securitization of the Iranian government and the desecuritization of its nation— a pattern established during George W. Bush’s first term—persisted. However, the defining feature of Obama’s representations of Iran was the introduction of securitization-desecuritization pairs targeting the Iranian government. This dual strategy implied potential rewards alongside definite punishments, presenting Iran with sharply contrasting choices and emphasizing both consequences and opportunities.

As outlined in Table 18, these securitization-desecuritization pairs reflected a ‘carrot-and-stick’ policy aimed at influencing Iran’s behavior. For instance, Obama securitized Iran’s nuclear program, portraying it as a significant threat and accusing Iran of pursuing weapons of mass destruction. Simultaneously, he desecuritized aspects of the same issue, stating that Iran’s nuclear program did not constitute an urgent threat, emphasizing the U.S.’s respect for Iran’s peaceful nuclear rights, and acknowledging Iran’s legitimate access to peaceful nuclear power.

**Table 18.** Distribution of the Third-Level Subcodes and Their Frequencies across Barack Obama’s First Term

First-Level Codes	Second-Level Subcodes	Third-Level Subcodes	Frequency
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM IS THREATENING	25
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE PILLARS OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER	13
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSUING WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION	11
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL LIBERTIES AND RIGHTS	5
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' SECURITY AND PHYSICAL EXISTENCE	4
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. RESPECTS IRAN'S PEACEFUL NUCLEAR RIGHTS	4
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. SUPPORTS IRAN'S INDEPENDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WORLD	4
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EMPLOYING POLITICAL TERRORISM	3

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DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN'S NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS CAN BE CONSTRUCTIVE	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SPONSORING TERRORISM	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	DESTABILIZING THE REGIONS OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE FOR THE U.S.	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	DESECURITIZING THE DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH IRAN	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. HOPES IRAN ASSUMES ITS INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ECONOMIC DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN'S ECONOMIC INTEGRATION WITH INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS POSSIBLE	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN IS A MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' NATIONAL INTERESTS	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE GLOBAL ECONOMY	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF THE IRANIAN NATION	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE CIVILIZATIONAL IDENTITY	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM IS NOT AN URGENT THREAT	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ECONOMIC DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. RESPECTS IRAN'S RIGHT TO ACCESS PEACEFUL NUCLEAR POWER	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN CAN REJOIN THE COMMUNITY OF NATIONS	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	THE IRANIAN PEOPLE SHARE UNIVERSAL DESIRES	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	THE U.S. ADMIRES THE IRANIAN NATION'S RICH HISTORY, CULTURE, AND CIVILIZATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS	1

Source: Authors

Similarly, Obama accused the Iranian government of undermining the pillars of the liberal international order, while simultaneously expressing hope for Iran's adherence to international norms and its reacceptance as a normal member of the global community. Following this pattern, Obama portrayed Iran as a threat to the civilizational identity of the free world, but concurrently emphasized the possibility of Iran rejoining the community of nations.

Economic sanctions aimed at pushing Iran toward nuclear negotiations played a crucial role in Obama's carrot-and-stick approach. Obama significantly escalated sanctions against Iran during his first term, resulting in some of the harshest and broadest sanctions ever imposed on the country (Katzman, 2014; Nephew, 2017). Early in his presidency, Obama expanded existing sanctions through executive orders targeting Iranian entities allegedly involved in nuclear proliferation and terrorism (Katzman, 2014). A

major legislative step came with the passage of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA) of 2010, which extended penalties to foreign banks engaging with Iran's energy sector and financial institutions, effectively threatening to disconnect them from the U.S. financial system (Katzman, 2014; Nephew, 2017). This pressure campaign was intensified in 2012 when the European Union imposed an oil embargo and, under U.S. influence, the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) disconnected Iranian banks, thereby isolating Iran from the global financial network (Nephew, 2017; Parsi, 2017). Additional sanctions targeting Iran's Central Bank were implemented through the 2011 National Defense Authorization Act, further reducing Iran's oil exports and causing severe economic dislocation (Katzman, 2014; Nephew, 2017). By the end of Obama's first term, these combined measures had led to rising inflation, currency devaluation, and economic hardship in Iran.

While Obama's securitization of the Iranian government spanned the military, political, and economic sectors—with a pronounced focus on Iran's nuclear program—he also emphasized the desecuritization of diplomatic engagements with Iran. Obama expressed the U.S.'s willingness to engage in dialogue with Iran without preconditions, and declared that Iran's nuclear negotiations could be constructive. This dual strategy reflected Obama's effort to maintain pressure on the Iranian government to change its perceived threatening behavior, while simultaneously leaving open a pathway for diplomacy and Iran's reintegration into the international system.

## **6. 10. Barack Obama's Second Term: Desecuritizing Securitization (Positive Securitization)**

The data in Table 9 indicate that during Obama's second term, his representations of Iran focused on securitizing the Iranian government in the military, political, and economic sectors, accounting for 27.27%, 8.26%, and 3.31% of all representations of Iran respectively. In contrast, his desecuritization of the Iranian government targeted the political, military, societal, and economic security sectors, comprising 42.98%, 11.57%, 1.65%, and 1.65% of all representations of Iran.

Obama's political desecuritization of the Iranian government during his second term was the highest among all reviewed presidential terms, while his military desecuritization of the Iranian government in this term ranked second, following Reagan's first term. Additionally, Obama's securitizations of the Iranian government in the societal and economic security sectors during this term were the second highest among all examined terms, surpassed only by his own first term.

Regarding the Iranian nation, Obama's desecuritization efforts during his second term focused on the societal sector, accounting for 2.48% of all his representations of Iran. This was the second highest societal desecuritization among all reviewed terms, following George W. Bush's second term.

During Barack Obama's second term, his continuation of the carrot-and-stick strategy for the securitization and desecuritization of the Iranian government was characterized by a novel approach, conceptualized by the authors as *Desecuritizing Securitization* or *Positive Securitization*. This approach involved intensifying the securitization of Iran's nuclear program, while simultaneously

asserting that harsh exceptional measures, whether military or economic, would be insufficient to adequately address the threat posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions. Instead, Obama sought to desecuritize dialogue and engagement with the Iranian government, advocating multilateral diplomacy backed by pressure from the U.S. and its allies, as the primary solution to resolve Iran's nuclear threat.

Obama argued that, in the absence of a nuclear agreement with Iran achieved through diplomacy, no exceptional measures—whether military or economic—could effectively prevent Iran's alleged pursuit of nuclear weapons. He further emphasized that failure to secure such an agreement would lead to catastrophic and unbearable consequences. This strategic use of securitization to enable desecuritization represents a distinctive feature of Obama's second-term foreign policy toward Iran (see Table 19).

**Table 19.** Distribution of the Third-Level Subcodes and Their Frequencies Across Barack Obama's Second Term

First-Level Codes	Second-Level Subcodes	Third-Level Subcodes	Frequency
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN'S NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS CAN BE CONSTRUCTIVE	41
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM IS THREATENING	15
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM IS NOT AN URGENT THREAT	12
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSuing WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION	10
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	DESECURITIZING THE DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH IRAN	7
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SPONSORING TERRORISM	5
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE PILLARS OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER	4
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EMPLOYING POLITICAL TERRORISM	4
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' SECURITY AND PHYSICAL EXISTENCE	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. RESPECTS IRAN'S PEACEFUL NUCLEAR RIGHTS	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ECONOMIC DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. RESPECTS IRAN'S RIGHT TO ACCESS PEACEFUL NUCLEAR POWER	2

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DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. AND IRAN CAN BRIDGE THEIR IDENTITY DIFFERENCES	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	THE U.S. RESPECTS THE IRANIAN PEOPLE AND THEIR COUNTRY	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	DESTABILIZING THE REGIONS OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE FOR THE U.S.	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSUING ANTI-AMERICAN POLICIES AND DESIRES	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRANS' GOVERNMENT FEEDS ITS PEOPLE LIES&FALSE PROPAGANDA	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE GLOBAL ECONOMY	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EMPLOYING ANTI-U.S. RHETORIC TO JUSTIFY ITS ECONOMIC SHORTCOMINGS	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN LEADERS LACK ECONOMIC INSIGHT	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE GLOBAL ENERGY MARKET	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF OTHERS	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN HAS BEEN A VICTIM OF IRAQ'S MILITARY AGGRESSION	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	MILITARY DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN'S MILITARY CAPABILITIES ARE LIMITED	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. RESPECTS IRAN'S NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THERE ARE SIGNS OF POSITIVE CHANGE IN IRAN'S POLICIES	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	THE U.S. ADMIRES THE IRANIAN NATION'S RICH HISTORY, CULTURE, AND CIVILIZATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS	1

Source: Authors

In practice, Obama significantly heightened the portrayal of Iran's nuclear program as an urgent threat requiring immediate attention and action. Simultaneously, he argued that extraordinary military and economic measures would not effectively eliminate the threat posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions. This dual approach aimed to desecuritize dialogue with Iran by fostering a more favorable perspective among both public and elite audiences in the United States and its allied nations toward a political resolution of Iran's nuclear issue. Ultimately, this strategy sought to build broad support for Obama's efforts to politically engage Iran and achieve a nuclear agreement.

Barack Obama's approach to the securitization of Iran's nuclear program during his second term diverged significantly from the core principles of securitization theory and the securitizing

strategies employed by previous U.S. presidents. Securitization theory posits that each act of securitization seeks to secure audience consent for implementing exceptional measures against a perceived threat. However, Obama departed from this traditional framework. Unlike his predecessors, who used securitization primarily to justify the imposition of harsh measures on Iran, Obama employed securitization as a tool to desecuritize dialogue and advance diplomatic engagement with Iran (see Table 19).

Obama's positive or desecuritizing securitization of Iran was accompanied by extensive efforts to politically desecuritize the Iranian government—efforts that were more pronounced than those observed in any other reviewed presidential term. He asserted that nuclear negotiations could be constructive, and emphasized that resolving the nuclear crisis would serve as a foundation for broader peace in the Middle East. Furthermore, Obama underscored the United States' respect for Iran's peaceful nuclear rights and national sovereignty, suggesting that positive changes in Iran's policies justified the adoption of a diplomatic approach (see Table 19).

Interestingly, even after the adoption and implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Obama's dual strategy of securitization and desecuritization persisted. On one hand, he maintained the securitization of the Iranian government, using it as leverage to influence Iran's behavior and policies in the region. On the other, he continued to desecuritize political engagement, admiring the JCPOA as a testament to the success of the U.S.'s patient and disciplined strategy that combined multilateral diplomacy backed by pressure.

Through his innovative use of positive securitization, Obama redefined the role of securitization in addressing international

conflicts. By balancing the intensified securitization of Iran's nuclear program with the desecuritization of diplomatic engagement, he sought to establish a framework for political conflict resolution, ultimately positioning the JCPOA as a cornerstone of his diplomatic legacy.

### **6. 11. Donald Trump's Presidency: Comprehensive Securitization to Coerce Iran into Conforming with U.S. Middle East Strategy**

The data in Table 9 indicate that during Trump's presidency, his representations of Iran primarily focused on securitizing the Iranian government in the political, military, and economic security sectors, accounting for 42.02%, 32.30%, and 14.79% of all representations of Iran respectively. In contrast, his desecuritization of the Iranian government was limited to the economic and political security sectors, constituting 1.17% and 0.39% of all his representations of Iran.

Trump's single term, along with George W. Bush's second term, represent one of the two periods during which the Iranian government was securitized across the largest number of security sectors—five out of six. His political securitization of the Iranian government ranked third among all examined presidential terms, following George W. Bush's second and first terms. Similarly, Trump's economic securitization of the Iranian government was the third highest, surpassed only by Reagan's first term and Clinton's second term. Notably, Trump is the first and only U.S. president to portray Iran as a threat in the cyber security sector, which accounted for 0.78% of all his representations of Iran.

Regarding the Iranian nation, Trump's desecuritization efforts

focused on the political and societal security sectors, accounting for 1.56% and 1.17% of all his representations of Iran respectively.

Donald Trump's representation of Iran during his presidency was shaped by three primary elements of his foreign policy: the *America First* policy and his rejection of past U.S. globalist projects, his commitment to avoiding endless wars in the Middle East, and his emphasis on the United States' destiny as a peacemaker, achieving peace through strength rather than war. Trump viewed Iran as a significant threat to each of these objectives, framing his approach to the country accordingly.

Trump's *America First* policy prioritized national rebuilding, rejecting the globalist endeavors of previous U.S. administrations, which he claimed had neglected American citizens and domestic infrastructure. He argued that "The future does not belong to globalists. The future belongs to patriots. The future belongs to sovereign and independent nations who protect their citizens, respect their neighbors, and honor the differences that make each country special and unique" (Trump, 2019b). In this context, Trump emphasized that his role as president was "not to represent the world" but "to represent the United States of America" (Trump, 2017). He further stated that his administration's primary obligation was "to serve, protect, and defend the citizens of the United States" (Trump, 2017).

In the Middle East, Trump pursued a strategy of *peace through strength* as an alternative to engaging in prolonged and costly conflicts. He viewed his so-called "groundbreaking peace deals" between Israel and Arab states as the beginning of "the dawn of the new Middle East" (Trump, 2020). Trump identified Iran as a significant obstacle to this vision, criticizing its conventional military capabilities, ballistic missile program, and nuclear

ambitions. These factors, along with Iran’s regional policies and influence, were framed as threats to the key pillars of his foreign policy. As a result, Trump pursued a comprehensive securitization of Iran, employing exceptional measures, particularly economic sanctions, which he described as “the toughest sanctions ever imposed by us on a country” (Trump, 2019a). These measures aimed to coerce Iran into changing its regional policies.

To advance his Middle East strategy, Trump heavily securitized Iran, presenting it as the root cause of instability in the region. By portraying Iran as a common threat to both Israel and Arab states, he worked to justify normalization of relations between these parties. At the same time, Trump sought to desecuritize Israel, framing its collaboration with Arab states as essential for countering Iran’s warmonger regional policies (see Table 20).

**Table 20.** Distribution of the Third-Level Subcodes and Their Frequencies Across Donald Trump's Single Term

First-Level Codes	Second-Level Subcodes	Third-Level Subcodes	Frequency
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL LIBERTIES AND RIGHTS	36
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE PILLARS OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER	25
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS ARE DAMAGING	20
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S CONVENTIONAL MILITARY CAPABILITIES ARE THREATENING	18
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SPONSORING TERRORISM	16
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' SECURITY AND PHYSICAL EXISTENCE	14
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EMPLOYING POLITICAL TERRORISM	13
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF THE IRANIAN NATION	13
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ADVANCING WARMONGER POLICIES	11
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSING WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION	10
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	DESTABILIZING THE REGIONS OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE FOR THE U.S.	10
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT IS CORRUPTED	9
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF OTHERS	7
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	WASTING THE IRANIAN NATION'S WEALTH TO PURSUE VICIOUS POLICIES	6
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSING ANTI-AMERICAN POLICIES AND DESIRES	5

SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT IS A FAILED STATE	5
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	IRANIAN NATION DOES NOT SUPPORT ITS GOVERNMENT'S MALICIOUS POLICIES	4
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN LEADERS LACK ECONOMIC INSIGHT	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	FUNDING TERRORISM	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE NATIONAL IDENTITY OF OTHER NATIONS	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE CIVILIZATIONAL IDENTITY	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING GLOBAL PEACE AND SECURITY	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN IS EXPANDING ITS HARMFUL INFLUENCE	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRANS' GOVERNMENT FEEDS ITS PEOPLE LIES&FALSE PROPAGANDA	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE GLOBAL ENERGY MARKET	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	SOCIETAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE CULTURAL IDENTITY	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ECONOMIC DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN THE U.S. AND IRAN IS POSSIBLE	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	THE U.S. ADMIRES THE IRANIAN NATION'S RICH HISTORY, CULTURE, AND CIVILIZATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POSING THREAT TO THE INTERNATIONAL OIL MARKET	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' NATIONAL INTERESTS	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THREATENING THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF THE WORLD	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ECONOMIC SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	EXPANDING ITS INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST THROUGH FUNDING	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	CYBER SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT RESTRICTS INTERNET ACCESS	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	CYBER SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN UNDERTAKES MALICIOUS CYBER ACTIVITIES	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	DESECURITIZING THE DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH IRAN	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	ECONOMIC DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	THE U.S. CAN HELP IRAN MAKE GOOD AND SHORT-TIME ECONOMIC RECOVERY	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	SOCIETAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN NATION	THE WORLD BELIEVES IN THE GOODNESS OF THE IRANIAN PEOPLE	1

Source: Authors

Trump was a staunch critic of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which he securitized and dismissed as a disastrous and flawed agreement. He argued that it failed to halt Iran’s “agenda of aggression and expansion” (Trump, 2018). According to Trump, the JCPOA allowed Iran to increase its military budget by 40% through oil revenues, which were allegedly used to develop nuclear-capable missiles, finance terrorism, and fuel conflicts in Syria and Yemen (Trump, 2018).

In his rhetoric, Trump employed a hybrid approach by simultaneously securitizing the Iranian government, while desecuritizing the Iranian people. He claimed that, while his administration prioritized the interests of Americans, Iranian leaders had abandoned their citizens. He portrayed Iran’s leadership as economically incompetent and oppressive, asserting

that the Iranian people were victims of their government's policies and did not support their government's policies and actions (see Table 20).

Trump's comprehensive securitization of Iran across multiple sectors of security was designed to justify the use of all exceptional measures short of war to pressure Iran into aligning with U.S. policies in the Middle East. His Iran-specific version of 'peace through strength' offered limited engagement opportunities, proposing short-term economic recovery in exchange for Iran's political surrender and denuclearization (see Table 20).

#### **6. 12. Joe Biden's Presidency: Securitization to Preserve the Status Quo**

The data in Table 9 indicate that during the examined first year of Biden's presidency, his representations of Iran focused on securitizing the Iranian government exclusively in the military and political security sectors, accounting for 73.33% and 6.67% of all representations of Iran respectively. In contrast, his desecuritization efforts targeted only the political security sector, comprising 20.00% of all his representations of Iran. Biden securitized the Iranian government in the fewest number of security sectors among all examined presidents, covering only two out of six sectors.

Joe Biden's representations of Iran during the first year of his presidency primarily reflected an attempt to maintain the status quo in U.S.-Iran relations. While he sought to avoid significant escalation in tensions between the two countries, his desecuritization efforts concerning Iran were limited and lacked substantial impact.

A notable feature of Biden's approach was his return to a Realist perspective, emphasizing geopolitical considerations in his securitizations of Iran. Unlike some of his predecessors, Biden did not differentiate between the Iranian government and the Iranian nation in his securitizing and desecuritizing efforts, instead treating Iran as a unified nation-state.

In the military security sector, Biden framed Iran's nuclear program as a significant threat to both American and global security. He accused Iran of pursuing weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, and advancing aggressive regional policies that jeopardized the territorial integrity of U.S. allies in the Middle East. Additionally, Biden characterized Iran's conventional military capabilities as game-changing technologies that threatened regional stability and global peace (see Table 21).

**Table 21.** Distribution of the Third-Level Subcodes and Their Frequencies Across Joe Biden's Only Term

First-Level Codes	Second-Level Subcodes	Third-Level Subcodes	Frequency
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM IS THREATENING	3
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING OTHER STATES' SECURITY AND PHYSICAL EXISTENCE	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ADVANCING WARMONGER POLICIES	2
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	IRAN'S NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS CAN BE CONSTRUCTIVE	2
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	IRAN'S CONVENTIONAL MILITARY CAPABILITIES ARE THREATENING	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	PURSUIING WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING GLOBAL PEACE AND SECURITY	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	MILITARY SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	DESTABILIZING THE REGIONS OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE FOR THE U.S.	1
SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	POLITICAL SECURITIZATION OF IRAN	ENDANGERING THE PILLARS OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER	1
DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	POLITICAL DESECURITIZATION OF THE IRANIAN STATE	DESECURITIZING THE DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH IRAN	1

Source: Authors

In the political security sector, Biden securitized Iran by claiming it posed a challenge to the pillars of the liberal international order. Specifically, he argued that Iran endangered the sovereignty of U.S. allies in the Middle East (see Table 21).

Biden's efforts at political desecuritization primarily centered on promoting diplomatic engagement with Iran. He announced that the United States was prepared to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) if Iran reciprocated by complying with the agreement's terms.

While a complete assessment of Biden's representations of Iran requires analysis beyond his first year in office, initial observations suggest that this approach was characterized by a balance between containment and limited engagement. Biden's foreign policy toward Iran did not pursue war or full-scale engagement. Instead, through his geopolitical securitization, he sought to preserve the status quo by maintaining existing sanctions and counterbalancing Iran's influence in the Middle East through the securitization of its allegedly warmonger policies. Simultaneously, by endorsing diplomatic engagement and expressing a willingness to return to the JCPOA, Biden aimed to prevent further escalation in U.S.-Iran relations.

## **7. Discussion**

This study has analyzed the securitization and desecuritization of Iran within U.S. presidential rhetoric, uncovering a significant transformation over time. The findings reveal a shift from a largely reactive posture to a deliberately constructed securitizing project. This evolution constitutes a defining characteristic of American discursive practices toward Iran. Rather than treating Iran as an

objective or static threat, successive U.S. presidents have actively constructed and reconstructed Iran's threat status through historically contingent and rhetorically tailored representations, thereby legitimizing a broad spectrum of exceptional measures.

The analysis identified two dominant rhetorical frameworks—Realist and Constructivist—that have shaped U.S. securitizing discourse on Iran across different administrations. The Realist approach, which prevailed from Jimmy Carter's presidency through Bill Clinton's second term, and resurged under Joe Biden, focused on securitizing Iran primarily within geopolitical domains such as the military and economic sectors. This approach framed Iran and its people as a unified national entity and treated Iran as a hostile yet ordinary state within the international system. It addressed elite audiences—policymakers and allied governments—and sought to alter Iran's regional and international behavior without fundamentally challenging its legitimacy.

In contrast, the Constructivist approach, which emerged during George W. Bush's first term and persisted through Donald Trump's presidency, introduced a nuanced representation of Iran. This framework differentiated between the Iranian government and the Iranian people, portraying them as distinct and, at times, opposing entities with divergent visions for the country's path and national interests. Under this approach, the Iranian government was frequently securitized as an oppressive regime and a political pariah, deemed unfit to belong to the community of nations. The audience for this approach extended beyond policymakers, targeting the general public in the United States, Iran, and allied regional countries. While the primary aim remained altering Iran's behavior and policies, the approach also entertained aspirations of regime change, particularly during George W. Bush's presidency.

By constructing Iran not only as a strategic threat, but also as a moral and ideological adversary, this approach deepened and diversified the securitization process. Table 22 summarizes and compares the main characteristics of these two securitization approaches toward Iran:

**Table 22.** Characteristics of Realist and Constructivist Securitization Approaches in U.S. Presidential Rhetoric on Iran (1979–2021)

Characteristic	Realist Approach	Constructivist Approach
<b>Time Span</b>	Carter (1979) through Clinton (2001); resurged under Biden (2021)	George W. Bush (2001) through Trump (2021)
<b>Main Framing of Iran</b>	Iran as a unified state actor; hostile but legitimate state	Dichotomy: Iranian government as oppressive vs. Iranian people as victims/allies
<b>Nature of Threat Framing</b>	Geopolitical and strategic threat (military, economic)	Ideological, moral, and existential threat
<b>Primary Security Domains</b>	Military and economic security sectors	Political and societal security sectors
<b>Target Audiences</b>	Elite: U.S. policymakers and allied governments	Broad (elite and public): U.S. policymakers, allied governments, U.S. public, Iranian people, international community
<b>Objective</b>	Altering Iran's behavior without challenging its legitimacy	Altering Iran's behavior; challenging the government's legitimacy; entertaining regime change
<b>View of Iran's Legitimacy</b>	Hostile but legitimate state actor	Iranian government as illegitimate; Iranian people as victims of their government or partners of the West
<b>Securitizing Strategy</b>	Conventional threat framing	Ideological and moral framing with an emphasis on identity
<b>Measures Justified</b>	Sanctions, diplomatic pressure, military readiness	Broader confrontation; potential regime change

Source: Authors

A key contribution of this study lies in the development of an analytical framework designed to anticipate presidential approaches toward Iran. By situating each administration's rhetoric within one of the two identified frameworks and mapping the security sectors

they prioritized, the study offers a tool for predicting the likely trajectory of a U.S. president's policy and discourse on Iran. This framework holds practical relevance for both scholarly analysis and policy forecasting, particularly during leadership transitions or periods of escalating tensions.

Nonetheless, this study is not without limitations. Its exclusive focus on presidential rhetoric does not account for other influential actors, such as Congress, the media, and security bureaucracies, which also shape the securitization process. Future research would benefit from adopting a multi-actor perspective or exploring how Iranian leaders have engaged in counter-securitizing practices to resist and reframe U.S. threat narratives. Comparative studies involving other cases of securitization—such as North Korea or Venezuela—could further enrich our understanding of how identity, ideology, and discourse interact in the formulation of foreign policy.

## **8. Conclusion**

This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of the securitization and desecuritization of Iran in U.S. presidential rhetoric from 1979 to 2021, revealing the dynamic and constructed nature of threat narratives in American foreign policy discourse. By examining a broad corpus of presidential speeches and strategic documents, the research has demonstrated that Iran's portrayal as a threat has evolved not as a mere reaction to external realities, but as a product of shifting political objectives, ideological frameworks, and audience engagements. Over time, the U.S. securitization of Iran has transformed from an initial reaction to bilateral tensions into an intentionally designed and discursively constructed project.

This evolution marks a defining characteristic of American securitizing rhetoric toward Iran.

A key contribution of this research is the theorization of Positive Securitization, or Desecuritizing Securitization, as a novel addition to securitization theory. Unlike the traditional use of securitization to justify the implementation of exceptional measures such as military force or sanctions, Positive Securitization uses securitizing discourse to legitimize dialogue and political engagement. It is based on the argument that even the most extreme military or economic measures would not be enough to neutralize a perceived threat; therefore, diplomacy is presented as the only viable and effective solution. By framing coercive measures as ineffective, this approach allows leaders to build a strong case for diplomacy as the most practical and realistic path forward. In this way, securitization becomes a tool for facilitating political resolution rather than enabling coercive action.

This approach found a clear expression during Barack Obama's second term, where he intensified the securitization of Iran's nuclear program, while simultaneously emphasizing that military strikes or additional sanctions alone could not resolve the issue. Instead, he advocated for diplomatic engagement as the only realistic path forward. By combining a strong securitizing stance with efforts to desecuritize political engagement, Obama employed Positive Securitization to build support for a peaceful resolution. He framed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) not as a concession, but as a necessary achievement of multilateral diplomacy. This strategy not only distinguished Obama's rhetoric and approach from those of his predecessors, but also redefined the role of securitization in U.S. foreign policy toward Iran.

Furthermore, two overarching discursive frameworks—Realist and Constructivist—emerged from the analysis, each corresponding to distinct phases in presidential rhetoric. The Realist framework, dominant from the Carter administration through Clinton (and reemerging under Biden), depicted Iran as a unified state actor and framed the threat primarily in geopolitical terms, particularly within the military and economic security domains. This approach targeted elite audiences—namely, political leaders and decision-makers in the United States, as well as regional and allied governments—and sought to influence Iran’s regional and international behavior and policies. While it portrayed Iran as a hostile power, this framework did not fundamentally challenge its status as a legitimate actor within the international system. By contrast, the Constructivist framework, which emerged during George W. Bush’s first term and persisted through Donald Trump’s presidency, marked a discursive shift toward a more ideologically charged and morally framed representation of Iran. Central to this approach was the construction of a dichotomy between the Iranian government and the Iranian people, portraying the former as oppressive and illegitimate, while casting the latter as victims or potential partners of the West. This securitizing discourse expanded beyond elite strategic circles to engage broader domestic and international publics, thereby enabling normative justifications, including explicit or implicit endorsements of regime change. Bush’s ‘axis of evil’ rhetoric and Trump’s references to Iran as a ‘murderous dictatorship’ exemplify this turn, wherein existential threat framing not only served foreign policy objectives, but also reinforced American identity narratives.

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the study challenges the conventional assumption that securitization invariably results in aggressive or

exceptional measures. Instead, it reveals that the boundary between securitization and desecuritization is fluid, context-dependent, and subject to rhetorical mediation. Practically, the analysis demonstrates that the U.S. policy toward Iran has been driven less by material threat assessments and more by symbolic boundary-making. These discursive constructions have served dual purposes: legitimizing intervention abroad and reinforcing national identity at home. This dynamic helps explain why efforts at desecuritization—such as diplomatic normalization—often encounter structural resistance, as they require dismantling entrenched threat narratives that have become integral to U.S. foreign policy discourse.

In sum, this study underscores that the construction of threats is not a fixed or inevitable process, but is shaped by historical context and ideology, and is open to change. Furthermore, it reveals that the boundary between securitization and desecuritization is fluid, context-dependent, and subject to rhetorical mediation. By highlighting these dynamics, the research contributes to securitization theory and offers ways to envision more constructive and lasting engagement between the United States and Iran.

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All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization of the article and writing of the original and subsequent drafts. All authors have seen and approved the final version of the manuscript.

#### **Declaration of the Use of AI and AI Assisted Technologies**

This article was not authored by artificial intelligence. The authors used DeepSeek AI for grammar and language polishing only. All conceptual development, analysis, and interpretations are the sole work of the authors. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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The authors avoided data fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, double publication/submission and any form of misconduct against publication ethics. Authors have properly cited all sources of ideas, words, and materials including pictures, charts, tables and statistics used in their paper.

### **Data Availability Statement**

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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