# 10. Securitization Theory: Legitimacy in Security Politics

## 10.1. Legitimacy in Securitization Theory

Directly and in the short term repression against terrorist groups can only diminish their resources – therefore its counter-intended effect can only take place in the long run. Furthermore, the counter-intended effect of repression is only conceivable in connection with the security discourse of the terrorist groups' opponents. In order to understand this counter-intended effect I present securitization theory which deals with the question of how actors develop legitimacy for the imposition of extraordinary means. With my simulation-analysis I am subsequently able to analyze the feedback loops of intended and counter-intended effects of state repression.

### 10.1.1. Legitimacy and Audience in Security Politics

Securitization Theory belongs to the wider branch of Critical Security Studies which itself is a constructivist approach in the studies of International Relations. The theory is built on the assumption that security is not an objective fact. It explains how security is socially constructed by 'securitizing' issues:

"A security issue is posited (by a securitising actor) as a threat to the survival of some referent object (nation, state, the liberal international economic order, the rain forests), which is claimed to have a right to survive. Since a question of survival necessarily involves a point of no return at which it will be too late to act, it is not defensible to leave this issue to normal politics. The securitising actor therefore

claims a right to break normal rules, for reasons of security" (Buzan & Waever 2003: 71).

Securitization theory explains how security actors mobilize their audience by leading a security discourse in order to become capable of implementing extraordinary means. With the focus on this approach the hitherto cursory vicious-circle hypothesis is enriched by a constructivist theory specialized in discursive preparation for the implementation of security policies. Securitization theory explains the deployment of extraordinary means in security politics by framing security issues: "The social design of a security problem conditions and legitimates the kind of means used to stop it." (Balzacq 2011: xiii). The theory can be used to study persuasion, legitimization, and social mobilization (Vuori 2011: 186). I use the work of Thierry Balzacq (2011) who developed a sociological approach to securitization theory as a basis, which is more useful to my research purpose than the initial approach of the Copen Hagen School developed by Ole Waever, Barry Buazan and Jaap de Wilde.[1] In particular, the more clearly defined concept of audience (or even several audiences) by Balzacq speaks for this approach because audiences are crucial for understanding legitimacy. This approach is furthermore more suitable to my cases since it defines practices and performatives (in addition to speech acts) as securitizing acts.

The three core assumptions for understanding the discourse which makes an issue a security issue and thereby justifies the imposition of violent means are (Balzacq 2011: 3):

- Centrality of audience
- Co-dependency of agency and context
- The dispositif and the structuring force of practices

I will go into further details regarding these concepts in the following sections.

1 The Copenhagen School pays only little attention to clearly defining the role of the audience and, for my purpose, treats securitization too exclusively as a speech act.

### 10.1.2. One Theory for Analysing Both Conflict Parties

As we have seen, Schlichte states that the need for legitimacy is a precondition for state as well as for non-state actors to participate in a conflict. Securitization theory allows us to analyze state as well as non-state actors with the same theoretical framework. This theory can explain whether a group is capable of legitimizing its violent behaviour and to what extent. Vuori, for example, analyzes the impact of securitization for the mobilization and suppression of social movements. But even though he acknowledges that securitization studies traditionally centre on legitimization from the side of the authorities, he also criticizes the fact that protest studies (and social movement theories) capitalize on the mobilization of social movements, and he shows that "both literatures often overlook the interaction between the authorities and protestors: both sides of the struggle may take the other's moves into account" (Vuori 2011: 189). Vuori highlights that the theory of securitization provides a single framework that enables us to explain the behaviour of both (state and non-state) sides involved in a conflict. In my view this is very useful for the sake of complexity-reduction and for an understanding of the vicious circle. In addition, it helps us to better understand the mutual constitution of securitizing actors and audiences.

It is furthermore interesting to use only one framework for state as well as non-state behaviour as it is observable that both sides behave very similarly, namely in an essentialist way: on the one hand, the behaviour of Muslims is solely explained by their religion. Such an essentialist argumentation leads to the negligence of historical and social factors and sees Islam as the only and all explaining essence (Khalid 2007: 5). For these reasons, the securitization of Islam has been analyzed in different settings from Europe (Cesari 2009) to Pakistan (Sheikh 2009). Moreover, Meyer explains that the fundamentalist identity politics of religious groups has the same goal as the apparently reactive western identity politics à la Huntington – both of them use cultural differences as a means of legitimating their power (Meyer 2002: 9).[2] Therefore, I find it interesting to apply the theory to both sides in the conflict.

2 Authors such as Bernard Lewis (2003), Zbigniew Brzezinski (2004) and Samuel Huntington (2002) are responsible for creating this new dualist narrative and entitle their books *Crisis of Islam*, *The Great Chessboard* and *Clash of Civiliza-*

## 10.2. VOCABULARY AND UNITS OF ANALYSIS

Securitization theory gives us a theoretical framework for analysing how new security issues evolve, how such threats are framed and who is involved in the securitization process. The main elements (of the sociological approach according to Balzacq) of securitization theory are introduced in the following sections. Following this, securitization theory provides my simulation analysis with a specified vocabulary, the units of analysis and the assumptions about the mechanism of securitization.

### 10.2.1. Securitizing Actors

As has already been mentioned, Vuori underpins the possibility of using the same theory for both sides in the conflict, for state as well as non-state actors (Vuori 2011: 189). As a result, both parties assume the role of securitizing actors. As with state actors so too can non-state actors declare states of exception (Salter 2011: 118). Yet what makes an actor a securitizing actor? Events can have different meanings to different actors. A securitizing actor is one who interprets an event in a securitizing way, which means that he declares the existence of a referent object to be endangered by the securitized issue. By his argument the securitizing actor calls for extraordinary means to stop this danger. If a securitizing actor defines something as an existential threat to some referent object, this is called a securitizing move (see next section).

In my study, securitization theory explains that extraordinary means (here: repressive or radical means) have to be legitimized by every actor and this is done by securitizing a referent object, which is claimed to be endangered by a threatening object. This means:

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*tions*. These authors are essentialists as they explain the behaviour of Muslims solely by their religion. This new dualism therefore has many critics: „[…] in public discourse and also among academics who had not worked on non-western regions, state failure, new wars, organized crime, and transnational terrorism were meshed together into a legitimizing discourse for a new wave of securitization and militarization“ (Schlichte 2009: 9). Analysts blame the aforementioned authors for essentialism, because they reduce all conflicts to the differences among cultures (Cesari 2009; Khalid 2007: 5; Meyer: 2002; Schlichte 2009).

- *State actors* claim that the secular state is threatened by terrorist Islamists who want to establish sharia – therefore they enforce restrictive religious policies and ban religious groups.
- *Non-state actors* claim that the just Islamic society is threatened by repressive corrupt leaders who constrain religious freedom – and therefore they wage jihad against them.

Referring to the protests in Kyrgyzstan in October 2005, Wilkinson explains how even a single (conflict-)event can be securitized in different ways by different actors:

"The protester's common narrative centred on portraying Kyrgyzstan (the land, rather than the state) and/or its people as being subjected to an existential threat – from corruption, criminalisation, worsening economic conditions – and a demand for immediate action from the government to address the threats. Simultaneously, however, there was a counter-securitizing narrative being presented by other groups (such as the governments of neighboring republics) that portrayed protests themselves as a visible sign of Kyrgyzstan's continued instability and insecurity and therefore as a threat to the republic's existence as a state" (Wilkinson 2011: 104).

In our case the state refers to the nation state as the referent object, non-state actors on the other hand refer to free religious practice as the referent object. Both securitize Islam (securitizing issue) for their means: state actors say foreign Islamic influences threaten the national security and sovereignty of their countries. Non-state actors see the 'secular' contemporary regimes as threatening the good life of devout Muslims. Both are right from their point of view – therefore a security dilemma exists.

### 10.2.2. Securitizing Moves

The securitization takes place through a *securitizing move*. A securitizing move refers to a *referent object*, which is the good that a securitizing actor's ultimate goal is to protect.[3] The original securitization theory intro-

3 The referent object can for example be the liberal international economic order, the planetary ecosystem, a community or a state (Buzan and Waever 2003: 12).

duced by Barry Buzan's and Ole Waever's Copenhagen School (CS), focused on securitizing acts as speech acts. Their main idea was that by defining something as a security problem the first step had been taken to implement extraordinary means. Persons with a great deal of influence in society can promote securitizing speech acts. The speeches of politicians and others who have an influence on security politics as well as publications of institutions and scientists are analyzed in this context (see for example Hagmann 2009).

In the understanding of the Copenhagen School a speech act does more than describe reality – it is a means of power and realizes a specific action (Balzacq 2011: 1). Contrary to this view, Balzacq considers that the power of words depends on (2011: 25):

- the context and the power position of the agent that utters them,
- the relative validity of statements for which the acquiescence of the audience is requested; and
- the manner in which the securitizing actor makes the case for an issue, that is, the discursive strategy displayed.

As a result, the sociological approach on securitization of Balzacq and others, "talk about securitization primarily in terms of practices, context, and power relations that characterize the construction of threat images" (Balzacq 2011: 1). This is especially important in a non-democratic setting where the implied assumption that speech acts are desirable and possible is not given because of restrictions on the freedom of expression (Wilkinson 2007: 12). Therefore, Wilkinson (2007), Vuori (2008: 71) and others (Balzacq 2011, McDonalds 2008: 570, Salter 2011) recommend including written sources such as political programs and laws when analysing securitization in an authoritarian setting. In my study I refer to religious laws as written sources of securitization, and undifferentiated repression of the population through restrictions on the practice of religion as securitizing practices by state authorities. Non-state actors exercise a securitizing move with pamphlets, with their own fatwas, and word-of-mouth propaganda at regular group-meetings and in prisons.

### 10.2.3. Audience

Securitization does not take place by the securitizing move of the securitizing actor alone. The securitizing move, conducted by a securitizing actor, is always addressed to an audience (or to several audiences).[4] The success of a securitizing move depends on the support it receives among the audience. Whereas CS usually concentrates on successfully securitized cases, there are other authors who study the success or failure of securitization moves.[5] Securitization only takes place when the securitizing move is accepted by the audience (Léonard & Kaunert 2011: 58). However, in order to be successful, "securitization does not require the consent (formal or informal) of the entire audience, it only requires the consent of enough of the audience – the 'critical mass' that O'Reilly (2008) explains as a combination of volume and quality" (Vultee 2011: 83). Its success is therefore dependent on helping a securitizing actor to "rightly perceive the feelings and needs of the audience […]", and enables him to use a, "[…] language that will resonate well with the audience" (Léonard and Kaunert 2011: 61; see also Balzacq 2005: 184). For these reasons, in every empirical study on securitization the audience has to be clearly defined.

The audience might usually constitute the citizens in a democratic state or governmental elite – especially in the case of a non-democratic system (Vuori 2008: 72). The support given by an audience can be formal (policymakers such as parliamentarians) or moral (general public) (Léonard and Kaunert 2011: 62). However other audience settings are also possible, such

4 "[…] the idea of the 'audience' oversimplifies the fact that there can be multiple audiences, with different characteristics" (Léonard & Kaunert 2011: 60).

5 Salter criticizes the lack of study into the failure of securitization (Salter 2011: 116). But "we cannot accept a simply binary result of 'accepted' or 'failed' securitizing moves […]. Rather, there are several steps in the acceptance or failure of a securitizing move" (Salter 2011: 119). Along with Salter, the question of whether a securitizing move was successful or not can be decided by answering these questions: "To what degree is the issue-area discussed as a part of a wider political debate? Is the description of the threat as existential accepted or rejected? Is the solution to the threat accepted or rejected? Are new or emergency powers accorded to the securitizing agent?" (Salter 2011: 119f).

as popular, elite, technocratic and scientific settings (Léonard and Kaunert 2011: 62).

In this case I will refer to the whole population of a Central Asian nation state as the audience of the state-actors and to the Muslim population of the state as the audience of the Islamist non-state actors. It is rather uncommon to speak of legitimacy in relation to authoritarian regimes and non-state groups accused of terrorism. Often it is assumed that only liberal democracies need legitimacy to implement extraordinary means because they depend on public opinion to a greater extent than authoritarian regimes. I postulate that even authoritarian regimes depend on the population's participation with what Vuori refers to as the "ritual of conformity" (Vuori 2008: 71). Compared to democracies, where legitimacy is necessary to win the next elections, securitization in these states conduces to maintain the political order, to exercise control over the population and to renew discipline (Vuori 2008: 69). It is worth pointing out, though, that securitization theory can also be used to analyze the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes although it is more often applied to an analysis of western democracies.

The fact that the intention of terrorism per se is to awe people, as well as the fact that the condemnation of foreign groups and alleged terrorists in authoritarian regimes often have the appearance of show trials, serves to demonstrate that, repressive acts, including acts of terrorism are often not only directed at the immediate victims (see definition of terrorism in section 1.1.2) of these acts but also at the general public. Waldmann, an expert on terrorism mentions the "Reaktionsangewiesenheit" of terrorists: on the one hand, terrorists intend to provoke a disproportionate reaction from the government they attack in order to trigger a circle of action and repression that allows the enemy to be "exposed" (2003: 88). The brutal and disproportionate response of security forces should show Islamist sympathizers that the fight against the government is a necessity. On the other hand, the fact that acts of terror can be used to justify brutal police violence could explain why it is so difficult to disprove that acts of terror are not provoked by the government itself (for example 1999 bombings in Tashkent; see Naumkin). Lastly, non-state violence helps authoritarian states to strengthen their power.

### 10.2.4. Preconditions and Context of Securitization

The securitization act takes place in a certain context: securitizing actors have a certain 'dispositive' to securitize. Furthermore, preconditions such as regulatory and capacity tools influence the success of a securitizing move (Balzacq 2011: 17ff). Regulatory tools are policy instruments such as written programs, laws etc. Capacity tools contain material and non-material resources such as information, training and so on. In our case, the religious ministries, the Muftiate and security forces represent the state's capacities. Non-state actors rely in this regard mainly on their members and support by foundations and allies.

Apart from these preconditions of the security move, the context of the securitization is important for its analysis. Two different kinds of context are embraced in the analysis of securitization: proximate and distal context. Whereas the proximate context outlines the questions of who securitizes what and when (Wilkinson 2011: 107f), the distal context describes how and why securitization takes place (Wilkinson 2011: 108ff). According to Salter, the "proximate context refers to the immediate features of interaction", to the stage on which and the genre in which a securitizing move is made as well as to the audience and its reception of the securitizing move (Salter 2008: 328). I have already mentioned the importance of the mutual incitement of opponents, which can be included as part of the proximate context in the analysis (Vuori 2011: 189). Whereas Wilkinson describes the proximate context as the micro-environment, he refers to the distal context as the macro-environment of the securitization, where "social class and ethnicity, regional and cultural settings, and the sites of discourse" matter (2011: 98). The political system in which securitization takes place is also part of the distal context. It therefore allows us to take into account the special circumstances of authoritarian regimes and socio-demographic preconditions for conflicts. In our case, the distal context for the securitization of Islam is represented by the context-legitimacy (good governance and socio-economic situation) of the Central Asian states as well and by the revival of Islam in the region.

## 10.3. SECURITIZATION OF ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA

### 10.3.1. Units of Analysis in the Central Asian Context

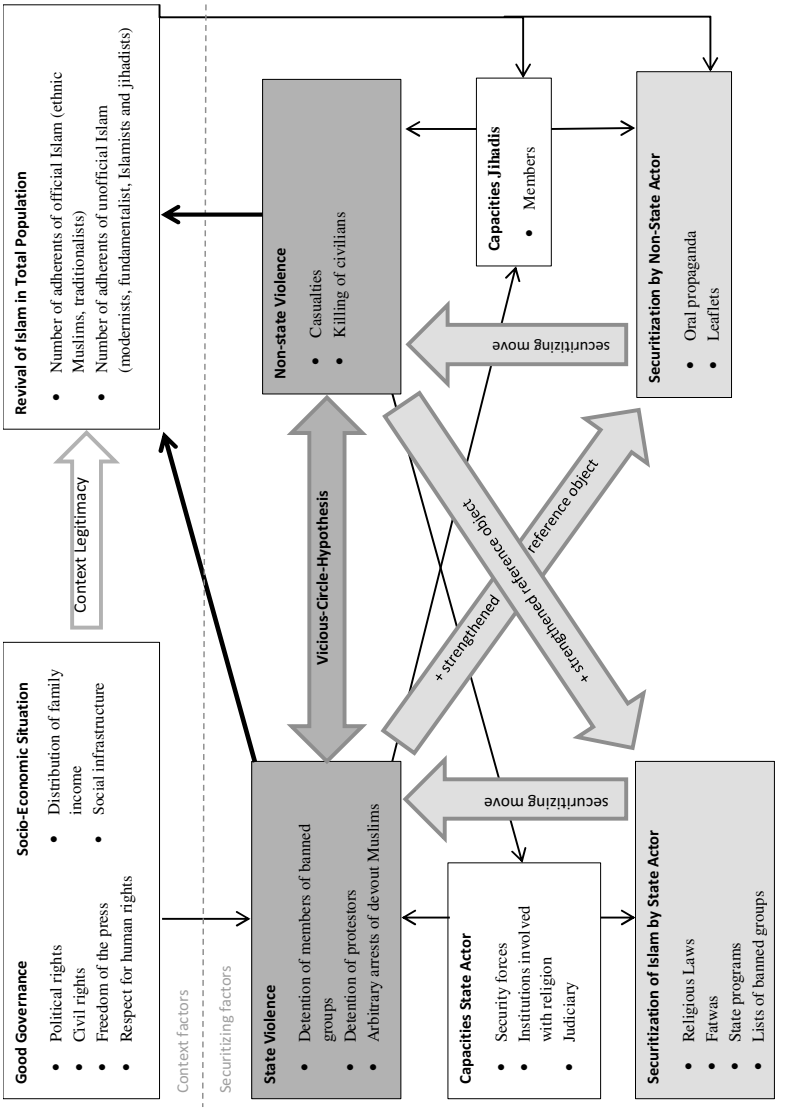
Securitization theory explains that the securitization of an issue takes place when a reference object is presented as threatened in a securitizing move. With regards to my research question I suppose that a vicious circle develops because a securitizing move on one side also results in the securitization of the opposing side. This means: violence by one party justifies the opposing party's perpetuation of the violence. The more repressive the state is against ordinary devout Muslims the easier it is for Islamists and jihadists to present the state as threatening the right to freedom of religion. However, the more acts of violence by non-state actors occur the easier it is for the government to justify its rigorous policies against all 'foreign' Islamic groups.

*Table 23: Securitization Theory in the Central Asian Context*

| | **State Actor** | **Non-State Actor** |
|---|---|---|
| Reference object | Positive: secure governmental power<br>Negative: freedom from sharia | Positive: sharia, Islamic society/state<br>Negative: freedom from corrupt leaders |
| Securitizing move | Speech act: restrictive laws, fatwas (issued by the Muftiate)<br>Practice: repression of the free practice of religion | Speech act: fatwas, other publications (leaflets etc), rel. instruction<br>Practice: jihad |
| Dispositive | Regulatory tools: institutions (ministry, muftiate)<br>Capacity tools: security forces, alliances | Regulatory & Capacity tools: members |
| Audience | Citizens | Religious ummah |

The following causal loop diagram displays these conflict assumptions and the vicious-circle hypothesis graphically.

### 10.3.2. Vicious-Circle Hypothesis as a Causal Loop Diagram



According to the causal loop diagram above, the following conflict assumptions elaborate on the hypothesis of the vicious circle of securitization of Islam in Central Asia:

*Table 24: Conflict Assumptions for Vicious Circle Hypothesis*

| | |
|---|---|
|  | **Vicious-Circle Hypothesis**<br>Expected correlation of repression and radicalization on the macro level by the Vicious-Circle Hypothesis. This correlation is not directly analyzed – securitization theory explains how the correlation comes about. |
|  | **Conflict Assumptions from Securitization Theory**<br>*State Actor*<br>• Goal: detention of terrorists and prevention of acts of terrorism.<br>• Intended effect (securitizing move): the aim of state violence (detention of alleged extremists and terrorists) is to prevent the spread of 'foreign' Islamic groups in the country.<br>*Non-State Actor*<br>• Goal: non-state violence is aimed at the physical or psychological weakening of security forces, the terrorization of civilians or material damage.<br>• Intended effect (securitizing move): to show the strength of the movement and probably gain new sympathizers as well as provoke a disproportionate response from the state. |
|  | **Counter-Intended Effects (strengthening of reference object)**<br>*State Actor:* violations of human rights might aggrieve people. Alleged 'extremist' and 'terrorist' detainees are especially prone to mistreatment in prisons – this fact as well as the conditions in the specific prison systems can lead to the radicalization of individuals.<br>*Non-State Actor*:[6] terrorist attacks alienate the population and convince them that political Islam is not a humane alternative to the existing regimes. Furthermore, they strengthen the acceptance of restrictive state policies against non-official religious groups. |

6 In the computer simulation I am interested in the counter-intended effects of state violence only. The counter-intended effect of non-state actors is not elaborated on in the computer simulation in order not to make the model too complex.

| | |
|---|---|
| ⇨ | **Context-Lecitimacy**<br>According to theories introduced in section 1.2 diverse factors (subsumed here as context-legitimacy) have had an impact on the revival of Islam (in Table 28 the measure of context-legitimacy is explained) |
| → | **Minor Influences**<br>(explained from top to bottom and left to right):<br>• Human rights abuses impact state violence<br>• State violence is caused by state institutions (security forces and religious institutions)<br>• These state institutions influence the securitization of non-state actors<br>• State violence has a direct effect on the jihadists' capacities<br>• Non-state violence has a direct effect on the state's capacities<br>• The revival of Islam has an impact on the strength of jihadists and on the extent to which the secular state is securitized |

In the next chapter I will translate these theoretical conflict assumptions as well as my conclusions from the case studies (see typologies in chapter 4 and chapter 9) into a simulation model. It will be interesting to find out if these very simple conflict assumptions allow us to forecast some important conflict features. It is generally accepted that models should be as simple as possible and as complex as necessary to have a maximum explanatory power. For the moment, therefore, I do not take into account interesting factors such as the internal organizational structure of religious groups or more elaborate assumptions on the composition of groups' demographic features. Instead, I concentrate on those aspects which are said to play an important role according to securitization theory and according to the findings of my case studies.