

**Israel as the New American Frontier:  
U.S. Securitization Strategies on Hamas, *2001-present***

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## ABSTRACT

On October 7th, 2023, the Islamic Resistance Movement, better known as Hamas, initiated an offense against Israel that resulted in an ensuing war with tens of thousands of deaths till date. Though both sides have been accused of war crimes, the United States has focused its attention solely on Hamas, presenting them as an imminent threat to (inter)national security that must be neutralized. This thesis examines the manner in which, as well as why, U.S. presidents have engaged in the securitization of Hamas, starting with the Bush presidency in 2001 until Biden's term today. The purpose of this thesis is to capture the discourse presented by U.S. presidents that securitized Hamas and offer explanations for why they have engaged in such strategies. The framework used for this analysis is that of the Copenhagen School, which sees securitization as a speech act. Here, securitization refers to the manner in which political actors prioritize issues on the political agenda by rhetorically positioning them as a threat to security. Accordingly, several presidential speeches were selected, upon which discourse analysis was performed. Through an analysis of these speeches as well as other source material, this research finds that the U.S. securitization of Hamas can be understood through the conceptualization of the New American Frontier, an argument based on Frederick Jackson Turner's American Frontier as the line between savagery and civilization. This thesis argues that the U.S. securitizing discourse of Hamas walks hand in hand with an imperial notion of Israel due to their inherent connection to Orientalism. As such, the idea of Israel being the New Frontier finds its reiteration in the securitization of Hamas. The research introduces the *Imperial Trinity of Discourse* as a framework vital to this reiteration; which includes how ideology, Orientalism, and hegemony have worked together to justify both the securitization of Hamas and the decades long U.S. support of Israel. As such, this research contributes to securitization studies as well as existing literature on the *special relationship*, by arguing that the securitization of Hamas has stood central to U.S.-Israel relations and the continued perseverance of U.S. imperialism.

**KEYWORDS:** *the special relationship, Hamas, securitization, Orientalism, United States, imperialism, discourse*

## PREFACE

*Discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized.*<sup>1</sup>

— Michel Foucault

There resides a power in discourse that moves beyond the real and finite boundaries of the physical; it lives on through people's voices, through institutions, through policy decisions... It is a power that is hidden and functions precisely because of its place in the shadows. This thesis aims to step into that place of harm and uncover the depth of its motives; illustrating the ways in which words carry a dimension that necessarily engages in forms of Othering by means of being spoken. It is the acknowledgment of this Othering, the defining of Others through the sole abstraction of the Self, that encapsulates the heart of this thesis.

Think for instance of the word 'terrorist'. What does it mean fully? More pressingly, what does it mean in the mouths of those that use it? The idea that one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist is not that far from the truth when one considers the way terminology plays with power. As such, this thesis acknowledges that terms like 'terrorist' carry a value which becomes real when being articulated. The way one uses such words tells us more about the narrative than it does about its object. And narrative — that is the place where power takes hold and is reproduced. Edward Saïd's *Orientalism* illustrates how the power of narrative production fundamentally engages with Othering. Even this thesis, by means of being written, engages with a narrative production that excludes and presupposes Others. Presenting Hamas as an object in this study does the very thing *Orientalism* warns of; another Western-based and Western-oriented inquiry into the Middle East. In no way do I wish to subscribe myself to the Westernized and Eurocentric view that permeates our daily lives already by means of media coverage and academic focus. Instead, I would like to take this space to shift attention to what most of academic literature neglects to emphasize; the subject of such dominating power; the people it insistently subjugates and the modes of resistance it necessarily creates. The amount of harm that is done to human beings in the Israel-Hamas war and long before it is easily forgotten in the existential stream that is globalization. A focus on institutions and governmental players in academia tends to neglect those human beings because of their set scale of analysis. Though this thesis may appear to be falling into the same trap, it aims to negate this through an analysis that uncovers those harmful shadows of political discourse to which those institutions and governmental players ascribe. This focus on discursive power aims not to neglect the people it subdues, but rather aims to fully understand the extent of their subdual.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in *Untying the Text*, ed. Robert Young (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1981), 52–53.

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## Chapter 1 — Introduction: U.S. Securitization Strategies on Hamas, *2001-present*

### Introduction

On December 29th, 2023, South Africa brought a case before the International Court of Justice, in which the country accused Israel of violating the Genocide Convention in their war against Hamas on the Gaza Strip. The United States discredited these charges as a meritless endeavor.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the U.S. has focused its resources on dismantling Hamas, as they have offered up to ten million U.S. dollars for those who can provide more information on their financial facilitators.<sup>3</sup> It begs the question as to why the U.S. has been so relentless in positioning Hamas as an (inter)national security threat, and what lengths they are willing to go to stop them.

The United States has vigorously opposed Hamas since its formation in the 1980s, condemning them for their continued use of violence and refusal to recognize Israel. The U.S. placed the group on the foreign terrorist list near the end of the twentieth century, and has envisioned them as a threat to (inter)national security ever since.<sup>4</sup> Especially after 9/11, punitive actions against the group intensified as Hamas was deemed a crucial obstacle in pursuing peace in the Middle East. However, whilst the U.S. was pushing for democratic elections in Palestine around that time, Hamas was gaining more traction and won the majority of votes in the 2006 elections.<sup>5</sup> Shortly thereafter, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip, which would eventually become the center of the warzone in the ongoing Israel-Hamas war.<sup>6</sup>

This research investigates the ways in which U.S. presidents have securitized Hamas in public speeches since the beginning of the twenty-first century until now, starting with the Bush presidency in 2001. Accordingly, the U.S. presidents under investigation include George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden, respectively. The research

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<sup>2</sup> Rédaction Africanews, “The US has dismissed South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ),” *Africa News*, January 4, 2024, <https://www.africanews.com/2024/01/04/us-says-south-africas-court-case-accusing-israel-of-genocide-is-meritless/>.

<sup>3</sup> “Rewards for Justice: Reward Offer for Information on Hamas Financial Networks,” Media Note, U.S. Department of State, last modified, January 5, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/rewards-for-justice-reward-offer-for-information-on-hamas-financial-networks/>.

<sup>4</sup> Nathan J. Brown, “Principled or Stubborn? Western Policy toward Hamas,” *Italian Journal of International Affairs* 43, no. 4 (2008): 73–87.

<sup>5</sup> Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide*, 2nd ed. (Pluto Press, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Prasanta Kumar Dutta and Jon McClure, “Mapping the conflict in Israel and Gaza,” *Reuters*, December 22, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/ISRAEL-PALESTINIANS/MAPS/movajdladpa/>.

uses the securitization framework as presented by the Copenhagen School, which focuses on how political actors securitize issues by discursively posing them as a significant threat to (inter)national security — with the intent of prioritizing them on the political agenda.<sup>7</sup> The research marks 2001 as a starting point, because, as aforementioned, the beginning of the twenty-first century altered U.S.- Hamas relations significantly; not only were they placed on the U.S. foreign terrorist list, they were elected into the Palestinian government, becoming a central political player in the U.S.’ long-standing ‘mediating’ involvement in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Additionally, there is no chosen end point, as the conflict is still ongoing. This means that changes in the U.S. foreign administration and discourse after the publication of this research are not included. Arguably, this does not harm the analysis of this research; only the extent of it. This is because the purpose of this research is not to infer truth or knowledge about U.S. discourse, but rather about investigating how the assumption of truth and knowledge functions as an instrument of power in this discourse.

Finally, calling the situation in Israel-Palestine a ‘conflict’ does not adequately address the extent of violence and brutality that is embedded in it. Tens of thousands of lives have been forcibly taken, not with the start of the Israel-Hamas war, but long before it. This thesis thus finds its social relevance in an attempt to uncover the power relations embedded in U.S. discourse pertaining to those lives. Analyzing U.S. securitization strategies will not only shed some light on their persistent pro-Israel mentality, but on what rhetorical tools have been utilized to justify and legitimize this mentality. This is ultimately rooted, as this thesis argues, in U.S. imperialism. As such, understanding the securitizing modes of U.S. imperialism in what is widely considered to be a post-imperial society will prove to be a valuable undertaking, as it aims to understand the polarizing depth of harm that such a discourse necessarily entails.

## **1.1 Research Questions**

This thesis aims to answer the following research question:

*How and why have U.S. presidents since 2001 engaged in the securitization of Hamas?*

The answer to this research question is threefold. First, it requires contextualizing the securitization of Hamas with regard to the Israel-Palestine conflict. This is because Hamas has become a key political player in the peace process. The analysis on the securitization of

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<sup>7</sup> Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

Hamas must thus begin with an understanding of what presidential campaigns and their ensuing narratives U.S. presidents have presented with regard to the conflict, resulting in the following subquestion:

- 1) *What presidential campaigns have U.S. presidents since 2001 presented with regards to the Israel-Palestine conflict and how have these been related to their (securitizing) view on Hamas?*

The second subquestion aims to understand how U.S. presidents have securitized Hamas, i.e. what heuristic artifacts (that is, rhetorical tools) they have used to convince their audience of the threat to (inter)national security that Hamas represents. As such, this section answers the following subquestion:

- 2) *What heuristic artifacts have U.S. presidents used to securitize Hamas?*

The third subquestion aims to understand why U.S. presidents have engaged in the securitization of Hamas. As such, this question connects securitization strategies with U.S.-Israel relations, addressing the final subquestion:

- 3) *Why have U.S. presidents engaged in the securitization of Hamas?*

## **1.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

At the core of this thesis' analysis lies a mode of discourse that connects securitization with imperialism. Ultimately, this thesis argues, U.S. imperialism has effectively operated through Hamas securitization strategies. As such, the theoretical framework below includes a small introduction into these two theoretical frameworks — imperialism and securitization — and their respective concepts.

### **1.2.1 Securitization theory**

This thesis uses the theory of securitization as defined by the Copenhagen School, which sees securitization as a speech act.<sup>8</sup> This means that when political actors intend to prioritize issues on the political agenda, they engage in a discourse that emphasizes an object as an imminent threat to (inter)national security. Such words include, but are not limited to, “security”, “threat”, or “danger”.<sup>9</sup> Whilst these words might indicate whether an issue is being securitized, they do not reveal what heuristic artifacts are being used to convince the audience of the immediate threat. In other words, for people to understand and relate to the

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<sup>8</sup> Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*.

<sup>9</sup> Erdoan A. Shipoli, *Islam, Securitization, and US Foreign Policy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

implied high level of danger, they often need context. Heuristic artifacts like metaphors, policy tools, and analogies, often help underline the gravity of the issue.<sup>10</sup> As such, building on Balzacq et al., this research includes three specific heuristic artifacts: mnemonic security, historical analogies, and Orientalism. The research builds on these three heuristic artifacts, because they are relevant in understanding Hamas securitization as rooted in conceptions of history and processes of Othering. Though the third chapter of this thesis will elaborate extensively on this, below is a brief explanation on each of the three concepts.

Mnemonic security addresses how memory is invoked to present an object as a threat.<sup>11</sup> Memory, as a political concept, relates to how politicians aim to create and contribute to (social) identity. It understands memory as an idea that is fixed in public remembrance; stabilizing a sense of self but also of collectivity. Memory becomes a heuristic artifact when it is used to legitimize a certain idea and criminalize others.<sup>12</sup> For instance, it can be used to explain why Neo-Nazism is considered immoral and illegal across the globe.

The process of criminalizing ideas inherently engages in forms of Othering, as the self cannot be construed without something to distinguish it by.<sup>13</sup> This process of Othering indicates that those that are not part of Us become the Other, defined solely by being an abstraction of Us.<sup>14</sup> As such, the second heuristic artifact used for this thesis is Orientalism; a theory or analytical lens that connects Othering with Western, stereotypical knowledge production about the Middle East. Specifically, in this context, Orientalism relates to how people from the Middle East are discursively displayed as being violent, exotic, and irrational — so as to better define the West as civilized, peaceful, and superior. As such, Orientalism forms a crucial part of securitization, as stereotypes and image repositories help build a network of securitizing emotions.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, this thesis makes use of historical analogies. A historical analogy asserts that when two events agree in one aspect, they may agree in another.<sup>16</sup> For instance, one may draw an analogy between current U.S.-China relations and the historic U.S.-Russia Cold War.

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<sup>10</sup> Thierry Balzacq, Sarah Léonard and Jan Ruzicka, “‘Securitization’ revisited: theory and cases,” *International Relations* 30, no.4 (2016): 409–531.

<sup>11</sup> Maria Mälksoo, “‘Memory Must Be Defended’: Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security,” *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 3 (2015): 221–37.

<sup>12</sup> Mälksoo, “‘Memory Must Be Defended’: Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security,” 221–37.

<sup>13</sup> Felix Berensköter, “Memory, Identity and Its Politics,” in *Handbook on the Politics of Memory*, ed. Maria Mälksoo (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2023), 18–30.

<sup>14</sup> Edward W. Saïd, *Orientalism*, (Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>15</sup> Balzacq, Léonard and Ruzicka, “‘Securitization’ revisited: theory and cases,” 409–531.

<sup>16</sup> Djouaria Ghilani et al., “Looking Forward to the Past: An Interdisciplinary Discussion on the Use of Historical Analogies and Their Effects,” *Memory Studies* 10, no. 3 (2017): 274–85.



These two events are separated in (either) time and space; and whilst one serves as the example (the Cold War), the other is the target (characterizing U.S.-China relations). Making a historical analogy may allow a speaker to persuade their audience of a certain message (for instance: a new Cold War is coming). Analogies have persuasive power either through legitimization (normative or cognitive) or through emotion-evoking images.<sup>17</sup> These specific factors are addressed later on in the thesis.

### 1.2.2 Imperialism

This research builds on Ann Laura Stoler, who argued that the extent of empire is best seen in the “analytic designation of particular forms of political, culture, and economic domination and organization”.<sup>18</sup> Behind these organizations lie the architects of empire, aiming to strengthen the imperial project. This makes empire not a “thing”, but an organization on the move.<sup>19</sup> As such, the extent of empire must be understood not so much in macro political entities but in ongoing processes that establish and produce power. Additionally, this thesis follows Stoler’s example to think about what empires leave *behind*; the people it insistently subjugates.<sup>20</sup>

This research aims to do so by building on the idea of *new imperialism*. This new imperialism has developed itself in the aftermath of postcolonialism and has been redefined through a political-cultural lens and a distinctly economic one. As for the latter, this thesis builds on Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin by stating that global capitalism is a vital part of the new American imperialism.<sup>21</sup> Through capitalist expansion and the discourse that accompanies it, the U.S. has strengthened its hegemonic position in a system that combines capital powers coordinated under its aegis.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the new imperialism has been culturally and politically reestablished by engaging with the legacy of colonialism. This thesis works with Derek Gregory’s *The Colonial Present*, by reaffirming the continued existence of notions of civilization and barbarism.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, this thesis addresses “imaginative geographies” as a fundamental part of this securitizing discourse, connecting the

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<sup>17</sup> Ghilani et al., “Looking Forward to the Past,” 281.

<sup>18</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, “Considerations on imperial comparisons,” in *Empire speaks out: languages of rationalization and self-description in the Russian empire*, edited by Ilya Gerasimov, Jan Kusber, and Alexander Semyonov (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 33–55.

<sup>19</sup> Stoler, “Considerations on imperial comparisons,” 35.

<sup>20</sup> Stoler, “Considerations on imperial comparisons,” 36.

<sup>21</sup> Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, “Global Capitalism and American Empire,” *Socialist Register* 40 (2004): 1–42.

<sup>22</sup> Panitch and Gindin, “Global Capitalism and American Empire,” 13.

<sup>23</sup> Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

spatiotemporal context with the discursive context of securitization.<sup>24</sup> These concepts are extensively elaborated upon in the fourth chapter.

Finally, this thesis argues that the reasons for U.S. securitization of Hamas lie rooted in the continuation of the imperial American Frontier. This argument is based on Frederick Jackson Turner's conceptualization of the American Frontier, which encapsulates the line between savagery and civilization.<sup>25</sup> This line is understood not as a fixed boundary but as a "moving line of military and cultural advance and retreat".<sup>26</sup> It is the idea of progress and civilization versus backwardness and savagery. The inherent racist and imperial footing of the American Frontier is the backbone of this thesis' final argument: that Israel has become the new American Frontier.

### **1.3 Historiography**

#### **Introduction**

The historiography of this thesis considers two different strands of (historical) research that are important to discuss here. Firstly, as this thesis builds upon U.S. securitization, the first two sections discuss securitization as a prevalent topic and mode of research. This includes first what has been researched thus far with respect to U.S. securitization strategies, indicating what topics have been securitized, by which actors, and what reasons they have held for securitization. The second section outlines the adjacent academic debate on securitization as an analytical approach, underlining the importance of introducing heuristic artifacts into the debate. Ultimately, these two sections form the basis of chapters two and three, which investigate how U.S. presidents have securitized Hamas. The last section of the historiography presents the historiographical debate on the nature of U.S.-Israel relations, consequently relating to why the U.S. has engaged in securitization strategies on Hamas specifically. This section thus connects to the fourth and final chapter of this thesis.

#### **1.3.1 U.S. securitization strategies**

Research on U.S. securitization strategies collectively began within the context of 9/11. Bush's 'War on Terror' had the prime purpose of framing terrorism as an imminent

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<sup>24</sup> Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 17.

<sup>25</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" and Other Essays*, ed. John Mack Faragher (Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Gregory H. Nobles, "Breaking into the Backcountry: New Approaches to the Early American Frontier, 1750-1800," *William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (1989): 641-70.

security threat to the United States.<sup>27</sup> Not just discourse, but a great amount of resources went into convincing the American public of the threat terrorism posed. Mabee argued in 2007 that the (discursive) focus on terrorism after 9/11 not only directed U.S. foreign policy choices, but orchestrated an entire bureaucratic shift as a result.<sup>28</sup> Since then, securitization scholars have identified several topics of U.S. securitization such as Islam and migration, but also economic campaigns such as the Belt and Road Initiative by China.

Shipoli in 2018 offered an extensive outline of the manner in which U.S. presidents have tried to position Islam as a threat to U.S. national security.<sup>29</sup> He argued that the securitization of Islam is not a novel occurrence after 9/11, but rather is rooted in earlier conceptions of how Americans view Islam and Muslims. Similarly, Colomé-Menéndez, Koops and Weggemans showed that the migration-security nexus has been a process of a variety of factors over time, moving up and down the political agenda.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, Shah argued in 2021 that under the Trump administration, U.S. policy choices regarding the China's Belt and Road Initiative were rooted in securitization strategies.<sup>31</sup> Though he contended that such a strategy was flawed and ineffective for the U.S., his research pointed out that securitization formed a focal point in the Trump administration. As such, security scholars have agreed that topics of securitization alter positions repeatedly, depending on the context they arose in, but also depending on which specific actors are intent on securitizing them. These actors predominantly encompass those who hold a position of authority in the political field.

The research by Colomé-Menéndez et al. concluded that a president has a leading role in securitization, due to participation in the design of national security policies.<sup>32</sup> Sjöstedt argued in 2007 that the essence of the Bush doctrine, whilst related to 9/11, came into existence by political and societal discourses that were formed by, but not limited to, securitization processes.<sup>33</sup> She placed securitization at the foreground of such a doctrine and ultimately rejected the importance given to 9/11 in determining the Bush presidency. Instead,

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<sup>27</sup> Fred Vultee, "SECURITIZATION: A New Approach to the Framing of the 'War on Terror'," *Journalism Practice* 4, no. 1 (2010): 33–47.

<sup>28</sup> Bryan Mabee, "Re-Imagining the Borders of US Security after 9/11: Securitisation, Risk, and the Creation of the Department of Homeland Security," *Globalizations* 4, no. 3 (2007): 385–97.

<sup>29</sup> Erdoan A. Shipoli, *Islam, Securitization, and US Foreign Policy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> Desirée Colomé-Menéndez, Joachim A. Koops, and Daan Weggemans, "A Country of Immigrants No More? The Securitization of Immigration in the National Security Strategies of the United States of America," *Global Affairs* 7, no. 1 (2021): 1–26.

<sup>31</sup> Abdur Rehman Shah, "Revisiting China Threat: The US' Securitization of the 'Belt and Road Initiative,'" *Chinese Political Science Review* 8 (2021): 84–104.

<sup>32</sup> Colomé-Menéndez, Koops, and Weggemans, "A Country of Immigrants No More?"

<sup>33</sup> Roxanna Sjöstedt, "The Discursive Origins of a Doctrine: Norms, Identity, and Securitization under Harry S. Truman and George W. Bush," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3 (2007): 233–54.

she suggested that securitization should become the key strategy for analyzing any political doctrine. In more recent years, academic attention has diverted towards Donald Trump and his securitization practices. Magcamit argued in 2017 that securitization presents an accurate framework to investigate Trump's economic foreign policy.<sup>34</sup> He offered a model that included populism as an important aspect of successful securitization. Magcamit argued that Trump was able to implement realist foreign policy due to populist securitization, meaning the *America First* doctrine granted Trump with enough state power to shape foreign policy.

Additionally, there has been an influx of research that not only addressed the link between securitization and presidential doctrines, but investigated this process over time and thus across different presidential campaigns. The aforementioned research on Islamophobia by Shipoli compared several administrations and their effect on the perceived threat of Islam and muslims.<sup>35</sup> His research argued that whilst some presidents have played a distinct role in the securitization of Islam (Bush, Trump), others have tried to desecuritize Islam (Clinton, Obama). The research by Michael D. Thomas also looked into securitization across time and presidents on the topic of climate change.<sup>36</sup> He established a theoretical model for the relation between the political and the military in response to the threat posed by climate change, arguing that ideology is an important factor in the military's response. As such, presidential doctrines and efforts of securitization strategies have been established as closely interlinked.

With respect to ideology, some scholars have speculated on why political actors would engage in securitization strategies (other than a perceived physical danger). Ambrosio et al. argued that U.S. securitization has mainly rested on two pillars: maintaining hegemony and promoting democracy in the international system.<sup>37</sup> In general, there has been a consensus in securitization studies that democracy and security are intrinsically connected in discourse; where one is compromised, the other shortly follows. Again, research by Shipoli showed that the U.S. has always justified its presence in the Middle East in the name of bringing democracy.<sup>38</sup> This is confirmed by Colomé-Menéndez et al., who argued that across U.S. presidential campaigns, the promotion of democracy is placed as a prerequisite for

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Magcamit, "EXPLAINING THE THREE-WAY LINKAGE BETWEEN POPULISM, SECURITIZATION, AND REALIST FOREIGN POLICIES: President Donald Trump and the Pursuit of 'America First' Doctrine," *World Affairs* 180, no. 3 (2017): 6–35.

<sup>35</sup> Shipoli, *Islam, Securitization, and US Foreign Policy*.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Durant Thomas, *The Securitization of Climate Change: Australian and United States' Military Responses (2003 - 2013)* (Springer Link, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> Ambrosio, Schram, and Heopfner, "The American Securitization of China and Russia," 1–33.

<sup>38</sup> Shipoli, *Islam, Securitization, and US Foreign Policy*.

American security.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Shipoli argued that it is the fundamental pillar of U.S. foreign policy.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, Shah stated that Trump's securitization of the Belt and Road Initiative can be viewed from the context of China threatening the liberal-democratic world order.<sup>41</sup>

Nonetheless, Shah also emphasized the role of hegemony in securitization; arguing that above anything, Trump's policy reflected a concern for the U.S. losing its regional hegemonic position in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>42</sup> The connection between securitization strategies and hegemony is also emphasized by Ambrosio, Schram and Heopfner, who argued that since 2015, the U.S. has felt more insecure in the face of a rising power competition.<sup>43</sup> Their research placed China and Russia as the foremost threat to the U.S. geopolitical position in the international system. As such, they argued, securitization strategies by the U.S. must also be understood from the perspective of maintaining unipolar hegemony.

### **1.3.2 Securitization as a mode of research**

Whether securitization makes sense as an analytical approach has been largely debated by security scholars.<sup>44</sup> Can one really infer when securitization is taking place? If so, what methods are capable of determining so? This section addresses the merit of using securitization as a mode of research, pertaining to its successes but also its limitations.

Overall, academic research has both scrutinized and utilized the securitization framework as a tool for understanding U.S. presidential campaigns and (foreign) policy considerations. Stritzel and Chang in 2015 argued that securitization, in order to be an effective analysis, must not be seen as a direct relationship from actor to audience, but rather as a complex process of resistance and acceptance; a political game of moves and countermoves.<sup>45</sup> Research by Zimmermann confirmed this view, when he showed that securitization moves, especially those that can seem ambiguous at first, owe much of their power to the manner in which the audience accepts it — or rejects it, for that matter.<sup>46</sup>

In this light, academic research of late has been prompted to shift its attention towards spheres that are not initially part of securitization, such as Stritzel and Chang's work on the

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<sup>39</sup> Colomé-Menéndez, Koops, and Weggemans, "A Country of Immigrants No More? The Securitization of Immigration in the National Security Strategies of the United States of America."

<sup>40</sup> Shipoli, *Islam, Securitization, and US Foreign Policy*.

<sup>41</sup> Shah, "Revisiting China Threat: The US' Securitization of the 'Belt and Road Initiative'."

<sup>42</sup> Shah, "Revisiting China Threat: The US' Securitization of the 'Belt and Road Initiative'."

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Ambrosio, Carson Schram, and Preston Heopfner, "The American Securitization of China and Russia: U.S. Geopolitical Culture and Declining Unipolarity," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 2019, 1–33.

<sup>44</sup> Balzacq, Léonard and Ruzicka, "'Securitization' revisited: theory and cases," 409-531.

<sup>45</sup> Holger Stritzel and Sean C. Chang, "Securitization and Counter-Securitization in Afghanistan," *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 6 (2015): 548–67.

<sup>46</sup> Hubert Zimmermann, "Exporting Security: Success and Failure in the Securitization and Desecuritization of Foreign Military Interventions," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11, no. 2 (2017): 225–44.

counter-voices of resistance in the war of Afghanistan.<sup>47</sup> This shift in academic focus can be found rearticulated in the recent work of Baysal on securitization, who offered a dual approach to the framework, noting those whose security is “insecuritized” for the sake of securitization.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Mabee argued that securitization frameworks should also include the institutions they build up, as the Department of Homeland Security finds its roots in the aftermath of 9/11.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, he stated, it is not enough to investigate the rhetoric of the Bush administration with regard to securitization, as security issues are also solidified by the protective institutions they set up. In a similar light, Vultee aimed to address the gap of media coverage in analyses of securitization.<sup>50</sup> He found that media acceptance, amongst others, is an important factor in declaring whether securitization moves are successful or not. As such, more and more factors have been introduced to enhance the reliability and validity of securitization studies.

Additionally, there have been scholars who have argued that the securitization lens cannot be used in every domain of the political sphere. Phillips argued in 2007 that using a securitization framework for economic policy misrepresents its substance.<sup>51</sup> Whilst there is merit in investigating the economic-security nexus, she noted, securitization should not be used as the prime analytical tool when analyzing U.S. foreign economic policy choices. The securitization framework offers too rigid a design in the volatile international political field the U.S. is navigating. As such, Phillips argued, securitization frameworks are not always as effective for certain policy analyses.

Finally, research by Balzacq et al. concluded that securitization theories should aim to include performatives, social commitments, regimes of practices and contextuality, in order to improve.<sup>52</sup> Underlining the importance of contextuality, they reiterated Balzacq’s earlier definition so that it now involves the importance of heuristic artifacts that an actor uses to establish the gravity of the situation. Some scholars have incorporated the use of heuristic artifacts into their analysis. For instance, Püttmann in 2019 argued that the securitization of Islam in Kosovo followed an Orientalist framework.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, in Shipoli’s work on

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<sup>47</sup> Stritzel and Chang, “Securitization and Counter-Securitization in Afghanistan.”

<sup>48</sup> Başar Baysal, “20 Years of Securitization: Strengths, Limitations and A New Dual Framework,” *International Relations* 17, no. 67 (2020): 3–20.

<sup>49</sup> Mabee, “Re-Imagining the Borders of US Security after 9/11,” 385–97.

<sup>50</sup> Vultee, “SECURITIZATION: A New Approach to the Framing of the ‘War on Terror.’”

<sup>51</sup> Nicola Phillips, “The Limits of ‘Securitization’: Power, Politics and Process in US Foreign Economic Policy,” *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 2 (2007): 158–89.

<sup>52</sup> Balzacq, Léonard and Ruzicka, “‘Securitization’ revisited: theory and cases,” 409–531.

<sup>53</sup> Friedrich Püttmann, “Securitisating the Oriental,” *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen*, no. 2 (2019): 30–44.

Islamophobia, Orientalism and securitization walked hand in hand.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, research by Yuen Foong Khong remarked upon the importance of analogies in the U.S. decision to intervene in Vietnam.<sup>55</sup> That being said, the extent to which security studies have dealt with heuristic artifacts is minimal at best. Despite a growing call for contextuality, academic research has focussed its efforts primarily on actors and institutions, rather than the core of securitization itself; the speech act. Accordingly, that is the precise aim of this thesis. Rather than adding on to existing research by investigating whether securitization is indeed taking place, this thesis looks at the *efforts* to securitize, which are ultimately (but not exclusively) rooted in political discourse.

### **1.3.3 Hamas and the *special relationship***

Democracy promotion and hegemony have been proposed as general reasons for why the U.S. has engaged in securitization strategies. However, this research aims to understand why the U.S. has securitized Hamas specifically. Their efforts of securitization thus lie ultimately rooted in the U.S. pro-Israel mentality, as Hamas has posed foremost a threat to Israel. This section therefore outlines the academic debate surrounding the historical relationship of the U.S. and Israel.

U.S.-Israel relations has been a topic thoroughly researched over the span of several decades. Academics and politicians alike have commonly referred to their bond as “the special relationship”.<sup>56</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov argued that this relationship is best understood as the dynamic between “soft factors” and “hard factors”, meaning the interplay between the sharing of values and the similarity of strategic interests.<sup>57</sup> According to his analysis, the United States only characterized their relationship as special once it enhanced their own global and regional interests. Noam Chomsky, writing sixteen years later, agreed that the strategic interests of the U.S. mattered primarily for their unconditional support of Israel, as for example, control over Middle Eastern oil has become a great concern for the United States.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, Chomsky recognized the soft factors Bar-Siman-Tov was referring to, indicating that a large part of U.S. support for Israel is rooted in American liberalism.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Shipoli, *Islam, Securitization, and US Foreign Policy*.

<sup>55</sup> Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>56</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, “The United States and Israel since 1948: A “Special Relationship”?” *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 2 (1998): 231–62.

<sup>57</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, “The United States and Israel since 1948?” 232.

<sup>58</sup> Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians* (Haymarket Books, 2014), 102.

<sup>59</sup> Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle*, 121.

In 2006, political scientists Mearsheimer and Walt offered the theory of an existing pro-Israel lobby within the Bush administration.<sup>60</sup> More specifically, they argued that the reasons for the unconditional support the U.S. has rendered to Israel go beyond shared values and strategic interests. Rather, it has been the consequence of “a loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively works to move U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction”.<sup>61</sup> Fundamentally, they argued that the main rationale given for Israel support does not hold up in light of the challenges the U.S. has had to deal with because of it. Rather, it has been the working of a pro-Israel lobby inside the U.S. government.

The *Israel Lobby* received a good amount of backlash, with many scholars accusing the authors of engaging in anti-semitism. Whilst Chomsky credited them for taking a courageous stand, he believed the *Israel Lobby* wasn't a very convincing case.<sup>62</sup> In the *Fateful Triangle*, Chomsky elaborated on why; the singular focus on domestic political pressures overestimated the influence of domestic pressure groups in decision-making and underestimated the support for Israel.<sup>63</sup> As such, the disagreement appeared to be a matter of weight; Chomsky mainly argued that whilst the *Lobby* might explain the *special relationship*, it does not (and can not) fully account for it.

## **Conclusion**

With the recent increasing influence of Hamas in the international geopolitical landscape, the U.S. has had to pivot new securitization efforts. This thesis hopes to shed some light on the ways in which the United States has discursively engaged with Hamas in the political sphere. In so doing, it sets itself apart from current securitization studies in three distinct ways.

Firstly, whilst there has been plenty of research on U.S. securitization strategies, the securitization of Hamas has remained unexplored. This research thus contributes to securitization studies by introducing the completely new topic of Hamas. Secondly, this research does not situate itself in measuring the success of securitization strategies, but rather by analyzing these strategies as the workings of a speech act. The central occupation of heuristic artifacts in this thesis aims to fill the growing gap that academic research has referred to as a lack of discursive contextuality in securitization studies.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, by connecting these heuristic artifacts with presidential campaigns, the thesis places emphasis on

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<sup>60</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Israel Lobby,” *London Review of Books* 28, no.6 (2006).

<sup>61</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Noam Chomsky, “The Israel Lobby?” *ZNet*, March 28, 2006, <https://chomsky.info/20060328/>.

<sup>63</sup> Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle*, 82.

<sup>64</sup> Balzacq, Léonard and Ruzicka, “‘Securitization’ revisited: theory and cases,” 521.



the spatiotemporal context in which securitization strategies take place. This spatiotemporal context includes issues of *when* and *where* securitization takes place, and, more pressingly, as will be clear later on, how the speech act itself makes use of space and time in order to securitize. Finally, this research contributes to existing research on the *special relationship* by adding a new angle: the role of Hamas. Whilst earlier research has looked at the political and social values of the pro-Israel mentality, it has not explored the securitization of Hamas as an important way of strengthening that mentality.

#### **1.4 Methodology and Sources**

This research aims to answer the following research question: *How and why have U.S. presidents since 2001 engaged in the securitization of Hamas?* This entails analyzing public presidential speeches since 2001, thus including Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden, as the presidents under investigation. These speeches form the core of primary sources upon which the discourse analysis is performed. As aforementioned, securitization strategies are captured by a discourse that establishes Hamas as a primary threat to (inter)national security.

##### **1.4.1 Primary sources**

This research aims solely to perform discourse analysis, therefore these sources are well-suited, as they are a direct representation of the rhetoric used by the presidents. The securitization framework by the Copenhagen School includes more factors in its investigation, such as audience and media. Though the purpose of this research is not to analyze these realms, it is necessary to reflect a bit on the audience to whom these speeches were delivered. A large share of the speeches were given at the White House, though some were given in Israel or Palestine. Arguably, the audience changes the content of the speech, as we see for example that Trump exhibited a much more polarizing attitude when he was surrounded by Israelis than when he was with Palestinians. For instance, in a joint speech given with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, he said “It is only reasonable that I have to do a lot for the Palestinians, or it just wouldn’t be fair. Now, don’t clap for that, okay?”<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the purpose of speech is of importance as well, as for instance the “On A New Beginning” speech by Obama in Cairo was much anticipated by actors in the Israel-Palestine conflict, Hamas included.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Donald Trump, “Peace to Prosperity,” transcript of speech delivered at the East Room, The White House, Washington, D.C., January 28, 2020,

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-trump-speech-this-could-be-the-palestinians-last-opportunity/>.

<sup>66</sup> Barack Obama, “On a New Beginning,” transcript of speech delivered at Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt, June 4, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09>.

Though factors like the audience and purpose certainly influence the content of the speech, this thesis is more concerned with its securitizing nature. The sources are thus not evaluated on these dimensions but are exclusively selected by their securitizing words. The limitation of these sources is that some of them do not explicitly mention Hamas but refer to threats or danger that implicitly imply Hamas. As such, discourse analysis requires in-depth reading. Additionally, as this research shows, the lack of naming groups also contributes to processes of Othering, which is crucial for securitization purposes. Finally, the sources have limitations because of their relatively small size. Not many public speeches were given by U.S. presidents on the conflict. Nonetheless, the speeches that are selected provide a good entry point into understanding what rhetorical tools have been commonly used across presidents.

#### **1.4.2 Methodology**

The speeches are selected by looking at the available presidential archives online on the basis of mentioning the Middle East, Hamas, or Israel-Palestine, and reading them in-depth. The speeches are categorized by President and Year, to help gain a sense of how and in what context presidents engage in securitization strategies. First, it is determined whether there is evidence of securitization, by looking at words that are used to imply an (inter)national security threat. These words are drawn from the Copenhagen School framework, and include, but are not limited to, ‘security’, ‘threat’, or ‘danger’.<sup>67</sup> The in-depth reading part largely determines whether a speech is securitizing. Though the aforementioned words are chief indicators of securitization, they are not its only indicators. For instance, mnemonic securitization rarely makes use of securitizing words, but rather grounds its tactic in a narrative production that excludes Others from that narrative. As such, whilst ‘danger’ may not be mentioned, ‘we’ and ‘they’ may already imply strategies of Othering and subsequently securitization. In-depth reading confirms this.

Next, the speeches that are labeled as securitizing are read in-depth once more, and thematized through open coding.<sup>68</sup> This thematization involves sentences or words that hint at mnemonic security, Orientalism, historical analogies, ideology, and hegemony. For instance, as this thesis shows, the repetition of 9/11, ISIS, or Al-Qaeda, in speeches about Hamas forms part of the large semantic repertoire of analogy-making. As such, the themes provide the

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<sup>67</sup> Erdoan A. Shipoli, *Islam, Securitization, and US Foreign Policy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>68</sup> Hennie R. Boeije, *Analysis in Qualitative Research* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009).

analysis for what heuristic artifacts U.S. presidents have used within efforts of securitization (subquestion 2) and why they have engaged in these strategies (subquestion 3).

### 1.5 Thesis Outline

The thesis proceeds from *what* presidents have done, to *how* they have done it, to *why* they have done it. Essentially, this means that chapter two investigates U.S. presidents separately, providing a political-historical context of the presidential campaigns with regard to the Israel-Palestine conflict. This entails using secondary sources to outline their policies; and connecting this to their discourse (the primary sources). Additionally, this chapter indicates whether the U.S. presidents have made use of securitization strategies and to what extent.

In chapter three, the thesis discusses what heuristic artifacts these U.S. presidents have employed to securitize Hamas. Three specific heuristic artifacts are discussed: mnemonic security, historical analogies, and Orientalism, respectively. These heuristic artifacts are pointed out across presidents; though each president has used one more than the other.

Finally, in chapter four, the thesis discusses the reasons for securitization. This analysis is grounded in connecting securitizing speech with existing literature on the *special relationship*. The chapter pursues three distinct categories of what is termed *the Imperial Trinity of Discourse*: ideology, Orientalism, and hegemony. Consequently, this chapter argues that through a securitizing discourse, U.S. imperialism has been reinforced. This idea is encapsulated in the New American Frontier; where Israel is discursively portrayed as the line between civilization and savagery.

## **Chapter 2 — The Everlasting Mediator: U.S. Presidential Campaigns on Israel-Palestine**

### **Introduction**

This chapter looks at each U.S. president separately, discussing some key pillars of their presidential campaigns on Israel-Palestine, and connecting this to their view on Hamas in this conflict. This chapter thus aims to answer the following subquestion:

*What presidential campaigns have U.S. presidents since 2001 presented with regards to the Israel-Palestine conflict and how do these relate to their (securitizing) view on Hamas?*

The chapter proceeds in chronological order, starting with Bush, following with Obama, Trump, and Biden. This chapter will not yet discuss *how* they have rhetorically securitized Hamas, but focuses on what presidential campaigns they have presented and what role Hamas has occupied in their discourse. By doing so, this chapter lays the foundation for the following chapters, as it situates the presidents in their respective contexts.

### **2.1 George W. Bush: The Anti-Terror Campaign**

#### **2.1.1 Americans and Israelis allied**

The Bush presidential campaign signified Israel foremost as a powerful ally in the ‘War on Terror’.<sup>69</sup> Whilst Israel was in a battle with Palestinian terrorists, Bush was involved in deepening security cooperations across the entire region of the Middle East, focusing on breaking down terrorist networks as well as the countries that enabled them.<sup>70</sup> Specifically, Bush stated, “America stands with you in breaking up terrorist networks and denying the extremists sanctuary”.<sup>71</sup> This ‘War on Terror’ was accompanied by a securitizing rhetoric, intent on creating two opposite sides: those nations that fight the terrorists and those that fund them. Bush emphasized this dichotomy when he argued that “every nation actually committed to peace will stop the flow of money, equipment and recruits to terrorist groups seeking the destruction of Israel — including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah”.<sup>72</sup> With

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<sup>69</sup> Elliott Abrams, *Tested by Zion* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 81.

<sup>70</sup> George W. Bush, “President Bush Attends Saban Forum 2008,” transcript of speech delivered at Newseum, Washington, D.C., December 5, 2008, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/12/20081205-8.html>.

<sup>71</sup> George W. Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset,” transcript of speech delivered at the Knesset, Jerusalem, May 15, 2008, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/05/20080515-1.html>.

<sup>72</sup> George W. Bush, “President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership,” transcript of speech delivered at the Rose Garden, June 24, 2002, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020624-3.html>.

this statement, Bush aimed to underline that those who do not recognize Israel or are associated with those who do not, are on the wrong side of the fight; and thus a primal threat to U.S. and international security.

As such, the bond between the U.S. and Israel was strengthened via an inherently securitizing rhetoric, focused on being allies in the ‘War on Terror’. Ultimately, through the securitization of Hamas, Bush intended to center the world around one particular enemy, the terrorist. In his speeches, Bush reiterated this, stating that “[The U.S. and Israel] share a powerful belief in a powerful weapon against the terrorists. We believe that the surest way to defeat the enemies of hatred is to advance the cause of hope to the cause of freedom — liberty as the great alternative to tyranny and terror”.<sup>73</sup> Here, Bush aligned the enemies of Israel with the enemies of liberty. In this sense, the role of Hamas in the conflict was not approached domestically, but rather as another enemy in the global ‘War on Terror’ Bush was intent on fighting, as he stated that peace can only be achieved if “all parties fight terror”.<sup>74</sup>

### **2.1.2 A reformed, anti-terror Palestine**

The creation of a Palestinian state was of central importance to Bush’ ‘War on Terror’ campaign, as the state was preconditioned upon Palestine dismantling the terrorist network.<sup>75</sup> During his presidency, Bush designed the Roadmap to Palestinian Statehood, which focussed (amongst other points) on presenting Palestine with new leadership as part of a larger democratic reform plan, backing his earlier statement that “no Palestinian state would be born of terror”.<sup>76</sup> This new leadership was meant to be now Palestinian president Abbas, whilst the former president Arafat, was meant to resign (though he never did, as he died not much later).<sup>77</sup> Repeatedly, Bush insisted that “when the Palestinian people have new leaders [...] the United States of America will support the creation of a Palestinian state”.<sup>78</sup>

Ultimately and evidently, the Roadmap never worked out, as, for one thing, it proved quite difficult to transfer control of the security forces from Arafat to Abbas.<sup>79</sup> The connection between the Palestinian state under Arafat and the ‘War on Terror’ is one repeatedly emphasized in Bush’ speeches. He argued that it is the Palestinian government’s

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<sup>73</sup> George W. Bush, “Remarks at the Israeli Presidential Conference,” transcript of speech delivered at the ICC Jerusalem International Convention Center, Jerusalem, May 14, 2008, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbushisraelipresidentialconference2008.htm>.

<sup>74</sup> George W. Bush, “President Bush Discusses Importance of Freedom in the Middle East,” transcript of speech delivered at the Emirates Palace Hotel, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, January 13, 2008, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/01/text/20080113-1.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, 119.

<sup>76</sup> Bush, “President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership.”

<sup>77</sup> Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, 312.

<sup>78</sup> Bush, “President Bush Discusses Importance of Freedom in the Middle East.”

<sup>79</sup> Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, 275.

reluctance to fight off terrorism that undermines their possibility of an independent state, arguing that “Today, Palestinian authorities are encouraging, not opposing, terrorism. This is unacceptable. And the United States will not support the establishment of a Palestinian state until its leaders engage in a sustained fight against the terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure”.<sup>80</sup> Again, globalizing his argument, Bush stated that “nations are either with us or against us in the war on terror”.<sup>81</sup> As such, the design of the Roadmap to Palestinian statehood stood central to his ‘War on Terror’ campaign, conditioning U.S. support of a Palestinian state solely upon their rejection of terror and the installment of president Abbas.

### **2.1.3 Normalizing Israel and winning the war**

Alongside a focus on Israelis as allies and creating an anti-terror Palestinian state, Bush also demanded that Middle Eastern nations normalize the existence of Israel. This normalization, Bush argued, was vital in winning the ‘War on Terror’, as he argued that in doing so “the Middle East will be characterized by a new period of tolerance and integration”.<sup>82</sup>

In pursuit of this goal, the Bush administration unconditionally supported Israel in a number of ways. For instance, the U.S. government gave a significant amount of financial aid that required no account of how it was spent.<sup>83</sup> This presented the risk that Israel used the money in ways that the U.S. opposed, like settlement activity on the West Bank. U.S. sanctions that resulted from this were a reduction in loan guarantees, which virtually had no effect on the amount of aid that Israel received.<sup>84</sup> As such, the Bush administration continued to support Israel financially, on the (rhetoric) account of America being “Israel's oldest and best friend in the world”.<sup>85</sup>

This clear financial and rhetorical support towards Israel could be seen in Bush’ securitizing rhetoric, where peace was presented upon the condition of normalizing Israel. Specifically, he stated, “as we move toward a peaceful solution, Arab states will be expected to build closer ties of diplomacy and commerce with Israel, leading to full normalization of relations between Israel and the entire Arab world”.<sup>86</sup> As such, by demanding that Israel be normalized and accepted into the world of nations, Bush again drew two sides: those that

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<sup>80</sup> Bush, “President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership.”

<sup>81</sup> Bush, “President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership.”

<sup>82</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>83</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 28.

<sup>84</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 40.

<sup>85</sup> Bush, “Remarks at the Israeli Presidential Conference.”

<sup>86</sup> Bush, “President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership.”

stand behind Israel and those that do not; the latter being accused of engaging with terrorists and the “old patterns of tyranny and despair”.<sup>87</sup>

## **2.2 Barack Obama: The Peace Campaign**

### **2.2.1 A rhetoric of hope and progress**

When Obama was elected President of the United States, he devoted his campaign to being anything but Bush, stating that “this cycle of suspicion and discord must end”.<sup>88</sup> Initially, this meant addressing conflict from a pacifist perspective, focussing on multilateral negotiations with all parties involved.<sup>89</sup> This different approach came after the ‘War on Terror’ campaign, which scarred the image of the U.S. in the Middle East with the relentless methods employed in fighting this war, promoting a “relationship [defined by] our differences”.<sup>90</sup> As such, Obama was intent on restoring this image, attempting to bridge the divisions and aim for peace in the Middle East in a non-violent way. For the Israel-Palestine conflict, this meant the creation of a legitimate, Palestine state whilst at the same time securing Israel from terrorist violence.

In his speeches, Obama clearly hinted at the legacy of Bush in the Middle East, stating that “Nine-eleven was an enormous trauma to our country. The fear and anger that it provoked was understandable, but in some cases, it led us to act contrary to our traditions and our ideals. We are taking concrete actions to change course”.<sup>91</sup> As such, instead of a rhetoric focussed on terror and hate, Obama employed a rhetoric of hope and progress, arguing that “That is the choice that must be made — not simply in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but across the entire region — a choice between hate and hope; between the shackles of the past and the promise of the future. It’s a choice that must be made by leaders and by the people, and it’s a choice that will define the future of a region that served as the cradle of civilization and a crucible of strife”.<sup>92</sup> By presenting a choice, Obama created a binary distinction that placed people on either side of hate and hope (still essentially defined by rejecting Israel or recognizing it, as becomes more evident in chapter three).

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<sup>87</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>88</sup> Obama, “On a New Beginning.”

<sup>89</sup> Cairo, *American Presidents and Israeli Settlements Since 1967*, 167.

<sup>90</sup> Obama, “On a New Beginning.”

<sup>91</sup> Obama, “On a New Beginning.”

<sup>92</sup> Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa,” transcript of speech delivered at the State Department, Washington, D.C., May 19, 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa>.

### 2.2.2 Call to renounce violence

This hope-centered approach is evident in the way the Obama administration securitized Hamas. Whereas Bush argued that Hamas must be denounced based on its violent tendencies, Obama argued that Hamas must renounce its violent tendencies, as he stated that they are standing in the way of a viable Palestine: “I would point out that all this stands in stark contrast to the misery and repression that so many Palestinians continue to confront in Gaza — because Hamas refuses to renounce violence; because Hamas cares more about enforcing its own rigid dogmas than allowing Palestinians to live freely; and because too often it focuses on tearing Israel down rather than building Palestine up”.<sup>93</sup>

Additionally, unlike Bush, who was intent on fighting Hamas, Obama argued that Hamas had a responsibility and a choice to give up the fight. He argued, “they also have to recognize they have responsibilities. To play a role in fulfilling Palestinian aspirations, to unify the Palestinian people, Hamas must put an end to violence, recognize past agreements, recognize Israel's right to exist”.<sup>94</sup> In its adherence to violent tactics, Obama said, “Palestinian leaders will not achieve peace or prosperity”.<sup>95</sup>

Finally, in this sense, Obama securitized Hamas not in a ‘negative’ light (portraying it as inherent evil) but in a ‘positive’ light (an evil that can be absolved). It could be absolved by recognizing Israel’s right to exist. As such, Obama connected Israel with peace. A strong advocate of democracy, he thus drew a distinction between (Israeli) democracy and (Hamas) violence. He reiterated this when he stated, “What we will oppose is an attempt by any group to restrict the rights of others, and to hold power through coercion and not consent. Because democracy depends not only on elections, but also strong and accountable institutions, and the respect for the rights of minorities”.<sup>96</sup> The administration enforced this opposition by interdicting weapons to Hamas, focussing on breaking down their network of suppliers.<sup>97</sup>

### 2.2.3 Security over scrutiny

Despite a rhetoric of hope and pacifism, Obama’s campaign can also be characterized as a decision for Israeli security over Israel scrutiny. In 2016, the Obama administration gave the largest military aid package ever to Israel, a ten-year agreement totaling thirty-eight

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<sup>93</sup> Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama and President Abbas of the Palestinian Authority in Joint Press Conference,” transcript of speech delivered at the Muqata Presidential Compound, Ramallah, West Bank, March 21, 2013,

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/03/21/remarks-president-obama-and-president-abb-as-palestinian-authority-joint->

<sup>94</sup> Obama, “On a New Beginning.”

<sup>95</sup> Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa.”

<sup>96</sup> Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa.”

<sup>97</sup> Cairo, *American Presidents and Israeli Settlements Since 1967*, 169.



billion U.S. dollars.<sup>98</sup> This is remarkable, considering Obama also repeatedly scrutinized Israel's policy decisions, ultimately ending his term with abstaining from a vote that would condemn Israel settlement activity as a violation of international law. From the beginning, Obama and Netanyahu had a rocky relationship, as Obama called upon a direct settlement freeze, stating that "The Palestinian people deserve an end to occupation".<sup>99</sup> Similarly, he argued that "Israelis must acknowledge that just as Israel's right to exist cannot be denied, neither can Palestine's. The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements".<sup>100</sup> Though Obama insisted on describing Palestine's situation as "intolerable", the Israeli government refused to stop settlement activity.<sup>101</sup> Obama's inability to pressure him into conceding made him appear weak to Palestine leaders.<sup>102</sup> As such, despite initially trying to be anything but Bush, Obama's policies resembled his, as he gave up the call of settlement freeze in return for limited concessions.<sup>103</sup> In the end, the U.S. distanced itself from being a mediator in the peace process, also seen by the resignation of the Special Envoy Mitchell.<sup>104</sup>

Nonetheless, as the size of the military package indicated, the U.S. had no intention of halting support to Israel. In every speech, Obama reiterated the importance of Israeli security, claiming that to deny Israel's existence is to "reject the earth beneath them or the sky above".<sup>105</sup> As for securitization purposes, Obama's case presents a less clear-cut case as it does with Bush. Publicly scrutinizing Israel yet not being able to stop the settlements did not help to position Hamas as a threat to security. As such, whilst engaging in some securitization tactics (as a result of the hope versus hate rhetoric), Obama's Peace Campaign was most certainly less securitizing than his predecessor's Anti-Terror Campaign.

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<sup>98</sup> Cairo, *American Presidents and Israeli Settlements Since 1967*, 184.

<sup>99</sup> Obama, "Remarks by President Obama and President Abbas of the Palestinian Authority in Joint Press Conference."

<sup>100</sup> Barack Obama, "On a New Beginning."

<sup>101</sup> Barack Obama, "On a New Beginning."

<sup>102</sup> Cairo, *American Presidents and Israeli Settlements Since 1967*, 172.

<sup>103</sup> Cairo, *American Presidents and Israeli Settlements Since 1967*, 176.

<sup>104</sup> Cairo, *American Presidents and Israeli Settlements Since 1967*, 177.

<sup>105</sup> Barack Obama, "Remarks of President Barack Obama To the People of Israel," transcript of speech delivered at the ICC Jerusalem International Convention Center, Jerusalem, March 21, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/03/21/remarks-president-barack-obama-people-israel>.

## 2.3 Donald Trump: The Israel-First Campaign

### 2.3.1 The Deal of the Century

From the start of his presidency, Trump was not hesitant to reveal his Israeli favoritism in the conflict, referring to Israel as “a light unto the world”.<sup>106</sup> The Trump administration put forward the Peace Plan, or “the Deal of the Century”, a report that very lopsidedly suggested how peace could be achieved between the Palestinians and Israelis.<sup>107</sup> Palestinian leader Abbas was quick to call his proposed deal the “slap of the century”.<sup>108</sup> This related first of all to the fact that the Trump administration publicly declared that Israeli settlements were not violating international law at all.<sup>109</sup> More specifically, he stated that the U.S. “will never ask Israel to compromise its security”.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, Trump changed history when he officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, ultimately moving the U.S. embassy there, stating that it “marks the beginning of a new approach to conflict between Israel and the Palestinians”.<sup>111</sup> As a result, Palestinian leaders grew frustrated and denied U.S. involvement in the peace process.<sup>112</sup> When Abbas refused to negotiate, the U.S. retaliated and cut U.S. funding of several Palestinian organizations providing services to refugees.

The Israel-favoritism campaign Trump was promoting was evident in his rhetoric as well. He argued, for instance, that the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital was only to “acknowledge the obvious”, stating that “this is nothing more, or less, than a recognition of reality”.<sup>113</sup> Trump linked his recognition of geographical entities to Israel’s security, as he said that “I am taking historic action to promote Israel’s ability to defend itself, and really to have a very powerful, very strong national security, which they’re entitled to have”.<sup>114</sup> The

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<sup>106</sup> Trump, “Peace to Prosperity.”

<sup>107</sup> A. Dirk Moses and Victor Kattan, “The Trump Presidency, the Question of Palestine, and Biden’s Business as Usual,” In *Chaos Reconsidered: The Liberal Order and the Future of International Politics*, eds. Robert Jervis, Diane N. Labrosse, Stacie E. Goddard, and Joshua Rovner, (Columbia University Press, 2023), 332.

<sup>108</sup> Ali Sawafta and Nidal Al-Mughrabi, “Slap of the century’: Palestinians reject Trump Mideast plan,” *Reuters*, January 29, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-plan-reactions/slap-of-the-century-palestinians-reject-trump-mideast-plan-idUSKBN1ZR2BN/>.

<sup>109</sup> Moses and Kattan, “The Trump Presidency, the Question of Palestine, and Biden’s Business as Usual,” 334.

<sup>110</sup> Trump, “Peace to Prosperity.”

<sup>111</sup> Donald Trump, “Statement by Former President Trump on Jerusalem,” transcript of speech delivered at the Diplomatic Reception Room, The White House, Washington, D.C., December 7, 2020, <https://il.usembassy.gov/statement-by-president-trump-on-jerusalem/>.

<sup>112</sup> Michael F. Cairo, *American Presidents and Israeli Settlements Since 1967* (Routledge, 2023), 193.

<sup>113</sup> Trump, “Statement by Former President Trump on Jerusalem.”

<sup>114</sup> Donald Trump, “Remarks by President Trump at Signing of Presidential Proclamation Recognizing Israel’s Sovereign Right Over the Golan Heights,” transcript of speech delivered at the Diplomatic Room, The White House, Washington, D.C., March 25, 2019,

connection between geography and security reinforced Trump’s pro-Israel case, as he argued that security is Israel’s number one priority, and is solidified by territorial possession.<sup>115</sup> As for securitization, this meant that Trump made the Peace Plan contingent on Hamas renouncing violence, which is where the enforced Palestinian responsibility stepped in.<sup>116</sup>

### 2.3.2 Palestine’s responsibility

According to Trump, vital to the Deal succeeding was the effort of the Palestinians, stating that it would give “the Palestinians the time needed to rise up and meet the challenges of statehood”.<sup>117</sup> Specifically, he required Palestine to “[adopt] basic laws enshrining human rights; protecting against financial and political corruption; stopping the malign activities of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other enemies of peace; ending the incitement of hatred against Israel [...] and permanently halting the financial compensation to terrorists”.<sup>118</sup> Again, Abbas was offered a choice; siding with the terrorists or recognizing Israel. Trump reiterated this notion when he said, “President Abbas, I want you to know that if you choose the path to peace, America and many other countries will — we will be there”.<sup>119</sup>

To invoke Palestine to get on board with the Deal, Trump securitized Hamas, as he aimed to emphasize that Palestinians were used as tools for terrorist agendas. More specifically, Trump argued that “the amount of needless bloodshed [...] in the name of senseless causes is beyond measure. The Palestinians have been the primary pawn in this regional adventurism, and it’s time for this sad chapter in history to end”.<sup>120</sup> As such, Trump argued that it is up to Palestine to make a stand against terrorism, as the conditions of statehood include the “firm rejection of terrorism”.<sup>121</sup> The threat of Hamas and the reason for its surrender in this sense were thus not related to the loss of lives or danger, but rather related to the conditions upon which Palestine would be recognized by Israel and the United States.<sup>122</sup> As such, Palestine’s inability to create statehood became solely tied towards its inability to renounce terrorism.

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<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-signing-presidential-proclamation-recognizing-israels-sovereign-right-golan-heights/>

<sup>115</sup> Trump, “Peace to Prosperity.”

<sup>116</sup> James R. Stocker, “One Eye on the Rearview Mirror: The Middle East from Trump to Biden,” In *Chaos Reconsidered: The Liberal Order and the Future of International Politics*, eds. Robert Jervis, Diane N. Labrosse, Stacie E. Goddard, and Joshua Rovner (Columbia University Press, 2023), 450.

<sup>117</sup> Trump, “Peace to Prosperity.”

<sup>118</sup> Trump, “Peace to Prosperity.”

<sup>119</sup> Trump, “Peace to Prosperity.”

<sup>120</sup> Trump, “Peace to Prosperity.”

<sup>121</sup> Trump, “Peace to Prosperity.”

<sup>122</sup> Stocker, “One Eye on the Rearview Mirror: The Middle East from Trump to Biden,” 450.

### 2.3.3 Make Israel great again

Trump's pro-Israel stance involved not just trying to salvage peace between Israel and Palestine, but between Israel and the wider Arab world.<sup>123</sup> The recognition of Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights played into this strategy of enforcing Israel's presence in a global context, as Trump argued it signified the "incredible possibilities when strong, sovereign, and independent nations chart their own destinies".<sup>124</sup> Additionally, the Trump administration initiated the Abraham Accords, which included trade agreements meant to establish diplomatic relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco, aiming to solidify international recognition.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, attempts by the United Nations to scrutinize Israel were consistently vetoed by the United States, as Trump argued that the UN "treated Israel [...] very, very unfairly".<sup>126</sup>

As such, as part of his pro-Israel international campaign, Trump engaged in a rhetoric that emphasized Israel's greatness as a sovereign state, ultimately sketching its opponents as "enemies of peace".<sup>127</sup> More specifically, he argued that "Israel is thriving as a sovereign nation, and no international body should question the contributions Israel makes to the region and, indeed, the world".<sup>128</sup> By doing this, Trump attempted to put Israel on the international political stage, presenting the nation as a worthy partner to democracy and peace. This stood in sharp contrast to Palestine, a nation, according to him, "trapped in a cycle of terrorism, poverty, and violence".<sup>129</sup>

## 2.4 Joe Biden: The Humanitarian Campaign

### 2.4.1 Palestinian innocence

Unlike his predecessor, Biden framed Palestinians as consisting of innocent bystanders, in sharp opposition to the "unadulterated evil" of Hamas.<sup>130</sup> His focal support of a

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<sup>123</sup> Moses and Kattan, "The Trump Presidency, the Question of Palestine, and Biden's Business as Usual," 332.

<sup>124</sup> Trump, "Remarks by President Trump at Signing of Presidential Proclamation Recognizing Israel's Sovereign Right Over the Golan Heights."

<sup>125</sup> Moses and Kattan, "The Trump Presidency, the Question of Palestine, and Biden's Business as Usual," 332.

<sup>126</sup> Donald Trump, "President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel in Joint Press Conference," transcript of speech delivered at the East Room, The White House, Washington, D.C., February 15, 2017, <https://il.usembassy.gov/president-trump-prime-minister-netanyahu-israel-joint-press-conference/>.

<sup>127</sup> Trump, "Peace to Prosperity."

<sup>128</sup> Donald Trump, "Remarks by President Trump at the Israel Museum," transcript of speech delivered at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, May 23, 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-israel-museum>.

<sup>129</sup> Trump, "Peace to Prosperity."

<sup>130</sup> Joe Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on the Terrorist Attacks in Israel," transcript of speech delivered at the State Dining Room, The White House, Washington, D.C., October 10, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/10/10/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-terrorist-attacks-in-israel-2/>.

two-state solution brought Palestine to the foreground, arguing that “it’s more important now than ever”.<sup>131</sup> In one speech, Biden reminded Israel’s leaders that “humanitarian assistance cannot be a secondary consideration or a bargaining chip”, referring to the civilians of Gaza that are caught in the crossfire.<sup>132</sup> As such, the administration has been involved in airdrop missions that bring humanitarian aid to Gaza. However, these missions have been under much scrutiny for being ineffective, as well as the Biden administration as a whole. There is backlash that Biden has been unable to divert Netanyahu from his destructive path, making the U.S. appear weak and unnecessary for the peace process.<sup>133</sup>

In his speeches, Biden used Palestinian innocence to underline the danger of Hamas. He strongly advocated that Hamas is responsible for the wrath the war has brought, and that the only way Palestinians could enjoy self-determination and peace is through the elimination of Hamas.<sup>134</sup> The contrast between words like innocence, mourning, and suffering, as opposed to evil, ravages, and slaughter, formed a big part of the Biden securitizing rhetoric. He drew a line between Hamas and Palestinians so that there was only one clear threat to be eliminated. This is also why he (like Bush) advocated against terrorism solely, underlining that “we condemn the indiscriminate evil, just as we’ve always done”.<sup>135</sup> As such, the Biden administration singled out Hamas as the sole cause of the conflict, standing in the way of peace between the Palestinians and Israelis.<sup>136</sup>

#### **2.4.2 Israel and their right of defense**

Despite the added focus on Palestinians, Biden constantly affirmed the right of Israel to defend itself. The Biden administration always strongly advocated in favor of Israeli security.<sup>137</sup> This advocacy is rooted in the link between the Jewish past and the American identity, as Biden argued that Israel holds “the idea of America: [...] freedom, independence, self-determination”.<sup>138</sup> For policy decisions, this meant that the United States has remained

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<sup>131</sup> Joe Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the Release of Hostages from Gaza,” transcript of speech delivered at White Elephant Nantucket, Nantucket, Massachusetts, November 26, 2023, <https://il.usembassy.gov/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-release-of-hostages-from-gaza/>.

<sup>132</sup> Joe Biden, “Remarks of President Joe Biden — State of the Union Address As Prepared for Delivery,” transcript of speech delivered in The United States Capitol, Washington, D.C., March 7, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2024/03/07/remarks-of-president-joe-biden-state-of-the-union-address-as-prepared-for-delivery-2/>.

<sup>133</sup> Josh Rogin, “Biden’s opportunity to break with Netanyahu has arrived,” *Washington Post*, March 7, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/03/07/state-union-biden-israel-gaza-policy-message-reset/>.

<sup>134</sup> Joe Biden, “Joe Biden: The U.S. won’t back down from the challenge of Putin and Hamas,” *Washington Post*, November 18, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/11/18/joe-biden-gaza-hamas-putin/>.

<sup>135</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the Terrorist Attacks in Israel.”

<sup>136</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the Release of Hostages from Gaza.”

<sup>137</sup> Cairo, *American Presidents and Israeli Settlements Since 1967*.

<sup>138</sup> Joe Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the United States’ Response to Hamas’s Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia’s Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine,” transcript of speech delivered at the Briefing Room, The White House, Washington, D.C., October 20, 2023,

the biggest supplier of military aid to Israel.<sup>139</sup> However, Biden's support for Netanyahu has wavered as the number of deaths grows, as Biden repeatedly asserted that "Israel also has a fundamental responsibility to protect innocent civilians in Gaza. This war has taken a greater toll on innocent civilians than all previous wars in Gaza combined".<sup>140</sup> As such, the Biden administration has been increasingly frustrated with Israel's military campaign and have questioned U.S. partnership with Netanyahu.<sup>141</sup>

The right of Israel to defend itself took an important role in the securitization of Hamas, as Biden stated that the U.S. will make sure "they can continue to defend themselves".<sup>142</sup> Biden rooted this right in the Jewish past, stating that "the Jewish people know, perhaps better than anyone, that there is no limit to the depravity of people when they want to inflict pain on others".<sup>143</sup> Moreover, in linking this right of defense to the American identity, Biden justified the use of violence against Hamas, as well as the support and involvement of the United States in doing so, stating "We will make sure the Jewish and democratic State of Israel can defend itself today, tomorrow, as we always have. It's as simple as that".<sup>144</sup> By affirming the longstanding relationship between Israel and the United States, Biden created Us (Israel and the U.S.) opposite Others (Hamas).

### **2.4.3 Back to multilateralism**

Central to the foreign policy of the Biden administration has been multilateralism, returning to those international relations and agreements which Trump had previously abandoned.<sup>145</sup> For the Israel-Palestine conflict, this has entailed resuming financial assistance to Palestine. Moreover, the return to multilateralism has also meant that the U.S. is working together with other parties more closely in the conflict, as a G7 summit in November 2023 indicates.<sup>146</sup> Biden also announced a new "economic corridor", connecting India to Europe

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<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/10/20/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-united-states-response-to-hamass-terrorist-attacks-against-israel-and-russias-ongoing-brutal-war-against-ukraine/>.

<sup>139</sup> Dov Waxman and Jeremy Pressman, "The Rocky Future of the US-Israeli Special Relationship," *Washington Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2021): 89.

<sup>140</sup> Biden, "Remarks of President Joe Biden — State of the Union Address As Prepared for Delivery."

<sup>141</sup> Yasmeen Abutaleb, John Hudson and Tyler Pager, "Biden moving closer than ever to a breach with Netanyahu over war in Gaza," *Washington Post*, February 11, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/02/11/biden-netanyahu-closer-to-a-breach/>.

<sup>142</sup> Biden, "Remarks of President Joe Biden — State of the Union Address As Prepared for Delivery."

<sup>143</sup> Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on the United States' Response to Hamas's Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia's Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine."

<sup>144</sup> Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on the Terrorist Attacks in Israel."

<sup>145</sup> Frédéric Charillon, "The United States from Trump to Biden: A Fragile Return to Multilateralism," in *Crisis of Multilateralism? Challenges and Resilience*, eds. Auriane Guilbaud, Franck Petiteville, and Frédéric Ramel (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 122.

<sup>146</sup> U.S. Mission Russia, "G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Situation in Israel and Gaza," Media Note, last modified, November 29, 2023, <https://ru.usembassy.gov/g7-foreign-ministers-statement-on-the-situation-in-israel-and-gaza/>.

through the Middle East.<sup>147</sup> This emphasis on multilateralism finds its way into Biden's rhetoric as the United States presented itself as "a beacon to the world".<sup>148</sup> In his speeches, Biden tried to get the image across that the United States is the ultimate mediator and leader, rallying "allies and partners to stand up to aggressors and make progress toward a brighter, more peaceful future".<sup>149</sup>

This multilateral rhetoric contributed to the securitization of Hamas, who embodied this aggressor, standing in the way of peace and progress in the Middle East. Biden consistently stated that the U.S. is working with partners to ensure "a better future for the region — a future where this kind of violence is unthinkable".<sup>150</sup> The emphasis on the fight against violence and the importance of operating together in the face of it not only helped to define a common threat but placed this threat as singular; it is *all of us* against *only them*. This rhetoric must also be situated in the domestic political issues that Biden is facing, with a growing divide amongst American Jews on the conflict.<sup>151</sup> The public pro-Israel identity has been fragmenting as the public has become increasingly critical of Israel. By pressing for multilateralism, Biden implied that differences must be put aside in the communal fight against evil (interestingly connecting Bush (on evil) with Obama (on unity)).

## Conclusion

This chapter aimed to provide an answer to the following subquestion:

*What presidential campaigns have U.S. presidents since 2001 presented with regards to the Israel-Palestine conflict and how do these relate to their (securitizing) view on Hamas?*

In answering this question, the chapter had two main purposes. The first purpose of this chapter was to introduce the presidential campaigns of Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden with regard to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Though each president offered a unique approach to the peace process, none of them were able to resolve the conflict. Additionally, whilst some presidents were considered to be more pro-Israel than others (e.g. Trump versus Obama), any impactful sanctions against Israel never occurred. All presidents continued giving large sums of military aid to Israel. Though the U.S. public has begun to appear less bipartisan, there has been a consistent need for presidents to publicly support Israel (no matter what).

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<sup>147</sup> Biden, "Joe Biden: The U.S. won't back down from the challenge of Putin and Hamas."

<sup>148</sup> Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on the United States' Response to Hamas's Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia's Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine."

<sup>149</sup> Biden, "Joe Biden: The U.S. won't back down from the challenge of Putin and Hamas."

<sup>150</sup> Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on the Release of Hostages from Gaza."

<sup>151</sup> Waxman and Pressman, "The Rocky Future of the US-Israeli Special Relationship," 82.

The second purpose of this chapter has been to link these approaches to securitizing rhetoric towards Hamas, which differed per president. Obama was especially set apart from the others, as his securitization tactics included a more hopeful approach, as he used a rhetoric of responsibility and possibility. This stood in sharp contrast to the others, who believed Hamas to be inherently evil and incapable of renouncing violence. Nonetheless, whilst U.S. presidents differed in their approach on securitizing Hamas, all believed Hamas to be a primal threat to security and the success of the peace process, from which the U.S. has remained its everlasting (self-imposed?) mediator.



## Chapter 3 — History, Terror, and the Orient: U.S. Securitization Strategies on Hamas

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the rhetorical tools U.S. presidents have employed to securitize Hamas. In so doing, it answers the second subquestion:

*What heuristic artifacts have U.S. presidents used to securitize Hamas?*

The heuristic artifacts under investigation here are mnemonic security, historical analogies, and Orientalism, respectively. The first section focuses on how the memory of the Second World War has been used to justify and legitimize the state of Israel, whilst rendering critique on the state illegitimate or immoral. This kind of mnemonic security has been practiced by situating Israel in a past of tragedy, linking Israel to Zionism, and ultimately securitizing anti-Zionism as a form of antisemitism. The second section explores the historical analogies drawn between Hamas and 9/11, the ‘War on Terror’, the Holocaust, and ISIS. The third and final section argues that Orientalism plays a fundamental part in the securitization of Hamas, by outlining three stereotypical conceptions that U.S. presidents have utilized: the Oriental terrorist, the violent Middle East, and the deceitful knowledge production of the two.

### 3.1 Mnemonic Security: Securitizing Anti-Zionism

#### 3.1.1 Israel and the Holocaust memory

In U.S. discourse, the memory of the Holocaust has served as the primary justification for both the protection and the necessity of a Jewish state. Its public remembrance has often been invoked to justify Israel’s continued protection, most evident by the persistent use of the words ‘never again’ across presidents. For instance, as Trump stated, “I pledged right then and there what I pledge again today; the words ‘never again’”.<sup>152</sup> Biden reiterated this, saying, “We will not stand by and do nothing again. Not today, not tomorrow, not ever”.<sup>153</sup> In this sense, the public memory of the Holocaust not only served to justify the protection of the Jewish people, but to make their safety and security a top priority. Ultimately, this made the creation of a state seem (rhetorically) necessary. Biden reaffirmed this when he argued that

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<sup>152</sup> Trump, “Remarks by President Trump at the Israel Museum.”

<sup>153</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People.”

“The State of Israel was born to be a safe place for the Jewish people of the world. That’s why it was born. I have long said; if Israel didn’t exist, we would have to invent it”.<sup>154</sup>

Because the thought of Israel was linked to the image of the Holocaust, U.S. presidents have grounded the importance of Israeli security in the past. For example, in the context of Iran obtaining weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Obama said, “When I consider Israel’s security, I also think about a people who have a living memory of the Holocaust, faced with the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iranian government that has called for Israel’s destruction”.<sup>155</sup> Similarly, Biden argued that the purpose of Israel is being the “ultimate guarantor of security of Jewish people around the world so that the atrocities of the past could never happen again”.<sup>156</sup> As such, the pain that is embedded in the public memory of the Holocaust is not just used to sympathize with the Jewish people but to render their own state politically and morally necessary. Obama argued that the acknowledgement of this is what has rendered the bond between the U.S. and Israel unbreakable; “the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied”.<sup>157</sup> Similarly, Trump argued that “The state of Israel is a symbol to the world of resilience in the face of oppression”.<sup>158</sup>

### **3.1.2 Legitimizing Zionism**

Ultimately, U.S. presidents have not only necessitated the Jewish homeland in a moral and political way, but grounded it in ideology by attributing it to Zionism. All four U.S. presidents have consistently argued that the suffering and displacement the Jewish people have endured over centuries on end was evidence of their resilience for a singular cause; the return of the Jewish people to their homeland. Bush especially articulated Zionism when he stated that Israel “was the redemption of an ancient promise given to Abraham and Moses and David — a homeland for the chosen people of Eretz Yisrael”.<sup>159</sup> Bush argued that the Jewish people “never lost sight of Jerusalem”, and as they survived the Holocaust, they claimed what was rightfully theirs.<sup>160</sup> Obama reiterated this when he said that “the journey to the promise of the State of Israel wound through countless generations. It involved centuries

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<sup>154</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People.”

<sup>155</sup> Obama, “Remarks of President Barack Obama To the People of Israel.”

<sup>156</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the Terrorist Attacks in Israel.”

<sup>157</sup> Obama, “On a New Beginning.”

<sup>158</sup> Trump, “President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel in Joint Press Conference.”

<sup>159</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>160</sup> Bush, “Remarks at the Israeli Presidential Conference.”

of suffering and exile, prejudice and pogroms and even genocide”.<sup>161</sup> Trump also argued that “The ties of the Jewish people to this Holy Land are ancient and eternal”.<sup>162</sup>

The repetition of the words ‘Holy Land’ across all four presidents reiterated Zionism, building Israel upon a larger historical premise. This premise ultimately became “the idea that people deserve to be free in a land of their own”.<sup>163</sup> As such, Trump said, “these ancient lands should not be symbols of conflict but eternal symbols of peace”.<sup>164</sup> Linking the (Holocaust-grounded) necessity of a Jewish homeland with Israel gave a tangible form to Zionism. This idea thus brought Israel beyond a political entity, into the realm of religion and ideology. As such, an attack on Israel was often put in a religious context, as Biden recalled, “Innocent people murdered, wounded, entire families taken hostage by Hamas just days after Israel marked the holiest of days on the Jewish calendar. It’s unconscionable”.<sup>165</sup> The public memory of the Holocaust thus not only rhetorically helped to legitimize a Jewish state, but rendered its existence the veridiction of Zionism.

### **3.1.3 Anti-Zionism or antisemitism?**

We speak of mnemonic security when a certain thought or insinuation is rendered unconscionable or even considered criminal.<sup>166</sup> Situating the Zionist legitimacy of Israel in the memory of the Holocaust, U.S presidents securitized anti-Zionist behavior by presenting it as a form of antisemitism. Though anti-Zionism and antisemitism are distinctive concepts, U.S. presidents have rhetorically utilized them as though they are the same. Noam Chomsky wrote in detail about the ways in which diplomats have used the two interchangeably so as to render critique on Israel an unconscionable and discreditable act.<sup>167</sup>

All presidents under analysis here made use of the same rhetorical tool. For example, Bush said, “We believe that religious liberty is fundamental to a civilized society. So we condemn anti-Semitism in all forms — whether by those who openly question Israel's right to exist, or by others who quietly excuse them”.<sup>168</sup> Correlating anti-Zionism with antisemitism became a securitizing tactic that uses public memory to discredit opponents of Israel. Whether or not anti-Zionists are antisemites, U.S. presidents created a binary distinction that

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<sup>161</sup> Obama, “Remarks of President Barack Obama To the People of Israel.”

<sup>162</sup> Trump, “Remarks by President Trump at the Israel Museum.”

<sup>163</sup> Obama, “Remarks of President Barack Obama To the People of Israel.”

<sup>164</sup> Trump, “Peace to Prosperity.”

<sup>165</sup> Joe Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the Terrorist Attacks In Israel,” transcript of speech delivered at the State Dining Room, The White House, Washington, D.C., October 7, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/10/07/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-terrorist-attacks-in-israel/>.

<sup>166</sup> Mälksoo, “‘Memory Must Be Defended’: Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security,” 221–37.

<sup>167</sup> Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle*, 142.

<sup>168</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

offered a choice between being either ‘pro-Israel’ or antisemitist; just like securitization aims to create a side of good and evil. In one speech, Obama clearly utilized this heuristic artifact, as he stated:

Because antisemitism is a distillation, an expression of an evil that runs through so much of human history, and if we do not answer that, we do not answer any other form of evil. [...] It’s why, when voices around the world veer from criticism of a particular Israeli policy to an unjust denial of Israel’s right to exist, when Israel faces terrorism, we stand up forcefully and proudly in defense of our ally, in defense of our friend, in defense of the Jewish State of Israel. America’s commitment to Israel’s security remains, now and forever, unshakeable. And I’ve said this before — it would be a fundamental moral failing if America broke that bond.<sup>169</sup>

Obama argued here that criticism of Israel policy or the denial of Israel’s right to exist is evidence of antisemitism, a conception which is amoral and illegitimate. As such, the memory of the Holocaust was invoked to use anti-Zionism and antisemitism interchangeably, which indicated that those who denied Israel’s right to exist, like Hamas, were acting immorally and illegitimately. Chomsky referred to this as the “totalitarian mentality”, which renders any deviation from support for Israel “an intolerable affront”.<sup>170</sup>

### **3.2 Historical Analogies: The Historic Return of Terror**

#### **3.2.1 Normative legitimacy: Hamas and 9/11**

Historical analogies may function through normative legitimacy, which asserts that the speaker relates the current event to a historical fact — and is an authoritative figure. The legitimacy of the message is thus grounded not only in the authority of the person but in (the public knowledge of) the historical fact from which the person draws from.<sup>171</sup> For instance, in comparing 9/11 to Hamas, the message is made that Hamas presents a critical threat to (inter)national security, just like Al-Qaeda did.

Biden in particular aimed to correlate the October 7th attack by Hamas with the attack on the Twin Towers by Al-Qaeda on 9/11, stating that, “Since this terrorist attack took place, we have seen it described as Israel’s 9/11. But for a nation the size of Israel, it was like fifteen 9/11’s. The scale may be different, but I’m sure those horrors have tapped into some kind of

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<sup>169</sup> Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama at Righteous Among Nations Award Ceremony,” transcript of speech delivered at the Embassy of Israel, Washington, D.C., January 27, 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/01/27/remarks-president-righteous-among-nations-award-ceremony>.

<sup>170</sup> Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle*, 121.

<sup>171</sup> Ghilani et al., “Looking Forward to the Past,” 281

primal feeling in Israel, just like it did and felt in the United States”.<sup>172</sup> In so doing, Biden tried to persuade his audience of the gross impediment to American security that Hamas represented. In another speech, Biden suggested that the Hamas attack may incite the same “Islamophobia and distrust we saw after 9/11”.<sup>173</sup> By means of this analogy, Biden argued that Hamas and Al-Qaeda have a similar level of threat, whilst reminding the American public of what this threat has felt like in their experience and aftermath of 9/11.

### **3.2.2 Cognitive legitimacy: Hamas and the ‘War on Terror’**

Feasibility (or, cognitive legitimacy) uses the notion that because a certain historical fact has happened, it is de facto possible that it happens again.<sup>174</sup> This kind of analogy can serve as a warning for or a justification of something. Different U.S. presidents have made use of the analogy between the ‘War on Terror’ and Hamas, suggesting that there is a lesson to be learnt from the past as to how the U.S. needs to deal with terrorists (or how others should).

For Bush, the past served as a justification for retaliation, reflecting that:

Some seem to believe that we should negotiate with the terrorists and radicals, as if some ingenious argument will persuade them they have been wrong all along. We have heard this foolish delusion before. As Nazi tanks crossed into Poland in 1939, an American senator declared: ‘Lord, if I could only have talked to Hitler, all this might have been avoided.’ We have an obligation to call this what it is — the false comfort of appeasement, which has been repeatedly discredited by history.<sup>175</sup>

In the same speech, Bush argued that the “words of hateful leaders” must not be disregarded, as that is “a mistake the world must not repeat in the 21st century”.<sup>176</sup> Similarly, Biden stated that “history has taught us that when terrorists don’t pay a price for their terror, when dictators don’t pay a price for their aggression, they cause more chaos and death and more destruction”.<sup>177</sup> Biden and Bush both used the past as a justification for their offensive policy-making; ultimately drawing an analogy between Hamas and their experience of the ‘War on Terror’.

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<sup>172</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People.”

<sup>173</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the United States’ Response to Hamas’s Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia’s Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine.”

<sup>174</sup> Ghilani et al., “Looking Forward to the Past,” 281.

<sup>175</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>176</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>177</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the United States’ Response to Hamas’s Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia’s Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine.”

Nonetheless, in another speech, Biden used the same analogy to warn Israel about the dangers of retaliation. Here, he reflected upon 9/11, stating, “I caution this; while you feel that rage, don’t be consumed by it. After 9/11, we were enraged in the United States. And while we sought justice and got justice, we also made mistakes”.<sup>178</sup> Biden suggested that Israel could quite possibly make the same mistakes in their war against Hamas as the U.S. did against Al-Qaeda. As such, as the analogy may have served as a justification, it was also used as a warning.

### **3.2.3 Emotion-evoking images: Hamas, ISIS and the Holocaust**

Finally, referring to the current situation as indicative of past events may result in images that persuade the audience of the connection. All U.S. presidents under investigation here have made use of past events that triggered emotions in their audience, so as to position Hamas in a negative, dangerous light.

For instance, Biden used the imagery of ISIS to compare the October 7th attack, stating that “Hamas committed atrocities that recall the worst ravages of ISIS, unleashing pure unadulterated evil upon the world”.<sup>179</sup> In another speech, he referred to the similar “bloodthirstiness” and “brutality” of Hamas to ISIS, using words that provoked images of violence and carnage.<sup>180</sup> Indeed, comparing Hamas to ISIS presented the idea that ISIS and Hamas are a similar threat. Using words like ‘evil’ and ‘bloodthirstiness’ are particularly securitizing as they exhibit negative emotions such as fear and helplessness.

Moreover, Biden routinely offered the analogy of Hamas and the Holocaust, with the purpose of emotion-evoking images, saying, “[October 7th] has brought to the surface painful memories and scars left by a millennia of antisemitism and the genocide of the Jewish people”.<sup>181</sup> Additionally, he termed October 7th the “deadliest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust”.<sup>182</sup> As such, drawing the connection between the havoc of the Holocaust and that of the Hamas attack, Biden painted a picture of horror that he used to emphasize the violent nature of Hamas. This helped to persuade the audience of the primal threat Hamas represents.

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<sup>178</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People.”

<sup>179</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People.”

<sup>180</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the Terrorist Attacks in Israel.”

<sup>181</sup> Joe Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People,” transcript of speech delivered in Tel Aviv, Israel, October 18, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/10/18/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-october-7th-terrorist-attacks-and-the-resilience-of-the-state-of-israel-and-its-people-tel-aviv-israel/>.

<sup>182</sup> Biden, “Remarks of President Joe Biden — State of the Union Address As Prepared for Delivery.”

### 3.3 Orientalism: A Region of Terror and Bloodshed

#### 3.3.1 The stereotypical image: the Oriental terrorist

Another subtle but strong heuristic artifact is the use of Orientalism; a distorted mode of understanding the Middle East as the sole abstraction of the West. In Edward Saïd's eloquent words, it is "to pretend that the principal consideration is epistemological and natural — our civilization is known and accepted, theirs is different and strange — whereas, in fact, the framework separating us from them is belligerent, constructed, and situational".<sup>183</sup> U.S. presidents have made use of the Orientalist framework by presenting a universal image of the Middle Eastern terrorist, a man devoid of rationality and filled with evil.

Terrorist is a word repeatedly used across all presidents, yet the definition remains remarkably absent. What really is terrorism? According to Mearsheimer and Walt, terrorism cannot be captured under a single organization, movement or even an "enemy".<sup>184</sup> Terrorism is a tactic, a way of attacking targets (mostly civilians) for particular, often fear-inducing, purposes. As those purposes can differ; the tactics can differ; the regions can differ; the people affected can differ. Yet despite this inherent differential nature, U.S. presidents have been adamant on positioning terrorism as a singular, all encompassing threat to national security. Hamas, ISIS, Al-Qaeda; all are part of the 'War on Terror'. Terrorism transforms from a tactic to a perceived mode of being; an idea of what the terrorist looks like and how he behaves. Ultimately, this mode of being is envisioned through an Orientalist, securitizing rhetoric.

As aforementioned, securitization presents a dichotomy that reminds the subject of good and evil; and presents the object as being on the latter side. Bush reiterated this notion when he stated that the fight against terrorism is a "it is an ancient battle between good and evil".<sup>185</sup> In the same speech, Bush offered the idea that this battle is "more than a clash of arms. It is a clash of visions, a great ideological struggle".<sup>186</sup> Terrorism, here, became an ideology; a far cry from a tactic. Bush often referred to terrorism as such, for instance when he spoke of it as a "force".<sup>187</sup> Trump employed the same rhetoric, as he stated: "I repeat again that we must drive out the terrorists and the extremists from our midst, obliterate this evil ideology, and protect and defend our citizens and people of the world".<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Edward W. Saïd, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), quoted in Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 24.

<sup>184</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 62.

<sup>185</sup> Bush, "President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset."

<sup>186</sup> Bush, "President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset."

<sup>187</sup> Bush, "President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership."

<sup>188</sup> Trump, "Remarks by President Trump at the Israel Museum."

U.S. presidents have offered a securitization that not only determined terrorism as a singular entity, but attributed certain characteristics to this entity that were implied to be universal. For instance, Trump told Netanyahu, “We have a long history of cooperation in the fight against terrorism and the fight against those who do not value human life. America and Israel are two nations that cherish the value of all human life”.<sup>189</sup> Trump offered here the idea that all terrorists do not value human life (which, regardless of whether this is true or false, subjects the individual terrorist to a universal abstraction). Additionally, Biden argued that it is the terrorist’s resolve to “bring you down, bend your will, break your resolve”.<sup>190</sup> Alongside these universal characteristics, U.S. presidents offered the idea that the terrorist is born and bred in one region only, the Middle East. Bush especially rendered the terrorist a product of the region, as he correlated terrorism with “the violent currents swirling beneath the Middle East”.<sup>191</sup> According to him, these “currents” would result for the Middle East “to simmer in resentment and export violence”.<sup>192</sup>

### **3.3.2 The distortion of truth: the deceit of Hamas and the pawn that is Palestine**

The securitization of Hamas was not only built upon the image of the Oriental terrorist, but worked through the distortion of truth and knowledge production about the geopolitical region in which this terrorist operated. There were two sides to this rhetorical distortion that served securitization purposes; first, there was the alleged division between truth and deceit that presented Hamas as partaking in the latter, and, second, there was the idea that placed Palestine as a victim to this deceit, using the imagery of a pawn to victimize Palestine and render it helpless to the wrongdoings of Hamas.

As for the first, U.S. presidents repeatedly referred to Israel-Palestine as a “false war”, fabricated by “the enemies of peace [...] as an excuse to divide and totally oppress the Middle East”.<sup>193</sup> Similarly, Bush suggested that “On the one side are those who defend the ideals of justice and dignity with the power of reason and truth. On the other side are those who pursue a narrow vision of cruelty and control by committing murder, inciting fear, and spreading lies”.<sup>194</sup> The binary creation of a side of truth and a side of deceit is precisely favorable to Orientalism, as it confirmed the notion that the Middle East is full of terrible, deceitful, murderous people whilst the West is truthful and morally superior. When Bush argued that

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<sup>189</sup> Trump, “President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel in Joint Press Conference.”

<sup>190</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People.”

<sup>191</sup> Bush, “President Bush Attends Saban Forum 2008.”

<sup>192</sup> Bush, “President Bush Attends Saban Forum 2008.”

<sup>193</sup> Trump, “Peace to Prosperity.”

<sup>194</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”



the terrorists only have “their own desire for power”, arguably, he concerned himself not with truth, but the assumption of truth that helped paint a picture of Hamas as an immoral entity.<sup>195</sup>

The second distortion of truth that offered a subtle but decidedly Oriental understanding of the Middle East was the way Palestine was presented in the context of Hamas. From Bush till Biden, Palestine was described as a pawn in the wider “turmoil” of the Middle East.<sup>196</sup> The characterization of Palestine as a pawn contributed to the securitization of Hamas through three distinct effects, relating to a distortion of truth on Palestinian agency, the role of Israel, and on the Middle East as a region.

First, it neglected Palestine’s agency in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The repeated use of the word ‘pawn’ suggested that Palestine has been unable to alter or influence what has happened to them, as a state or as a people. Specifically, as Trump suggested, “Palestinians have been trapped in a cycle of terrorism, poverty, and violence, exploited by those seeking to use them as pawns to advance terrorism and extremism”.<sup>197</sup> Bush reiterated this when he said, “I can understand the deep anger and despair of the Palestinian people. For decades you’ve been treated as pawns in the Middle East conflict”.<sup>198</sup> Yet arguably, rather than a story of pawns and subjugation, the Intifada has told a story of resistance and power.<sup>199</sup> As such, the imagery of a pawn effectively took away Palestinians’ agency and put Hamas at the forefront of their suffering, as engaging in ““regional adventurism” and “needless bloodshed” in the “name of senseless causes”.<sup>200</sup>

Secondly, the pawn imagery helped to render Israel as outside of the violence to which Palestine has been subjected. In turn, it attributed the violence solely to Hamas, as Biden stated that the Palestinians “are suffering greatly because of this war that Hamas has unleashed”.<sup>201</sup> This kind of rhetoric thus offered the idea that Palestine’s suffering was exclusively connected to Hamas, and could be absolved by their surrender (hence explaining the repeated insistence by Obama for Hamas to take their responsibility).<sup>202</sup>

Finally, on a larger scale, the pawn imagery dictated that the Middle East was a region submerged in violence and conflict from which Palestine has been its victim. Similar to the universal Oriental terrorist assumption, it offered the idea that the entirety of the Middle East

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<sup>195</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>196</sup> Bush, “President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership.”

<sup>197</sup> Trump, “President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel in Joint Press Conference.”

<sup>198</sup> Bush, “President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership.”

<sup>199</sup> Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle*, 1229.

<sup>200</sup> Trump, “President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel in Joint Press Conference.”

<sup>201</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People.”

<sup>202</sup> Obama, “On a New Beginning.”

was a region “held at bay by bloodshed, ignorance, and terror”, from which Palestine has been its sorrowful subject.<sup>203</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to answer the following question:

*What heuristic artifacts have U.S. presidents used to securitize Hamas?*

The analysis above indicated that the use of heuristic artifacts has been evident across all U.S. presidents, though some have used them more than others. For instance, Obama has most assuredly been the frontrunner when it came to securitizing anti-Zionism, as he linked the rejection of Israel to antisemitism. As for historical analogies, Biden repeatedly used them; not just 9/11, but other terrorist events were recalled consistently to remind the public of the security threat of Hamas. Finally, Orientalism was most often employed by Bush and Trump, as the Middle East became a region submerged in violence, terrorism, and deceit, with Palestine as its victim and Hamas its aggressor.

As chapter two outlined U.S. presidential campaigns and their securitizing nature, this chapter has specified the rhetorical devices that U.S. presidents have used to persuade the audience of the Hamas threat. These two chapters have thus captured the spatiotemporal and discursive contexts of U.S. securitization strategies respectively. Now all that remains is, *why?*

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<sup>203</sup> Trump, “Statement by Former President Trump on Jerusalem.”

## Chapter 4 – The Imperial Trinity of Discourse: Ideology, Orientalism, and Hegemony

### Introduction

Fundamentally, understanding why U.S. presidents have engaged in securitization has little to do with the inherent violent tactics of Hamas but more to do with the decades long (political and economic) support of Israel. After all, the security issue that Hamas has represented is first and foremost directed towards the state of Israel rather than the United States. Israel, nonetheless, has been under international scrutiny since its creation due to (expansive) aggression and repeated violations of agreements.<sup>204</sup> This has caused Israel to be viewed as a “pariah” in the international sphere.<sup>205</sup> Yet — the United States, at the risk of domestic and international backlash, has been unequivocally supportive of Israel. This chapter aims to understand why this is the case, ultimately answering the final subquestion:

*Why have U.S. presidents engaged in securitization strategies on Hamas?*

The question why state actors behave the way they do is at the core of International Relations theory. Its answer fully depends on the person asking; the historical, political, social, or cultural context they live in; and what answer they are aiming to arrive at. Liberal theorists, realists, idealists... though vastly different, they all have one thing in common; the power of perspective. This chapter engages with questions of *why* in a manner that uses imperial theory as its beginning and end point. Whilst earlier chapters have focussed on rhetoric in combination with presidential campaigns (chapter two) and heuristic artifacts (chapter three), this chapter aims to weave those chapters together through a lens that captures the heart of U.S. foreign policy; the pursuit of U.S. imperialism in a postcolonial era.

Ultimately, this chapter presents the final and overarching argument of this thesis, illustrating that Israel has become the new American frontier. As mentioned elsewhere, the “American frontier” is a term derived from Frederick Jackson Turner, who theorized it as the “the outer edge of the wave — the meeting point between savagery and civilization”.<sup>206</sup> This thesis argues that imperialism stands vital to understanding why U.S. presidents have securitized Hamas. Israel has been rhetorically positioned as the line between civilization and savagery; between the West and the East; between Man and Other. Despite the age of postcolonialism, the U.S. has been playing the imperial game; operating in a region of

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<sup>204</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 80.

<sup>205</sup> Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle*, 12.

<sup>206</sup> Turner, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*, 32.

‘wilderness’ they have aimed to control. This chapter outlines three specific discursive features of this American frontier, which are termed *the Imperial Trinity of Discourse*, drawing on ideas from ideology, Orientalism, and hegemonic theory. Inherently, the chapter connects U.S. securitizing rhetoric with imperialism, building on Edward Saïd (and Foucault, implicitly) throughout.

#### **4.1 Ideology: The Civilizing Mission Revisited**

The securitizing discourse by U.S. presidents has captured three elements of U.S. ideology that relate to the imperial idea of a “civilizing mission”, the notion that imperialism works to civilize countries incapable of civilizing themselves.<sup>207</sup> First of all, there is democracy promotion; the idea that democracy is the superior political system that all countries must strive for. Secondly, there is the notion that because the U.S. has already established a superior democracy, they are capable of helping others to do the same. Finally, because the U.S. has been the frontrunner of civilization, they have carried a moral responsibility to lead the world.

##### **4.1.1 Democracy promotion**

Democracy promotion has indeed formed a core part of the U.S. securitization rhetoric, not only against Hamas specifically but against terrorism as a concept. Bush articulated this when he stated that “We believe that the surest way to defeat the enemies of hatred is to advance the cause of hope to the cause of freedom — liberty as the great alternative to tyranny and terror”.<sup>208</sup> In a different speech, he recalled “the fundamental insight, that freedom yields peace, is the great lesson of the 20th century”.<sup>209</sup> Biden also fondly presented democracy as the motivating power for peace, as he argued that “just as in World War Two, today, patriotic American workers are building the arsenal of democracy and serving the cause of freedom”.<sup>210</sup> In the fight against Hamas, he believed, “freedom will win”.<sup>211</sup>

Additionally, the goal of democracy has been what connected Israel and the United States, as Obama argued that the two of them “share a stake in the success of democracy”.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Andrew Sartori, “The British Empire and Its Liberal Mission,” *Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 3 (2006): 627.

<sup>208</sup> Bush, “Remarks at the Israeli Presidential Conference.”

<sup>209</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>210</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the United States’ Response to Hamas’s Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia’s Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine.”

<sup>211</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People.”

<sup>212</sup> Barack, “Remarks of President Barack Obama To the People of Israel.”

The sharing of democratic values as inherent to U.S. support reminds us of the research by Bar-Siman-Tov, who argued that the *special relationship* can be understood in part due to its “soft factors”, a community of values that includes a shared democratic identity.<sup>213</sup> Obama recalled this communal identity when he stated that, “As the only true democracy of the Middle East, [Israel] is a source of admiration and inspiration for the American people”.<sup>214</sup> Additionally, Bush argued that “The source of our friendship [...] is grounded in the shared spirit of our people, the bonds of the Book, the ties of the soul”.<sup>215</sup>

Ultimately, this ideological connection presents one of the reasons why the U.S. has been so adamant on supporting Israel. Mearsheimer and Walt referred to it as part of the “morale rationale”; aiding a fellow democracy in a time of need.<sup>216</sup> Indeed, as Biden promised, “Israel will be a safe, secure, Jewish, and Democratic state today, tomorrow, and forever”.<sup>217</sup>

#### **4.1.2 With the guidance of America**

Another key element of the civilizing mission has been that the imperial nation is in a unique position to help others to get to a more civilized state of being. Bush often reiterated the notion that the U.S. has helped nations on their path to freedom, stating that “[A free Asia] would not have been possible without America's presence and perseverance over many decades. And just as our commitment to Asia helped people there secure their freedom and prosperity, our commitment to the Middle East will help you achieve yours. And you can know from our record in Asia that our commitment is real, it is strong, and it is lasting”.<sup>218</sup>

However, in order to help, Bush argued, nations must “confront the moral relativism that views all forms of government as equally acceptable and thereby consigns whole societies to slavery”.<sup>219</sup> This confrontation has often needed violence to succeed, as the imperial ideology holds that there is a distinction between those nations that are capable of democracy and those that must be subdued to violence to become ready for it.<sup>220</sup> This idea of ‘readiness’ is found rearticulated in Bush’s speeches, as he stated, “They say that the Arab

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<sup>213</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, “The United States and Israel since 1948,” 232.

<sup>214</sup> Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in press availability,” transcript of speech delivered at the Oval Office, the White House, Washington, D.C., May 18, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-and-israeli-prime-minister-netanyahu-press-availability>.

<sup>215</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>216</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 86.

<sup>217</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People.”

<sup>218</sup> Bush, “President Bush Discusses Importance of Freedom in the Middle East.”

<sup>219</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>220</sup> Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 255.

people are not ‘ready’ for democracy. Of course, that is exactly what people said about the Japanese after World War II”.<sup>221</sup> The idea that a nation can be ‘ready’ for democracy implied not only a superior notion of democracy, but a hierarchized idea of civilization that is inherent to the imperial ideology of the civilizing mission.

#### **4.1.3 The U.S. as civilizational leader**

Finally, a key characteristic of the civilizing mission has been the near God-given belief that the better abled should rule others in order to advance the expansion of civilization.<sup>222</sup> As such, alongside the idea that the American empire is capable of helping nations realize their (democratic) potential, there is the normative dimension that they hold the responsibility to do so. Biden articulated this when he stated that “American leadership is what holds the world together. American alliances are what keep us, America, safe. American values are what make us a partner that other nations want to work with”.<sup>223</sup> In the same speech, he asked, “What would happen if we walked away? We are the essential nation”.<sup>224</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt referred to this line of reasoning as “backing the underdog”, where Israel was seen as the only true nation in the region surrounded by actors who were determined to destroy it.<sup>225</sup>

Regardless of such a malleable thing as the truth, the discourse employed by U.S. presidents indeed suggested a responsibility to watch over their democratic partner in the Middle East, as well as the region as a whole. Biden confirmed, “As we look to the future, we have to end this cycle of violence in the Middle East”.<sup>226</sup> Ultimately, he saw “a future where all children in the region — every child — Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Israeli, Palestinian, Arab — grow up knowing only peace. That’s what we do”.<sup>227</sup>

The notion of imperial responsibility in U.S. foreign policy was evident across all presidents under examination here. For Bush, it meant leading the ‘War on Terror’, whilst for Obama, it meant assigning a special envoy to handle the Israel-Palestine conflict. For Trump, the discourse of responsibility was predominantly economically-oriented, whilst for Biden, mainly political. Regardless of the context, U.S. discourse has confirmed how liberal ideas such as democracy were easily transformed into notions of “imperial responsibility and

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<sup>221</sup> Bush, “President Bush Discusses Importance of Freedom in the Middle East.”

<sup>222</sup> Sartori, “The British Empire and Its Liberal Mission,” 627.

<sup>223</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the United States’ Response to Hamas’s Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia’s Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine.”

<sup>224</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the United States’ Response to Hamas’s Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia’s Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine.”

<sup>225</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 81.

<sup>226</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the Release of Hostages from Gaza.”

<sup>227</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the Release of Hostages from Gaza.”

civilizational duty”.<sup>228</sup> The help the U.S. has offered has always been undoubtedly needed and desperately wanted. That is the essence of the civilizing mission; the Western heroes that are destined to push the boundaries of civilization further and the Others agreeably waiting for them to do so on the other side.

## **4.2 Orientalism: The Savage Middle East and Civilized Israel**

In defining these Others, Orientalism steps in. This section discusses three particular elements of the U.S. securitizing discourse that have reflected Orientalism. First, that the region is submerged in violence and terrorists. Second, that former Palestine was a spot of land with no value or designation. Lastly, that Israel has been the one prosperous, civilized nation amidst the violence of the Middle East. In particular, this section encompasses the spatiotemporal context of discourse, or, the way in which space and time have been used and misused to explain U.S.’ support for Israel.

### **4.2.1 Terror and violence all around**

Central to not just the tactics of securitization (as evident by chapter three), but to the continued support of Israel has been the depiction of the Middle East as a region submerged in terror and violence. The earlier-mentioned quote by Trump as a region “held at bay by bloodshed, ignorance, and terror” has been telling of the wider U.S.-produced narrative surrounding the Middle East.<sup>229</sup> The depiction of a region as inherently violent relates to what Edward Saïd introduced as “imaginative geographies”.<sup>230</sup> This concept works with the power of cognition; the construction of a space solely as an abstraction from a familiar space. In its essence, it is the inverse of ‘our’ space: the ‘Other’ space possesses the qualities that we do not (or vice versa). They are “imaginings given substance”.<sup>231</sup> In the context of empire, imaginative geographies are given substance through ideas of civilization and barbarism.<sup>232</sup> The Middle East is thus transformed into a place of barbarism, the stage on which Orientalism — and, imperialism — is set.

This conception of the Middle East as a region of barbarism has been reflected throughout U.S. discourse. For instance, Bush referred to the Middle East as “a set of problems to be solved, or the site of energy resources to be developed”.<sup>233</sup> Consistently, the

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<sup>228</sup> Sartori, “The British Empire and Its Liberal Mission,” 641.

<sup>229</sup> Trump, “Statement by Former President Trump on Jerusalem.”

<sup>230</sup> Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 17.

<sup>231</sup> Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 17.

<sup>232</sup> Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 259.

<sup>233</sup> Bush, “President Bush Attends Saban Forum 2008.”

Middle East was referred to as a region of “violence and turmoil”.<sup>234</sup> Additionally, Bush depicted the region as the product of the absence of freedom, as he stated that, “if the region continued on the path it was headed — if another generation grew up with no hope for the future, and no outlet to express its views — the Middle East would continue to simmer in resentment and export violence”.<sup>235</sup> All of these negative images of the Middle East have worked towards a narrative that saw the region as submerged in “repression and terror”.<sup>236</sup>

Additionally, the threat of violence in the region was attributed to the people living in it. The discourse that positions Arabs as savages has not been unknown to the Zionist enterprise.<sup>237</sup> Moreover, Biden contrasted Israel with the terrorists in the region that “live in darkness”.<sup>238</sup> For nearly all U.S. presidents under examination here, the Arabs were referred to as the inverse of the Jew; similar to the imaginative geographies mentioned above. In other words, we know of the Arab only through the definition of the Jew, the latter being peaceful, resilient, and prosperous. The Arab has become the Other, portrayed as inherently violent, living in an inherently violent region. For example, in the context of 9/11, Bush said, “We saw that conditions of repression and despair on the other side of the world could bring suffering and death to our own streets”.<sup>239</sup> In its essence, depicting the region and the people living in it as barbarian served the imperial cause of defining the idea of civilization; as Western, democratic, and non-violent.

#### **4.2.2 The ultimate wasteland**

The Middle East was not just depicted as a region filled with violence, but as a region deplete of modernity or prosperity. The region of Palestine needed to be rhetorically perceived as empty so that Israel could make something of it. This was reflected by Trump, as he stated, “There can be no better example of greatness than what Israel has done, starting from such a small speck of sand”.<sup>240</sup> Calling former Palestine a ‘speck of sand’ is precisely why Zionism can be seen as a colonial project.<sup>241</sup> For Israel to become a Jewish state, the traces of Palestine needed to be eliminated. This required the “physical erasures”, including

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<sup>234</sup> Bush, “President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership.”

<sup>235</sup> Bush, “President Bush Attends Saban Forum 2008.”

<sup>236</sup> Bush, “President Bush Attends Saban Forum 2008.”

<sup>237</sup> Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle*, 199.

<sup>238</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People.”

<sup>239</sup> Bush, “President Bush Attends Saban Forum 2008.”

<sup>240</sup> Trump, “Remarks by President Trump at Signing of Presidential Proclamation Recognizing Israel’s Sovereign Right Over the Golan Heights.”

<sup>241</sup> Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 78.



evictions, demolitions, displacements, and seizures.<sup>242</sup> The physical and mnemonic alteration of the Palestinian landscape was reflected in U.S. securitizing discourse. For instance, Bush argued that Israel “succeeded in building a prosperous society out of the desert”, as though there was no society there first, in the “desert”.<sup>243</sup>

The influence of geographical terms was apparent throughout Bush’ discourse. Admittedly, Bush presents an infamous example of the way Orientalism can function using space and time as securitizing devices. His use of geographical terms not only denoted the “Other” as a space, but attributed features to this space that sounded dangerous, exotic, or ancient, even. It thrived on the performativity of imaginative geography.<sup>244</sup> This is directly reminiscent of the Frontier; illustrating the wilderness that lies just beyond the line. For example, Bush talked about how Israel “planted the seeds of a modern economy in the sands of an ancient desert”.<sup>245</sup> Referring to the region as an ancient desert, or as a “rocky soil”, and contrasting it with Israel as the bringer of modernity, not only praised Israel’s arrival but legitimized it.<sup>246</sup> Trump also often spoke of the “ancient lands”.<sup>247</sup> It was image-evoking discourse, as though the region was uninhabited without any type of economy in place beforehand.

#### **4.2.3 Not you, not Israel**

Across U.S. presidents, Israel was presented as the only nation that was able to acquire (Western notions of) liberty and prosperity in the violent desert (hence, the frontier). With respect to liberty, U.S. presidents argued that “in spite of the violence, in defiance of the threats, Israel has built a thriving democracy in the heart of the Holy Land”.<sup>248</sup> Similarly, Trump said to Israel, “Your perseverance in the face of hostility, your open democracy in the face of violence, and your success in the face of tall odds is truly inspirational”.<sup>249</sup> The discourse U.S. presidents utilized evoked an image of a free Israel that overcame its obstacles. Note that ‘its obstacles’ (hostility, violence, threats) included abstract words that ensured Israel was the heroic center of the argument. This also became clear when Biden said, “You inspire hope and light for so many around the world. That’s what the terrorists

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<sup>242</sup> Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 87.

<sup>243</sup> Bush, “President Bush Discusses Importance of Freedom in the Middle East.”

<sup>244</sup> Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 82.

<sup>245</sup> Bush, “Remarks at the Israeli Presidential Conference.”

<sup>246</sup> Bush, “President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership.”

<sup>247</sup> Trump, “Peace to Prosperity.”

<sup>248</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>249</sup> Trump, “President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel in Joint Press Conference.”

seek to destroy [...] because they live in darkness — but not you, not Israel”.<sup>250</sup> Israel became a beacon of light, a beacon of democracy, much like the United States has perceived itself to be. They differed from their surroundings as they “don’t live by the rules of terrorists”.<sup>251</sup> Rather, Biden said, “We uphold the laws of war. It matters. There’s a difference”.<sup>252</sup>

Not just freedom, but prosperity was marked as one of Israel’s greatest achievements. As Bush recalled, “When Americans look at Israel, we see a pioneer spirit that worked an agricultural miracle and now leads a high-tech revolution”.<sup>253</sup> The ‘agricultural miracle’ was closely tied to the Zionist argument, indicating that Jews were meant to reclaim the “wilderness, to make the desert bloom”.<sup>254</sup> In the words of Trump, they fulfilled their destiny, as he stated that “Jerusalem stands as a reminder that life can flourish against any odds”.<sup>255</sup> The argument that Israel acquired peace and prosperity only served to ‘Westernize’ Israel and abstractify Palestine. Moreover, as aforementioned, it was used to legitimize the Zionist cause, to argue that where there was nothing, Israel made something.

### **4.3 Hegemony: Strategies of U.S. Imperialism**

Finally, U.S. securitizing discourse held elements of hegemonic theory; the quest to be the dominating political power in this region. This could be seen through three modes of pursuing hegemony. First, via capitalism, as U.S. imperialism has functioned through the market. Second, via the *special relationship*, as U.S.-Israel relations have been primarily based on strategic interests. Third, via other political players, as U.S. discourse has made use of the conflict with Iran and Russia to assert their own dominance.

#### **4.3.1 Capitalism means freedom**

The U.S. ideological insistence on freedom has found a strategic economic foothold in the capitalist global order. Ultimately, Bush’s notion that “freedom yields peace” became reiterated in (neo)liberalism.<sup>256</sup> This is because liberty and empire have both been reconciled in commerce; the idea that new imperialism is beneficial to all, as it boosts trade and strengthens common interests.<sup>257</sup> This new imperialism is “imperialism by invitation”, where

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<sup>250</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People.”

<sup>251</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People.”

<sup>252</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the Terrorist Attacks in Israel.”

<sup>253</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>254</sup> Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 79.

<sup>255</sup> Trump, “Remarks by President Trump at the Israel Museum.”

<sup>256</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>257</sup> Sartori, “The British Empire and Its Liberal Mission,” 628.

the American empire has worked through other states to maintain its hegemonic position.<sup>258</sup> This is why Bush stated, “As we have done in places from Asia to Europe, we're helping you bring your economies into the global market”.<sup>259</sup> Empire, in this sense, was no longer defined by its territorial implications, but rather worked from and for globalization; from which the U.S. has been the pioneer in the last century. This has been the “informal empire”, where the influence of America’s economy has worked alongside the (made to be seen as) universalistic language of American liberal democratic ideology.<sup>260</sup>

As such, advocating for the benefits of capitalism becomes the “empire lite”, the manner in which the U.S. has maintained the new imperialism, not through colonies but through a global sphere of influence.<sup>261</sup> This idea of new imperialism was evident across all speeches. For instance, Biden argued that “a better future for the Middle East” can be found in “more predictable markets [...] less war when connected. It benefits the people — it would benefit the people of the Middle East, and it would benefit us”.<sup>262</sup> Similarly, Bush deployed neoliberal rhetoric, stating that “Across this region, you have an abundance of human capital [...] opening your economies, you will unlock their potential, create vibrant and entrepreneurial societies, and usher in a new era where people have confidence that tomorrow will bring more opportunities than today”.<sup>263</sup>

Ultimately, Israel discursively became the pioneer of this new era in the Middle East. Repeatedly, Bush reminded his audience that Israel “now leads a high-tech revolution”.<sup>264</sup> Obama spoke of the “prosperous nation”, which, like the U.S., is “fueled by entrepreneurship and innovation”.<sup>265</sup> All and all, U.S. presidents argued that this prosperity is the result of Israel opening their “doors to the world economy”.<sup>266</sup> Consequently, U.S. presidents implored the countries of the Middle East to do the same. Free trade, political liberty, and peace became words that were interchangeably used and linked to Israel. As such, supporting Israel had fit the imperial agenda; as U.S. interests had become defined in “the extension and reproduction of global capitalism”.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Panitch and Gindin, “Global Capitalism and American Empire,” 13.

<sup>259</sup> Bush, “President Bush Discusses Importance of Freedom in the Middle East.”

<sup>260</sup> Panitch and Gindin, “Global Capitalism and American Empire,” 10.

<sup>261</sup> Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 251.

<sup>262</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the United States’ Response to Hamas’s Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia’s Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine.”

<sup>263</sup> Bush, “Remarks at the Israeli Presidential Conference.”

<sup>264</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>265</sup> Obama, “Remarks of President Barack Obama To the People of Israel.”

<sup>266</sup> Bush, “President Bush Discusses Importance of Freedom in the Middle East.”

<sup>267</sup> Panitch and Gindin, “Global Capitalism and American Empire,” 17.

### 4.3.2 The U.S.-Israel strategic relationship

Part of the *special relationship* between Israel and the U.S. have been the “hard factors”, indicating the strategic-security factors that have benefited both Israel and the U.S. in maintaining a close bond.<sup>268</sup> Historically, the U.S. pro-Israel stance found its origin in the context of the Cold War; viewing the Middle East through “the prism of U.S.-Soviet rivalry”.<sup>269</sup> Later, U.S. interests in the region were threatened by Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism and the potential proliferation of WMD. This was confirmed by Bush, who stated that “With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the primary threat to America and the region became violent religious extremism”.<sup>270</sup> Ultimately, at the core of the Israel-U.S. relationship lied thus the matter of security, likely as U.S. presidents believed that “no region is more fundamental to the security of America or the peace in the world than the Middle East”.<sup>271</sup>

The security issue that the Middle East represented was often (discursively and theoretically) captured by the terminology of the “rogue states”, indicating those authoritarian states that have supported terrorism or have been intent on developing WMD.<sup>272</sup> Again, Bush confirmed, stating in a speech that “We made clear that we will defend our friends, our interests, and our people against any hostile attempt to dominate the Middle East — whether by terror, blackmail, or the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction”.<sup>273</sup> In the recent escalation of the Israel-Hamas war, Biden also implicitly addressed these rogue states, stating that “my message to any state or any other hostile actor thinking about attacking Israel remains the same as it was a week ago: Don’t”.<sup>274</sup> He warned them, “the world is watching”.<sup>275</sup> As early as the late 1950s, the U.S. government figured that Israel would provide an effective barrier against radical nationalist threats that might serve to benefit the USSR; or, as of more recent, nations that have been aiding terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah.<sup>276</sup>

Finally, not only was Israel positioned as a strategic-security asset to the United States; they were said to be one in and of themselves, as Israel’s military efficiency was often cited in U.S. speeches on Israel’s status in the Middle East. This status has been known in

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<sup>268</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, “The United States and Israel since 1948,” 232.

<sup>269</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, “The United States and Israel since 1948,” 252.

<sup>270</sup> Bush, “President Bush Attends Saban Forum 2008.”

<sup>271</sup> Bush, “President Bush Attends Saban Forum 2008.”

<sup>272</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 70.

<sup>273</sup> Bush, “President Bush Attends Saban Forum 2008.”

<sup>274</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and its People.”

<sup>275</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the Terrorist Attacks In Israel.”

<sup>276</sup> Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle*, 103.

political discourse as Israel's "qualitative military edge".<sup>277</sup> Increasingly, Biden referred to Israeli security in this regard, stating that the U.S.' help in the Israel-Hamas war has shown "an unprecedented commitment to Israel's security that will sharpen Israel's qualitative military edge".<sup>278</sup> As such, the heart of the Israel-U.S. security relationship showed Israel (at least, rhetorically) being a strategic asset. This explains why, at least strategic-security-wise, the U.S. has been intent on Israel retaining their qualitative military edge and thus supporting them for decades on end.

### 4.3.3 The scramble for hegemony: Russia and Iran

Another element in the U.S. securitizing discourse that has pertained to hegemony is the competition the U.S. faced with other political actors, Russia and Iran in particular. The pro-Israel mentality has been thus in part explained as "helping contain the Soviet bear", indicating that Israel played an important part in helping contain Soviet influence and expansion in the region.<sup>279</sup> Though it is realistically debatable to what extent Russia presented and still presents a threat in the region, there has been no doubt that at least rhetorically, the Cold-War rivalry played an important part in the securitization of Hamas and the pro-Israel U.S. mentality. For instance, in the context of the Israel-Hamas war, Biden introduced the war between Russia and Ukraine to emphasize not the brutalities of Hamas, but of Putin. He stated:

You know, the assault on Israel echoes nearly 20 months of war, tragedy, and brutality inflicted on the people of Ukraine — people that were very badly hurt since Putin launched his all-out invasion. We've have not forgotten the mass graves, the bodies found bearing signs of torture, rape used as a weapon by the Russians, and thousands and thousands of Ukrainian children forcibly taken into Russia, stolen from their parents. It's sick.<sup>280</sup>

In the same speech, he argued that "We cannot and will not let terrorists like Hamas and tyrants like Putin win".<sup>281</sup> By juxtaposing Putin and Hamas, he not only securitized them simultaneously, but attempted to ground his reasoning in universal values, as Hamas and Putin "both want to completely annihilate a neighboring democracy".<sup>282</sup>

<sup>277</sup> Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on the United States' Response to Hamas's Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia's Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine."

<sup>278</sup> Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on the United States' Response to Hamas's Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia's Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine."

<sup>279</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 51.

<sup>280</sup> Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on the United States' Response to Hamas's Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia's Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine."

<sup>281</sup> Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on the United States' Response to Hamas's Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia's Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine."

<sup>282</sup> Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on the United States' Response to Hamas's Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia's Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine."

Additionally, the Israel-U.S. relationship has been grounded not only in the global hegemonic rivalry between Russia and the U.S., but in the regional hegemonic threat Iran has represented. Iran has been a significant, if not the most serious, military threat to Israel.<sup>283</sup> The nation has not only been a primary sponsor of Hamas, but of other terrorist groups that have been considered to be a threat to U.S. security. Regardless of the actual reasons why the U.S. has been concerned about Iran (there are plenty), rhetorically, the U.S. believed the “world’s leading sponsor of terror” to be a threat to the stability of the region.<sup>284</sup> In light of the above mentioned speech by Biden, he argued that “Iran is supporting Russia in Ukraine, and it’s supporting Hamas [...] we’ll continue to hold them accountable”.<sup>285</sup> Additionally, in the context of Iran and WMD, Obama argued that “it would embolden a government that has shown no respect for the rights of its own people or the responsibilities of nations”.<sup>286</sup> Bush reiterated, stating that “the President of Iran dreams of returning the Middle East to the Middle Ages and calls for Israel to be wiped off the map”.<sup>287</sup> As such, the U.S. and Israel have both held an interest in neutralizing Iran, not just because Iran has presented a threat to Israel, but to the hegemonic position of the U.S. in the region (which, arguably, has already been faltering with the rise of China).

## Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the rhetorical explanations given by the U.S. presidents for their securitization of Hamas, and compared this with the existing literature speculating on the *special relationship*. In so doing, it has answered the third and final subquestion:

*Why have U.S. presidents engaged in securitization strategies on Hamas?*

As this chapter argued, U.S. presidents have engaged in securitization strategies because they envisioned Israel as the line between savagery and civilization. This is explained through *the Imperial Trinity of Discourse*, which holds that there are three discursive elements to U.S. securitizing discourse that have reflected an imperial composition. The first element includes ideology, as the civilizing mission has been alive and kicking in U.S. discourse through notions of superiority and hierarchized civilization. The second element includes Orientalism, where U.S. discourse confirmed that the entirety of the

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<sup>283</sup> Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle*, 24.

<sup>284</sup> Bush, “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

<sup>285</sup> Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the United States’ Response to Hamas’s Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia’s Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine.”

<sup>286</sup> Obama, “Remarks of President Barack Obama To the People of Israel.”

<sup>287</sup> Bush, George W. “President Bush Addresses Members of the Knesset.”

Middle East has been viewed as a region submerged in violence and ‘wilderness’, whereas Israel has been the sole nation defined by liberty and prosperity. The third and last element includes hegemony, where the securitization of Hamas has been used to demonize Russia and Iran; an attempt for the U.S. to maintain global and regional influence.

Ultimately, this chapter concluded that the United States has been playing the imperial game; through a mode of securitizing discourse that has engaged with its imperial legacy through ideology, Orientalism, and hegemonic control.

## **Chapter 5 — Conclusion: Israel as the New American Frontier**

### **5.1 U.S. Securitization Strategies on Hamas**

This research aimed to answer the following research question:

*How and why do U.S. presidents since 2001 engage in the securitization of Hamas?*

It proceeded to do so by looking into (1) what characterized U.S. presidential campaigns with regard to the Israel-Palestine conflict, (2) how they securitized Hamas, and (3) why they engaged in the securitization of Hamas.

Chapter two of this thesis concluded that Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden held different approaches towards the Israel-Palestine conflict, which included a distinguished focus on Anti-Terror, Peace, Israel-First, and Humanitarian campaigns, respectively. All four presidents offered a way to solve the peace process, but with Israel and Palestine often refusing to make concessions, U.S. presidents failed to mediate the conflict effectively. Regardless, each approach had unique characteristics that are worth revisiting here. In particular, the Peace approach by Obama shed light on the ways in which securitization is not necessarily a ‘negative’ discourse. Though Obama perceived Hamas as a primal threat to security, he was different from other presidents by humanizing the group, telling them to take responsibility for the fate of Palestine and renounce violence. Whereas for Bush, Trump, and Biden, Hamas was considered a primal evil, incapable of rationalizing with. Nonetheless, regardless of a difference in presidential campaigns and proposed strategies, this chapter concluded that all U.S. presidents were heavily engaged in securitizing Hamas.

The third chapter analyzed what heuristic artifacts the U.S. presidents were using to securitize Hamas, focusing on three distinct concepts: mnemonic security, historical analogies, and Orientalism. Again, there were clear differences across presidents as to what heuristic artifacts they have favored. Obama rarely (if ever) used Orientalism, grounding his purposes for securitizing Hamas in history, by stating that those who oppose Israel have been engaging in antisemitism. Trump and Bush favored the Orientalist strategy, which involved abstracting Hamas as the Oriental terrorist, in a region of violence, terror, and deceit. Biden often used historical analogies like 9/11 and attacks by ISIS to securitize Hamas. Regardless of which heuristic artifact was employed, this chapter highlighted the efficacy of such artifacts and underlined the danger or immorality with which Hamas was associated by U.S. presidents.



The fourth chapter of this thesis looked into what reasons U.S. presidents (implicitly or explicitly) suggested for engaging in securitization strategies, and subsequently connected these reasons to existing academic literature on the *special relationship*. U.S.-Israel relations stood central in this chapter, because reasons for securitizing Hamas must be foremost found in the decades long U.S. support of Israel. Ultimately, this chapter concluded that the securitization of Hamas must be understood through the concept of the American Frontier, as Israel has been rhetorically presented as the line between savagery and civilization to strengthen American imperialism. This has been evident by three aspects of the imperial securitizing discourse: ideology, Orientalism, and hegemony.

First, the chapter concluded that imperial ideology has had a central focus in securitization strategies, most notably seen through the concept of the civilizing mission. U.S. presidents often articulated that the U.S. has a duty to promote democracy and help those nations that are deemed incapable of getting to that higher stage themselves. This is inherently an imperial notion; not only that democracy is a superior stage, or that nations need guidance, but that the U.S. has been an example to the world of what it means to advance. Secondly, this chapter captured the extent of Orientalism in U.S. discourse, indicating that the Middle East was a place of savagery and inferiority (unlike Israel). It has been a region submerged in violence as the birthplace of terrorism and despair. Additionally, this type of discourse rendered the land before Israel was there as devoid of resources — and people. Finally, this chapter showed how hegemonic rivalry took a central position in the securitization of Hamas. Through discourses of capitalist promotion, the U.S.-Israel strategic relationship, and the securitization of Russia and Iran, U.S. presidents showed an interest in the securitization of Hamas that was hegemonically driven.

As such, U.S. ideology, Orientalism, and hegemonic competition were concluded as three fundamental modes of discourse of the New American Frontier, as through the securitization of Hamas, they all promoted the U.S. as an imperial power.

## **5.2 Revisiting Securitization and *Special Relationship* Studies**

As aforementioned, this research aimed to address three gaps in current academic studies on securitization and the *special relationship*. Firstly, by investigating the securitization of Hamas by U.S. presidents, this research has introduced a completely new and unexplored topic of securitization. Whereas most early U.S. securitization scholars have looked at the securitization of terrorism, none of those researchers have looked at specific terrorist groups and placed them in their respective contexts. As such, this thesis aimed to

place a primary focus on context; not only the spatiotemporal context of securitization (where and when actors have securitized), but the discursive context as well (the plurality of semantic repertoires that actors have utilized). This context-based approach to securitization has filled the second gap in current academic research; the call for contextuality. If anything, this research has proven that securitization strategies are not merely about whether the object really is a danger, but through placing this object *in perspective* that it becomes dangerous. In other words, the actor makes use of a heuristic artifact to convince the audience of the threat. He or she will not say that *Hamas is dangerous*, but that *Hamas is similar to 9/11 and is therefore dangerous*. As such, this research has suggested that discursive contextuality, in line with Balzacq et al., largely influences the form of securitization, whether that be history, historical analogies, Orientalism, or something else entirely.<sup>288</sup> Finally, by focussing on Hamas and the *special relationship*, this research has shown that the U.S. support of Israel can be understood through an imperial lens on securitization. Though various scholars proposed several reasons for the *special relationship*, none of them really explored the role of Hamas in this relationship. As such, this research has set itself apart from existing literature on U.S.-Israel relations by introducing the securitization of Hamas as a vital part of defining and strengthening this relationship.

### 5.3 Revisiting Securitization and Imperial Theories

The cornerstone of this thesis was most assuredly the connection between the theory of securitization and that of imperialism. Arguably, what connected the two fundamentally together was Orientalism; a mode of Othering that has both a securitizing and imperial nature to it. As such, this thesis has become almost an ode to Edward Saïd, showing that the U.S. securitization of Hamas has been very much embedded in stereotypical conceptions about the Middle Eastern terrorist and the region he lives in (yes, *he*). Additionally, Orientalism was shown as inseparable from imperialism because it denotes ideas of Western hierarchy and civilization. It defines the ‘savagery’ on which the imperial stage is set and the ‘savage’ that is its object.

Furthermore, Saïd’s understanding of “imaginative geographies” proved vital to discursive contextuality, meaning that ideas of space and time have a securitizing dimension.<sup>289</sup> The New American Frontier is an imperial conception of Israel that is built

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<sup>288</sup> Balzacq, Léonard and Ruzicka, “‘Securitization’ revisited: theory and cases,” 409-531.

<sup>289</sup> Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 17.

around (imaginative) geographical boundaries. Space became altered (*there is and never was a former Palestine*), as well as time (*the Jewish people have always been destined to claim this land*). As such, the central argument of the New American Frontier has married imperialism and securitization through a focus on discourse (*the Imperial Trinity*).

Finally, this research extended the idea of new U.S. imperialism, showing that discourse has become a mode of power in preserving American imperialism. In line with Ann Laura Stoler, the New American Frontier showed that empire is a project on the move; an idea that is manifested beyond the literal boundaries of the American empire.

#### **5.4 Recommendations and Limitations**

This thesis proposes several recommendations as a result of the conceptualization of the New American Frontier. First, the idea of the New Frontier is distinctly rhetorical. The purpose of this research was not to draw conclusions about the securitization of Hamas, but to look into what discourse U.S. presidents employed in order to securitize them. As such, further research might benefit from moving beyond the realm of rhetoric; thinking about other dimensions in which securitization continues, like the media or specific institutions that the U.S. has set up with regard to the conflict. Additionally, further research might move into another realm entirely, investigating securitization strategies by Israel, Hamas, or other players in the conflict. Moreover, expanding on chapter two, future scholars might aim to study presidential campaigns and securitization strategies more in-depth, looking into factors like political doctrines, voting concerns, or voices of resistance specific to that time period. One might be prompted to ask why Bush and Trump favored Orientalist strategies whilst Obama and Biden stuck to examples of events (Second World War or 9/11).

As such, this thesis promotes the use of discursive and spatiotemporal context-based securitization studies. The central position of Orientalism in this paper has shown that imperialism and securitization work together very closely. Future research should explore the spatiotemporal dimension of this relationship further, looking into how (imperial) notions of space and time are used to convince the audience of a certain threat. This could not only be interesting for new securitization topics, but looking back to ‘old’ ones like the migration- or Islam-security nexus and introducing spatiotemporality as a new angle. Additionally and finally, this research recommends moving beyond securitization as a *speech act* and towards a *mode of discourse*. Viewing securitization as a speech act severely limits the understanding of power as central to this act. Not merely the power (or, authority) of the actor itself; but of the power that the *act* of speaking holds. As this research illustrated, looking at discourse through

an imperial lens has offered the idea that securitizing speech is much more than simply repeating words like ‘danger’, ‘threat’ or ‘priority concern’. Rather, understanding securitization as a mode of discourse allows for a reflection on the power that truth and knowledge production holds. Further research will benefit from shifting from *speech acts* to *modes of discourse*, as Foucault and Saïd will be able to slide in more easily, offering a more in-depth analysis of securitization strategies.

The limitations of this research relate to its recommendations, in that a singular focus on rhetoric presents a view on the world that is not concerned with accuracy. Rhetoric can only go so far in explaining why state actors behave the way they do. As such, the focus on discourse might present an image of U.S. presidents that is not reflected in for instance audience opinion or tactical decisions made by those presidents. Additionally, the imperial reading of securitization targets words that are inherently negative. For instance, the characterization of Bush in this paper is explained from an Orientalist angle, though at certain moments he speaks of the Middle East in a positive, admiring sense. Though these positive reflections of people and the cultures of Israel or Palestine are not included in this thesis, they would provide a more coherent picture on how U.S. presidents viewed the conflict. Nonetheless, this could be considered a different kind of research altogether. Finally, this thesis chose three specific heuristic artifacts to investigate. In doing so, it naturally limited itself. Other heuristic artifacts have equal worth of being included, like metaphors or euphemisms. Especially as the situation is still developing, Biden might make use of other heuristic artifacts. This thesis does not address this gap that is a necessary part of decision-making, though it is fundamentally aware of it.

Overall, this research has refrained from inferring truth and knowledge to emphasize the power of discourse in doing so. Connecting imperialism and securitization, this thesis has shown that securitization as a speech act is not enough; in its essence, it is a mode of discourse, utilized differently by the performing actor, investigated alternatively by the scholar. As a consequence, it has understood the role of Israel for the U.S. as the New American Frontier, the rhetorical line between savagery and civilization. As this particular line is located in the Middle East, one might be prompted to ask, does it also exist elsewhere?

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