

# **The Copenhagen School and Securitizations, Macrosecuritizations, and the Formation of a Constellation:**

## **The Tragedy of the Iran-Israel/United States Security Dilemma**

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### **Introduction**

1979 marked a time in history when the political and security dynamics of the Middle East and beyond became upended. The 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran created a theological government in Tehran that has since had tumultuous relations with several states; however, none have been as strained as those with the United States and Israel (hereafter referred to as the 'binational alliance') with which Iran has no diplomatic relations and a heavily sanctioned economic relationship. These feelings were fomented by antagonistic acts that have been attributed to, or admittedly caused by, Iranian actors against the binational alliance, and vice versa. These acts have included a combination of outright violent attacks as well as non-violent subversive measures to diminish the rival state's influence. These hostile relations have fostered deep-seated feelings of wariness, distrust, and outright disdain. As a result, the binational alliance has often categorically dismissed Iran's policies, including benign ones, as being the product of a malevolent, revisionist, and illegitimate government. Over the years, successive governments in Tehran and their Supreme Leaders have also made it very clear that sentiments of disdain are mutual.

Most recently, it has been Iran's nuclear energy program (which it claims is for peaceful purposes) that has caused the binational alliance to tighten the sanctions regime, continuously condemn the Iranian government, and to threaten it with preventative military strikes if it does not halt uranium enrichment. Israel, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has taken a more hawkish approach than his American counterpart, President Barack Obama. Netanyahu, in particular, has repeatedly described the development of Iran's nuclear program as an imminent existential threat to Israel. His policy route has been to opt for heavier sanctions with a threat of military action if Iran's level of enrichment crosses a particular threshold. On the other hand, Obama has engaged Iran through diplomatic negotiations along with the other members of the P5+1 (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, and Germany) while keeping "all options on the table."<sup>1</sup> In this case, using this model, one can apply this process to the current Iranian nuclear issue. Within the theoretical framework of the Copenhagen School I argue that the binational alliance has attempted to securitize (meaning the issue is presented as an existential threat, which requires emergency measures that justify actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure (Buzan, et al. 1998:23-24) Iran's nuclear energy program. Upon further examination, this attempt to securitize can also be conceptualized within the encapsulating 'macrosecuritization' of tenets and policies of the Iranian

theological regime. Moreover, Iran has also generated a macrosecritization which include tenets and policies of the governments United States and Israel that the leadership in Tehran believes are existential threats to its government. These consciously-generated macrosecritizations subsequently create a self-perpetuating 'constellation' that is in fact, a process-oriented 'security dilemma'. These concepts and their theoretical underpinnings will be discussed in length later on.

First, I will analyze momentous events that have shaped the ethnographic history of Israel and Iran. These events are provided to broaden and deepen the understanding of the cultural context of the behaviours of the Israeli and Iranian governments. I focus on Israel and Iran because it is their recalcitrant nature, which has been cultivated by these events, that reduces the likelihood of these two states to co-operate to pursue peaceful options to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue. Second, I will explain the Copenhagen School's constructivist and process-oriented argument that, "security' is a self-referential practice (not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat)"(24) and its implications are at the 'middle' (state) level, and the 'macro' (group of securitizations) level. Third, I demonstrate how securitizing actors of the binational alliance and Iran have attempted to securitize each other. Fourth, I explain who the key decision-makers (securitizing actors) of the three nations are; in addition, I analyze the 'speech-acts' of these decision-makers to demonstrate that they are a part of the process of securitizing. Lastly, I examine the structure of the macrosecritizations and explain how together they form a constellation, and subsequently a security dilemma. Indeed, within the scope and length of this paper it is only possible to effectively evaluate this process and its implications rather than making the argument about whether the threats were successfully securitized. I argue that the process of Netanyahu's attempted securitization of the Iranian nuclear program has generated a political atmosphere that reduces the feasibility of a peaceful resolution. Moreover, the macrosecritizations constructed by the US, Israel, and Iran subsequently form a constellation that represent and perpetuate a security dilemma which heighten the risk of conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a thinly-veiled reference to a military option as a last resort, if sanctions and diplomacy fail to change the trajectory of the Iranian nuclear program's development.

## Historical background and Israeli and Iranian ethnography<sup>2</sup>

In the thirty-four years since the inception of the Islamic regime, the United States and Israel have shared feelings of distrust and disdain for its leadership, and the feelings have been returned in kind. The origin and nature of these feelings can be better understood within an ethnographic context. Israel has been the continuous target of conventional and asymmetrical warfare which has perpetuated a sense of deep-seated insecurity since its establishment in 1948. This sense of insecurity has been heightened and hyper-sensitized by the spectre of the Holocaust. In fact, the Holocaust has become the central event of Jewish history which defines Israeli identity (Oron 1993), replacing the event of the establishment of the State of Israel (Herman 1979).<sup>3</sup> This phenomenon is not exclusive to the latest generation of Israelis either. After the Second World War, many Jewish survivors of the Holocaust arrived in Israel. In the early 1950s, "one out of every three Israelis was a survivor... [which constituted] a total of 350,000" (Resnik 2003:304). Thus, the physical embodiment of the Holocaust has been ever-present in Israeli society and has significantly shaped the state's national identity.

The psychological power that the memory of the Holocaust has over the Jewish state shows itself in instances of national insecurity. As Idith Zertal notes, *every*<sup>4</sup> war with Israel, from 1948 until the present, has been conceptualized by its leaders in terms of the Holocaust (Zertal 2005:5). Israel's leaders have evoked the memory of the mass extermination of millions of Jews to emphasize self-reliance and the overall importance of protecting and maintaining national security. This emphasis has been the foundation of hyper-sensitivity to national security threats. Strasler (1995) personifies this sensitivity when he states:

*...In as cynical and power-driven world as ours, Israel should not consider, even for a moment, giving up the nuclear option ... [Israel] must not, under any circumstance, put the guarantee for [its] safety in the hands of anyone else, and if there is someone who wants to call it 'a Holocaust complex', let them do so. As far as I am concerned, this is the most important lesson that the six millions [sic] taught us. (b1)*

In this sense, Israel's 'secret' nuclear weapons program is justified to protect the state.

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<sup>2</sup> The author acknowledges that political culture is not universal or uniform. Consequently, Israeli and Iranian political subjectivities are varied, and their political narratives and cultures are diverse. Yet, in official political rhetoric, I argue that the uniformity and exceptionality of the modern Israeli and Iranian experience is stressed to create national unity to rally against an exogenous threat.

<sup>3</sup> See also the survey Yad Vashem (the national museum of the Holocaust in Israel) performed in 1999, which found that 87 per cent of the respondents believed that the Holocaust was a central factor in their identity in: 'The upheaval in the memory of the Holocaust': Ha'aretz (2 May 2000, in Hebrew).

Therefore, a linkage is formed between the Jewish history of persecution and the necessity to defend itself by any means possible.

On the other hand, despite Iran's own lengthy history (from classical antiquity to present day) of numerous exogenous attempts to subjugate the people and governments of Iran, as well as to exploit its natural resources, any justification for its own nuclear energy program is unreasonable to Israel. The most recent examples of external meddling in Iranian affairs include a coup d'état in 1953 orchestrated in large part by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to overthrow the democratically-elected Prime Minister of Iran, Mohammad Mossadegh. Upon election in 1951, Mossadegh, a champion of the recently nationalized Iran's oil industry (which had closed the foreign-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's (AIOC) oil refineries in Iran), became a target of the British and American governments. This can be attributed to how Mossadegh had fused the constitutional movement in Iran with that of anti-imperialism; and, as Andreas Etges specifies, "...[He] had been among the founders of the National Front, one of whose main goals was to end the British domination of Iranian oil" (2011:498). After the coup, the US-backed dictator and monarch Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi took power. The Shah ended the nationalization program and allowed a consortium of nine foreign oil companies to extract Iranian oil. Gasiorowsky and Byrne summarize how the coup has heavily contributed to the narrative of the American government as a devious, imperialist usurper, espoused by the current theocratic regime:

*The coup was a watershed for Iran ...and for the standing of the United States in the region. The joint U.S.-British operation ended Iran's drive to assert sovereign control over its own resources and ...put an end to a vibrant chapter in the history of the country's nationalist and democratic movements. These consequences resonated with dramatic effect in later years. When the Shah finally fell in 1979, memories of the U.S. intervention in 1953, which made possible the monarch's ... unpopular 25-year reign, intensified the anti-American character of the revolution. (2004)*

The Shah's reign, and its end by popular revolution, has come to symbolize for the Islamic regime the need to confront any perceived American threat to Iranian sovereignty and self-determination. This symbolism is a major component of the regime's identity.

There are dominant, namely relatively more conservative, elements of regime also sees itself as a modern day metaphor for the Constitution of Medina, which the Islamic prophet

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<sup>4</sup> Emphasis is my own.

Muhammad drafted. This constitution formed effectively the first Islamic state (Haggay 1991:38). Former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani drew parallels between the two revolutions to explain the Islamic government's deep distrust and disdain for meddling foreign powers who condemn the theocracy and question its legitimacy:

*In the time of the Prophet. . . two superpowers dominated the world: Iran in the East and Byzantium in the West. . . Neither friend nor foe expected these revolutions to be victorious, and they were all proven wrong. In both cases the notion of exporting the revolution was first subjected to ridicule and mockery by enemies who thought that it constituted no serious danger to the . . . exploitative and imperialistic relations of the region. Thus, the Khosrows [the Sasanian kings] and the Reagans<sup>5</sup> of the world labeled the leaders of the two revolutions – the Prophet and [the founding Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah] Khomeini – as “sorcerers,” “lunatics,” and “deluded,” only to witness the world overwhelmed by Islam. (42)*

By comparing the 1979 revolution to the revolution of the Prophet, this symbolism is manifested to further legitimize the 1979 revolution and the subsequent theocratic government in the eyes of the clerical leaders in Tehran and the Iranian people. The American involvement in the coup and its condemnation of the Islamic revolution has therefore reinforced the theocracy's resolve to pursue self-determination as it sees fit. It also provides justification to challenge any act it perceives as foreign powers meddling in Iranian affairs. An even further deepening of Iran's disdain for the United States has been caused by the latter's military, financial, and intelligence support for the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War (Lando 2007).

Although there are glaring differences between the histories of the people of Israel and modern-day Iran, insofar as that the Holocaust is incomparable to anything Iranians have faced in modern times<sup>6</sup>, the fact remains that both peoples have been subjected to treatment that has firmly implanted a heightened sensitivity to, and suspicion of, adversarial behaviour. This heightened sensitivity creates a political environment that is hypersensitive, which widens the scope of perceived threats. In this sense, hypersensitivity suggests a potential clouding of clear-eyed judgment by imparting a powerful bias exuded

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<sup>5</sup> The Sasanian Empire was the last Iranian empire before the rise of Islam, ruled by the Sasanian dynasty from 224 CE to 651 CE. (POURSHARIATI, P. (2008) *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*. I.B. Tauris:4. Here, 'the Reagans' is a reference to US President Ronald Reagan and other leaders of the Western world who had denounced the Islamic regime.

<sup>6</sup> The author acknowledges the devastating scale and scope of destruction that Iranians endured during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War; but, although this war did deeply affect the collective Iranian psyche, I argue this phenomenon does the rival the scale of the effect on Israeli Jews.

through fear and skepticism. In terms of the relationship between Israel and Iran, not only does Israel assert that Iran's nuclear program is for the purpose of weaponization, which is arguable in its assumption, but it asserts that the program will produce nuclear weapons for offensive rather than deterrent capabilities. As presumably the latter is the purpose of Israeli's undeclared nuclear arsenal, there exists a double-standard. It is in part from the hypersensitivity to national security threats that creates this double-standard, but it is the recent history of verbal threats from the Islamic regime that have solidified and reinforced this perception. Indeed, verbal threats to the Islamic regime have also been made by Israel. This hypersensitivity thus roots policy-making deeply in subjectivity, which may hinder clear-eyed decision-making. It is with this in mind that we will explore how securitizations and macrosecuritizations are generated.

## **The Copenhagen School: Securitization theory, macrosecuritization theory, and the application of securitizations to the US, Israel, and Iran**

The Copenhagen School has developed a "new framework for analysis" of security studies (Buzan et al. 1998) that examines "security" [as] a move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issues either as a special kind of politics or above politics (23). This move can be understood as a process driven by certain actors, entities, and acts, most often at the 'middle', or state level.<sup>7</sup> The "securitizing actor" seeks to convince an "audience" through "speech-acts" that a "referent object" faces "existential" danger from a designated "threat", and thereby the actor claims a "right to handle the issue through extraordinary means [e.g., in the form of secrecy, ...placing limitations on otherwise inviolable rights, or focusing society's energy and resources on a specific task" (24). Furthermore, "...it is in this practice that the issue becomes a security issue – not necessarily because a real existential threat exists, but because the issue is presented as such a [threat]" (24). This act of securitization can arguably place any issue "on any part of the spectrum" and "will vary greatly across different sectors and levels of analysis; therefore, so will the nature of existential threats" (22). Keeping in mind that this framework has, "its shortcomings in terms of silences, non-verbal securitizations, causal explanations, and the need to refine the understanding of audience(s)" (Buzan and Wæver, 2009:254)<sup>8</sup>, one can still apply this framework effectively to explain the acts of securitization relevant to this paper. This framework will be applied to the current Iranian nuclear issue. Here, this single act of securitization will be the central focus of a group of securitized issues in this paper. Therefore, additional related examples of securitizations will be included, albeit not at the forefront of the analysis.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Middle-level' and 'state-level' are interchangeable terms that will be used according to the context.

Iran maintains that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only. Despite repeatedly stating this position, and the fact that Iran has yet to produce any weapons-grade highly-enriched uranium (HEU), Israel has threatened to attack Iranian nuclear facilities before the production of HEU even begins. This, along with Israel’s attempted securitization of the Iranian regime, are examples of middle-level securitizations. Again, the focus of this paper will not be on whether the securitization has been successful, but rather on the process of the attempt and its political and security implications. The securitization process and its relevant components are individually illustrated below:

|               | <b>Securitizing Actor</b> | <b>Audience</b>            | <b>Speech-Acts</b>                                      | <b>Referent Objects</b>   | <b>Existential Threats</b>   |
|---------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---|---|--|
| United States | President Bush            | Domestic and international | Analyzed later in, ‘The three nations’ decision-makers’ | Regional and international security   | Iranian nuclear program; Iranian-backed ‘terrorist’ organizations        |
| Israel        | Prime Minister Netanyahu  | Domestic and international |   | State of Israel; regional and international security                        | Iranian nuclear program; Islamic theocracy; anti-Israel regime in Tehran |
| Iran          | Supreme Leader Khomeini   | Domestic                   |   | Self-determination; sovereignty; Islamic theocracy; domestic civil policies | US imperialism; Israeli imperialism                                      |

When a securitizing actor consciously aggregates several middle-level securitizations, it generates what Buzan and Wæver call a “macrosecuritization” (2009). Thus, macrosecuritization serves as, “an additional concept to cover securitizations that speak to referent objects,” and threats, “higher than those at the middle-level (for example religious or political ideologies) and which aim to incorporate and coordinate multiple lower level securitizations” (257). Conceptually, they are an aggregation of multiple securitizations. In the case of Israel and Iran, Israel seeks to securitize a number of Iranian state-level policies (such as its nuclear program, regardless of an ongoing interim deal with the P5+1; the funding of militant, or “terrorist”<sup>9</sup> groups such as Hamas, the Islamic Jihad Movement of Palestine, and Hezbollah; and domestic human rights violations) which generate a macrosecuritization that encompasses these state-level policies.

This aggregation moves securitization 'above' the state-level to a 'higher' ideological level, where essentially several core policies of the theological regime are deemed existential threats to Israel. In this sense, many of the regime's policies will be considered inherently existential threats because the source of these policies is rooted in ideology that categorically dismisses Israel's right to exist and political legitimacy.

It is possible that an actor who consciously generates a macrosecritization for another actor, and then acts 'beyond the established rules of the game' to intercept and disable the threat, will act in such a way that solidifies and perpetuates the macrosecritization imposed upon it by the threat. This creates a social structure called a 'constellation'.<sup>10</sup> Constellations are generated by the interdependent [macro]secritizations of a variety of [actors], but do not require that the actors recognize this larger structure [268]. The logic and pattern of a constellation may be recognized by the analyst, with each individual actor conscious only of its own [macro]secritizations (268). An example of a constellation would be the ideological battle during the Cold War. The United States and the Soviet Union each consciously generated a macrosecritization of the other's ideology (capitalism/democracy, and Soviet communism, respectively)<sup>11</sup> as an existential threat to the other's own ideology, which in this case is referred to as the referent object. Also, each's ideology produced middle-level policies that were securitized as threats to one another's referent object. This cyclical relationship is the definition of a constellation. Thus, "when two macrosecritizations are mutually opposed, each construing as the ultimate threat what the other defends, they generate one integrated constellation. This way, the Cold War became a constellation containing two momentous macrosecritizations and a huge network of [interlinked] identities and policies" (259). It is in this capacity that the binational alliance and Iran have, through mutually opposed macrosecritizations, developed a perpetuating constellation. However, nuances at the sub-state level must be considered for thorough analysis. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the relevant sub-state securitizing actors, namely politicians in office, and their differentiations in terms of speech-acts and their level of influence in the political decision-making process. This will facilitate deeper analysis and aid in avoiding oversimplifying and misconstruing securitizing actors as black boxes.

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8 See: Lene Hansen, 'The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School', *Millennium*, 29:2 (2000), pp. 285–306; Michael C. Williams, 'Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics', *International Studies Quarterly*, 47:4 (2003), pp. 511–29; Claudia Aradau, 'Security and the Democratic Scene: Desecuritization and Emancipation', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 7:4 (2004), pp. 388–413; Thierry Balzacq, 'The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context', *European Journal of International Relations*, 11:2 (2005), pp.171–201; Holger Stritzel, 'Towards a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen School and Beyond', *European Journal of International Relations*, 13:3 (2007), pp. 357–83; Matt McDonald, 'Securitisation and the Construction of Security', *European Journal of International Relations*, 14:4 (2008) pp. 563–87; Juha Vuori, 'Illocutionary Logic and Strands of Securitisation', *European Journal of International Relations*, 14:1 (2008), pp. 65–99.

## The three nations' decision-makers: Their attempted securitizations and their speech-acts

The governments of the United States, Israel, and Iran have three very different systems of governance. They are a presidential federal republic, a parliamentary democracy, and a theocratic republic, respectively. Thus, the concentration and distribution of power varies within each government. Structurally, Israel has traditionally formed a coalition government as a product of its proportional representation (PR) system and its variety of political and religious ideologies. Currently, in Netanyahu's Likud Party-led coalition government, there are five other political parties. They are: Yisrael Beiteinu, Shas, The Jewish Home, the United Torah Judaism, and Independence. The first four are self-described nationalist, right-wing, religious, and Zionist (all to varying degrees) parties. (Freilich 2006:637) Along with the centre-right Likud party, the coalition shares common ground in terms of making the defence and preservation of the Israeli state its utmost priority.<sup>12</sup> It is in this sense that a shift in policy regarding the Iranian nuclear program from its current hardline stance would prove to be very difficult, if even desirable.

To make a political shift even more difficult, just maintaining the coalition often, "becomes an end in itself, and is, in any event, a full-time preoccupation. The need for compromise and consensus greatly limits the 'search' for options and leads to a marked decrease in attention to long-range and fundamental issues" (Freilich 2006:646). Moreover, because of the breadth of parties in the coalition government, Netanyahu is, "ostensibly just 'prima inter pares' (first among equals, in this case, among his cabinet of thirty ministers, the largest in Israel's history), as the statutory authority of the Israeli premier is highly circumscribed, and his actual power, even more than in other democracies, is a function of the premier's personality [and] political skills" (Freilich 2012:18). As Charles D. Freilich explains, in addition to this structure, there are causal factors that aid in explaining Israel's national security decision-making processes:

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<sup>9</sup> To be noted, these militant organizations are considered terrorist organizations, in whole or in part, by Israel, the United States, Canada, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the European Union, among others. However, many states, specifically Arab ones, consider these organizations to be legitimate in one form or another.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*, pp. 201–2, the Copenhagen School origins of the concept of a constellation might be traced back through Egbert Jahn, Pierre Lemaitre, and Ole Wæver, *Concepts of Security: Problems of Research on Non-Military Aspects*, Copenhagen Papers, 1 (Copenhagen: Centre for Peace and Conflict Research, 1987); Ole Wæver, 'Conflicts of Visions/Visions of Conflict' in O.Wæver, P.Lemaitre and E.Tromer (eds), *European Polyphony: Beyond East/West Confrontation*, (London: Macmillan 1989), pp. 283–325 – to roots in Norbert Elias's concept of 'figuration', cf. *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*. Vol. 1, *Wandlungen des Verhaltens in den weltlichen Oberschichten des Abendlandes* and Vol.2, *Wandlungen der Gesellschaft. Entwurf einer Theorie der Zivilisation* (Basel: Verlag Haus zum Falken 1939; English translation of the two volumes as *The Civilizing Process*, in 1978 and 1982).

*[Israel's] national security decision-making processes are shaped largely by three causal factors: first, a uniquely harsh and dangerous external environment, which greatly shapes and circumscribes Israel's national security choices; second, Israel's (PR) system; and finally, the relative weakness of the primary civilian national security organs (the foreign and defence ministries and the National Security Staff) in the national decision-making process compared to the IDF and the intelligence services (639).*

Therefore, the concentration of power may not rest solely in Netanyahu's hands; however, in the case of the Iranian nuclear program, there is widespread consensus within the nationalist, right-wing coalition government to take a hawkish position on the issue. It just so happens that Netanyahu's position on this issue coincides with the other parties in the coalition.<sup>13</sup> This strengthens his power and incurs solidarity over his attempt to securitize Iran's nuclear program; yet, it makes a shift in policy concerning the nuclear program politically very difficult to make.

Netanyahu's power and legitimacy is therefore rooted in his government's current hawkish position. So, analysis of his speech-acts which have been made in the attempt to securitize certain policies of Iran, and to subsequently generate an overarching macrosecritization, must be provided. This will aid in demonstrating how the process of securitization creates a tense political atmosphere uncondusive to pragmatic policy shifts, if necessary. Keeping in mind that I will analyze the speech-acts of all three securitizing actors, it is essential first to establish that phrases and metaphors are used to illustrate, "metonymic concepts that are grounded in experience and, like metaphors, structure not just our language but also our thoughts, attitudes, and actions" (Lakoff and Johnson 2003:39). This weaves a narrative that is essential to moving the threat outside of normal politics. At the annual United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2009, Netanyahu had harsh words for the Iranian government:

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<sup>11</sup> A middle-level referent object of the Soviet Union: socialized labour. This referent object also spurned fear of another period like the 'First Red Scare' (labour-related upheaval) in the United States, which was perceived to threaten its referent object: capitalism.

<sup>12</sup> The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) website states its mission is, "To defend the existence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state of Israel. To protect the inhabitants of Israel and to combat all forms of terrorism which threaten the daily life [sic]. <http://www.idfblog.com/about-the-idf/idf-code-of-ethics/>

<sup>13</sup> To be noted, there are members, if only a few, of the Israeli intelligence and defence communities who have recently spoken out against Netanyahu's hawkish policy regarding Iran. This occurred in 2011 and 2012, and considerable controversy erupted over reports from former Shin Bet (the Israeli Security Agency) and Mossad (the CIA's counterpart) officials. For more information see: FREILICH, C. (2013) National Security Decision-Making in Israel: Improving the Process. *The Middle East Journal* 67 (2):257-266.

*This Iranian regime is fueled by an extreme fundamentalism that burst onto the world scene three decades ago... In the past thirty years, this fanaticism has swept the globe with a murderous violence and cold-blooded impartiality in its choice of victims. ...The adherents of this unforgiving creed seek to return humanity to medieval times. Wherever they can, they impose a backward regimented society where women, minorities, gays or anyone not deemed to be a true believer is brutally subjugated. (2009)*

Here, Netanyahu labels the Islamic government's theological beliefs and policies as imperialist and barbaric, and which spread violence globally and persecute social groups domestically. Netanyahu draws on the memory of the Holocaust to further his point:

*But if the most primitive fanaticism can acquire the most deadly weapons, the march of history could be reversed for a time. And like the belated victory over the Nazis, the forces of progress and freedom will prevail only after an [sic] horrific toll of blood and fortune has been exacted from mankind. That is why the greatest threat facing the world today is the marriage between religious fanaticism and the [sic] weapons of mass destruction. The most urgent challenge facing this body is to prevent the tyrants of Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Will the international community stop the terrorist regime of Iran from developing atomic weapons, thereby endangering the peace of the entire world? (2009)*

In this excerpt, Netanyahu compares the Islamic government to the one that was responsible for the extermination of millions of Jews in Europe, and as a fanatical, illegitimate regime determined to use nuclear weapons for offensive purposes on a global scale. In a less subtle example, Netanyahu states that Iran with Ahmadinejad as president is like the government responsible for the Holocaust, despite the fact that Iranian Jews are able to practice their religion freely and have representation in the Iranian parliament (Brownfeld 2009:46-47). At the 2006 American Israel Public Action Committee (AIPAC) conference Netanyahu told the audience, "It is 1938. Iran is [Nazi] Germany. And Ahmadinejad is the new Hitler"<sup>14</sup> (Netanyahu: 2006). Netanyahu continued at the UNGA two years later:

*Can you imagine that man [Ahmadinejad] who ranted here yesterday ...armed with nuclear weapons? The international community must stop Iran before it's too late. If Iran is not stopped, we will all face the specter of nuclear terrorism, and the Arab Spring could soon become an Iranian winter. ...But as the prime minister of Israel, I cannot risk the future of the Jewish state on wishful thinking (2011).*

In this instance, Netanyahu shifts his speech-act's focus from the threat to the referent object: the Israeli state. Due to his perception of the Iranian nuclear program as an existential threat to Israel and thereby constitutes extreme circumstances, he hints that action must be taken to prevent this from becoming, in his mind, a possibility.

In addition to the national threat, Netanyahu accuses Iran of undermining regional security as well when he states that, "Iran is actively destabilizing Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain and many other Middle Eastern countries" (2013). The content of these speeches are for the justification of Netanyahu's threat to use extreme actions that take politics outside the normal rules – namely, a preventative military strike on Iranian nuclear facilities. Netanyahu states that, "...at this late hour, there is only one way to peacefully prevent Iran from getting atomic bombs.<sup>15</sup> That's by placing a clear red line on Iran's nuclear weapons program" (2012). The implication here is that if Iran passes the clear red line<sup>16</sup> it will be attacked by Israel. Netanyahu clarifies this threat when he states, "I want there to be no confusion on this point. Israel will not allow Iran to get nuclear weapons. If Israel is forced to stand alone, Israel will stand alone" (Netanyahu 2013). Lastly, Netanyahu has dismissed the option of negotiating with Iran. When Iran recently announced its willingness to negotiate with the P5+1, Netanyahu dismissed that at a ruse and stated that, "the international community should not fall into this trap" (Associated Press 2012). As a preventative and technically unprovoked (since there is no tangible sign of Iranian aggression) military attack against Iran would constitute the breaking of international law<sup>17</sup>, this would constitute taking politics outside the normal rules to prevent the existential threat from attacking the referent object.

In the next case study, the American government<sup>18</sup>, specifically, the Bush administration's speech-acts will be examined to demonstrate its securitization of the Iranian regime. It has been the most vocal in terms of securitization the Iranian nuclear program and it was arguably the first American government to generate a macrosecritization of the theological regime, and certainly the first after Iran's nuclear facilities were uncovered. Unlike the Israeli prime minister, the American president is the commander-in-chief of the military and has much more leeway when constructing and implementing foreign policy. Although, the president is somewhat constrained on this issue in particular because there are numerous American lawmakers who are hawkish on Iranian relations issues. Moreover, the president

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<sup>16</sup> Netanyahu elucidates that this red-line is the creation of highly-enriched uranium in Iran's nuclear facilities – not weaponization, or any direct military threat, per se.

<sup>14</sup> To be noted, this comment was received with a standing ovation, which serves as a demonstration of its resonance as a speech-act to this particular audience.

<sup>15</sup> To be noted, urgency and a "way out" are elements of the securitization process (namely, that a shrinking window of opportunity may not be the 'best' way to end the threat (i.e. legally) but it that may be the only way before it is too late.)

must seek approval from Congress to go to war, this is only if the campaign exceeds sixty days. However, to be noted, on at least 125 separate occasions, an American president has deployed the military in some capacity without prior express military authorization from Congress (American Constitutional War Powers 2001).

The most infamous speech-act made by President Bush was when he used the expression “the Axis of Evil” to include Iran: “States like [Iran], and [its] terrorist allies, constitute an Axis of Evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. ...Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people’s hope for freedom” (quoted in Heradstveit and Bonham 2007:423). In this 2002 State of the Union Address to Congress, Bush suggests that the Iranian government is analogous to the Axis Powers of the Second World War. Moreover, mention of the term “Axis” evokes the United States’ memory of its mortal enemies of the Second World War and resonates even today, so comparison to the Axis Powers stigmatizes the accused. It is employed as a rhetorical device, as, “‘Axis’ is used as a metonym for fascism and Nazism, and ‘evil’ as a metonym for Satanic forces that implies Iran... is responsible for evil deeds” (422). Indeed, this speech-act occurred only a year after the terror attacks of September 11th, 2001. At this point, the United States’ “War on Terror” was well underway, but the American invasion of Iraq was still a year away. In this sense, the use of the phrase Axis of Evil was a restructuring of the American understanding of the ‘War on Terror’, and Heradstveit and Bonham explain the administration’s rather dubious linkage between the terrorists responsible for 9/11 governments:

*[A] focus shifted from ... al Qa’ida [sic] ... to a series of other states [Iran, Iraq, North Korea], whose involvement in [9/11] ranged from minimal to non-existent. The key concepts in this restricting have been firstly “terrorist states,” which implies the ‘indivisibility of terrorism’<sup>19</sup> and therefore that the collective responsibility for 9/11 is on any state so designated; and secondly, on weapons of mass destruction, because anyone who possesses them may be tempted to sell or give them to terrorists, thus evoking fears of ... nuclear attacks on American cities (423).*

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<sup>17</sup> As an Israeli preventative strike would be sudden and without warning to alert the Iranian government, such an attack would be done without the UN Security Council’s approval. According to Chapter 1, Article 2; Chapter 6, Article 33, of the United Nations Charter, this deems the act a violation of international law. UNIACKE S. (2007). *The False Promise of Preventive War*. In Henry Shue; David Rodin, *Preemption: military action and moral justification*. Oxford University Press:88.

<sup>18</sup> US President Barack Obama has refrained from using vitriolic language to condemn the Iranian government. However, he has led efforts to add additional sanctions to the ones devised during the Bush administration’s two terms.

<sup>19</sup> The phrase, “indivisibility of terrorism,” was first used by Rupert Cornwell, (2002) *How War in the Middle East Roils Transatlantic Relations*. *European Affairs* 3 (2).

This is an insinuation that a state like Iran would not hesitate to replicate the war-like attacks on a major American city itself, or by providing a terrorist group with nuclear weapons that it has not yet attained, is a clear attempt to label the theocratic regime as an existential threat, if not directly to the United States, then to regional or international peace.

Lastly, the Islamic government has not minced words with its own rhetoric regarding the United States, which it regularly describes as the 'Great Satan' and the 'Global Arrogance', and Israel, which it refers to as the 'Little Satan' and the 'Zionist Entity'. The government is an illusionary democracy, as its presidential candidates are pre-approved by the clerical regime. Power is largely concentrated in the Supreme Leader of Iran, a position that is responsible for the appointment of the heads of many powerful posts in the military, civil government, and the judiciary. The Leader is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and the provisional chief of the three branches of government (the judiciary, the legislature, and the executive) (Sadjapour 2009:6). Thus, there is a clear centralization of power within the office of the Supreme Leader of Iran.

As Karim Sadjapour of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace states, "[The current Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei's political discourse [is constituted by the following tenets]: Islam embodies justice, independence requires self-sufficiency, and foreign powers are hostile to an independent, Islamic Iran (2009). Also to be noted, most of Khamenei's speech-acts are rooted in the presumption that the United States, and to a lesser extent Israel, have, and will continue to, subvert the theological government through imperialistic means. This defensive stance is in stark contrast to the assertion that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons for offensive purposes, an accusation made in the Netanyahu and Bush speech-acts. Khamenei labels Israel as an enemy of Israel in very harsh terms when he states:

*It is heard sometimes, [from] the enemies of the Iranian nation, like from the mouth of the malevolent, untouchable rabid dog of the region, the Zionist regime. They move their chins [saying] that Iran is a threat to the entire world. No. This is a saying of the enemy and exactly the opposite point to an Islamic origin [what is said originally in Islam]. The threat to the entire world are those forces of evil and evil-creators who have shown of themselves nothing but evil, such as this fake regime of Israel<sup>20</sup> (Bronner 2006).*

This vitriolic statement demonstrates the viewpoint that the leadership in Tehran has concerning Israel: an illegitimate, undermining, and hypocritical threat to the Islamic theocracy. In the case of the United States, Khamenei directly references the CIA-orchestrated coup

when he states that, “The US government has not yet lost its insatiable greed for domination of [Iran]. [The US is] still thinking of restoring their evil domination of Iran, which intensified with the coup [of former Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh]... and continued until the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1989<sup>21</sup>” (16). Khamenei also counters the binational alliance’s speech-acts when he states that, “The ridiculous accusations such as human rights violations or seeking weapons or mass destruction are only empty claims aimed at exerting pressure on the Islamic Republic, and if Iran [changes its ideology-rooted policies], the United States will also change its hostile attitude toward the Islamic Republic... We consider [self-determination] one of our major Islamic duties.<sup>22</sup>” (20). This effectively demonstrates how the binational alliance/Iranian constellation perpetuates itself. It is in these speech-acts that Khomeini makes the linkage between the Islamic Republic’s fundamental policies concerning its domestic nuclear program, its sovereignty over its domestic civil rights laws, and its right to, and need for, self-determination as a threat to the United States’ national interest. As such, Khomeini accuses the United States of coercion to undermine the Islamic republic’s foundational principles.

## Iran-US/Israel macrosecuritizations and the formation of a constellation and a security dilemma

By labelling the binational alliance’s macrosecuritization of the Iranian government (through microsecuritizations of its nuclear program, and domestic laws concerning civil rights and the policies it pursues in the name of self-determination) as empty claims (as mentioned in the speech-act above) meant to coerce the government, one can see how each side’s ‘threat’ is also the other side’s referent object. Specifically, the binational alliance’s referent object is national security, but more broadly regional (the Middle East) and international security. For Iran, the referent objects are its theological government and its right to self-determination and sovereignty. However, if Iran interprets the binational alliance’s quest for international security as a veil for imperialism, and if the binational alliance interprets Iran’s objective to defend its government, rights to sovereignty, and self-determination as an offensive nuclear threat, then a self-perpetuating constellation is created. In effect, this also manifests a process-created security dilemma.

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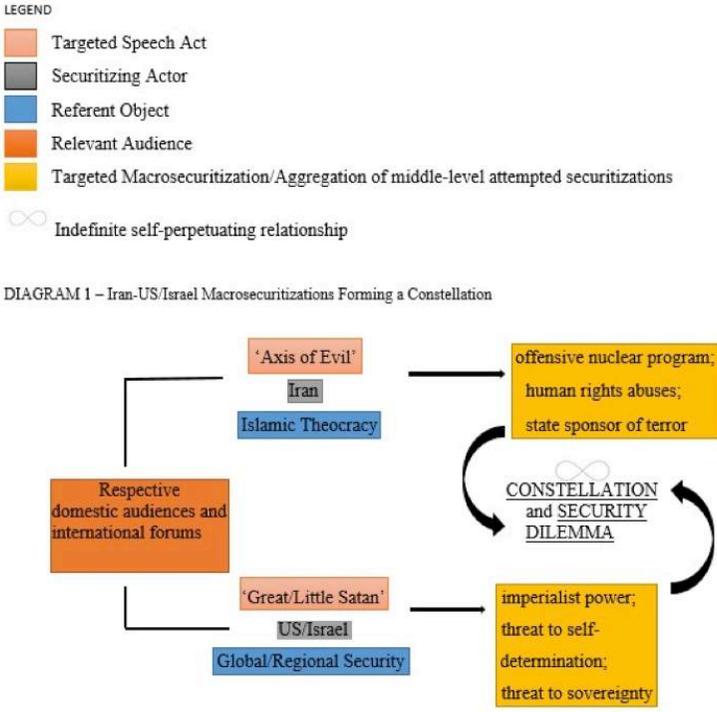
<sup>20</sup> Excerpt from a speech by Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to 50,000 Iranian paramilitary militia Basij commanders in Tehran’s Grand Prayer site. The speech was broadcast live by Iranian TV and radio.

<sup>21</sup> Address to students at Shahid Beheshti University, May 28, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Speech at the International Conference in Support of Intifada, April 24, 2001.

According to Booth and Wheeler (2009), a security dilemma, “gets to the very heart of politics among nations: the existential condition of uncertainty in human affairs.” (1) Moreover, the, “focus of the [dilemma] is that weapons that states can use for their own *self*-protection, potentially or actually *threaten harm* to others” (1). Essentially, the core argument of the security dilemma is that, in the absence of a supranational authority that can enforce binding agreements (this is essentially structural anarchy at the state level), “... efforts to improve national security have the effect of appearing to threaten other states thereby provoking military counter-moves. This in turn can lead to a net decrease in security for all states” (Griffiths and O’Callaghan 2002:292). More specifically, the ‘dilemma’ portion of the term refers to, “the need to choose (to interpret and to respond) in the existential condition of resolved uncertainty; sometimes, the outcome of these choices is that policies designed only to enhance security bring about mutual insecurity” (Booth and Wheeler 2009).

If it is uncertainty that creates this dilemma, it is Israel’s and Iran’s deep-seated distrust, anxiety, and fear bred by a history of fulfilled threats and antagonism that firmly roots it. This condition is further destabilized and taken out of rational discourse by cultural hypersensitivity to exogenous threats, as earlier demonstrated by cases in Israel and Iran’s ethnographic modern history. Booth and Wheeler state that, “according to most security dilemma theorists, permanent insecurity between nations is the inescapable lot of living in a condition of anarchy” (2). The theorists the authors are referring to view the security dilemma grounded in the same conceptualization of anarchy as put forward by John Herz, the theorist who coined the term ‘security dilemma’ in 1950. Herz’s reflections about the states system led him to believe that, “[there was] apparently no escape from this vicious circle [of the security dilemma]; and [he] believed it a necessary consequence of social life” (1951:3). This entire process (including what was previously outlined in Table 1) is elucidated in diagram 1:



However, this view of anarchic social life as inescapable insecurity and a given in international relations is somewhat short-sighted. As the process<sup>23</sup> of securitization has been demonstrated to be a series of conscious acts by a securitizing actor, the binational alliance-Iranian constellation and security dilemma is therefore not a product of anarchy, but a product of what states make of anarchy.<sup>24</sup> Even with the assumption that the state system is anarchical, Wendt argues that, “self-help is not a logical or contingent feature of anarchy itself. Instead, states act towards other states based on the intersubjective meaning that those states have for them” (1992:397). These intersubjective meanings are socially constructed and which can, by definition, be deconstructed.

In this context, the process-generated security dilemma need not be endlessly self-perpetuating. It is only insofar as that the identity of the macrosecritizations remain unchanged that the security dilemma can perpetuate. As Wendt illustrates: “When states assess the risk of another state’s military capability, it matters how that state is perceived — a nuclear Britain is much less dangerous to the United States than a nuclear North Korea because North Korea is perceived to be aggressive towards the US” (397). It may seem unimaginable

at the moment for Iran to be perceived by the binational alliance as no longer an existential threat, and even an ally of sorts (specifically, one whose identity is not perceived as a 'North Korea', but as a "Britain"), but this deconstruction of consciously generated mutual-macrosecritizations (which form a constellation and security dilemma) occurred when the Soviet Union's ceased to exist in its ideological form. The identity of the Soviet Union, and how the West perceived it, was deconstructed drastically and very rapidly (beginning with several revolutions in soviet states in 1989 and ending in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union). Therefore, the mutual antagonism between the binational alliance and Iran is not a given: just as it is a process-generated construct, it can be deconstructed by process as well.

The de-secritization of securitizations can occur, as outlined in *On Security*, by Ronnie D. Lipschutz. This can be done by, "de-secritiz[ing] issues that have been securitized" (Wæver 1995:57-58). Unfortunately, the difficulty of de-secritizing this particular security dilemma cannot be overstated. The macrosecritizations that have been consciously generated by the three actors are reinforced by speech-acts that serve to demonstrate that the referent object must be protected at all costs. Moreover, with the added dimension of complexity created by the relationship between one side's threat being the other side's referent object, it is difficult to imagine how de-secritization will occur in the binational alliance-Iran case. With Israel's and Iran's modern histories also replete with existential threats, the chances of the security dilemma continuing to perpetuate is much higher than the chances of reaching a mutually-agreed upon peaceful solution.

## Conclusions

The Iranian nuclear issue has been a major American and Israeli foreign policy dilemma since previously undeclared Iranian nuclear facilities were uncovered in Natanz and Arak in 2002. Ever since, the issue has been extremely contentious and has brought the Middle East to the brink of another military confrontation. Although the issue came to the forefront in 2002, its contentious nature has been magnified exponentially by ethnographic factors that span three-quarters of a century. By detailing both Israel and Iran's histories of exogenous existential threats to the state and government, respectively, this context allows for a more

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<sup>23</sup> In Diagram 1 is shown how securitization is process-oriented. Components of securitization generate macrosecritizations that encapsulate these components. A constellation forms as a result of the competing macrosecritizations. This constellation perpetuates in the fashion described at the beginning of the section.

<sup>24</sup> This is in reference to Alexander Wendt's influential 1992 article, Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics. *International Organization*. (46) 2:391-425.

thorough analysis of the resonance of the securitizing actors speech-acts. In the case of Israel, Netanyahu's ability to frame the need to defend the referent object by any means necessary from what is yet to be a weaponized nuclear program, is effective because of a history of constant threats to the Jewish state and the Jewish people, which is rooted in the memory of the Holocaust.

In Iran's case, the Supreme Leader Khomeini, who has been in power since 1989, has framed the United States as an usurping imperialist threat working in unison with Israel to undermine and overthrow the theological government, to take Iran's abundant oil reserves. This framing has resonated because of the memory of the 1953 CIA-led coup and the American government's consistent disapproval of the Islamic regime's policies, which is viewed by Iran as an attempt to undermine its right to self-determination.

The process of whether these securitizations, which as a group are formed into larger, ideologically-based macrosecuritizations, have been completely successful or not would need to be explored in an entire paper of its own. However, it is the process which has heightened the risk of military conflict. It is the process of Netanyahu's attempted securitization of the Iranian nuclear program which has generated a political atmosphere that reduces the feasibility of a peaceful resolution and heavily favours military action. This is political self-entrapment, as it handcuffs the securitizing actor's ability to make a pragmatic policy shift which could improve the chances of solving the issue peacefully. This self-imposed limitation is demonstrated by Netanyahu's categorical dismissal of the mere idea of negotiating with the Iranians. Although there have been instances in recent history where supposed hardliners took a drastic policy shift with great effect, such as when 'Nixon went to China'<sup>25</sup>, the complexities and risks of such an attempt in this case are exponentially higher for Netanyahu's political career.

By delegitimizing and dismissing any attempted negotiations with the Iranian government as a trap through the process of securitization, Netanyahu has effectively removed one of the few policy alternatives to peacefully resolving the issue. By doing so, Netanyahu discounts diplomatic negotiations and leaves only a military strike on Iranian nuclear facilities or for the Iranians to dissolve their nuclear program as acceptable and possible outcomes. Since the leadership in Tehran has stated that its, "guaranteed right to a domestic nuclear energy program is non-negotiable" (Associated Press 2013) by its interpretation of Article IV of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)<sup>26</sup>, Netanyahu's demand for Iran to dismantle its nuclear program is a non-starter. This is especially believable because of the Iranians heightened sensitivity to foreign powers undermining its right to self-determination, as mentioned earlier.

Moreover, the macrosecritizations constructed by Iran, the US, and Israel subsequently form a constellation that represent and perpetuate a process-formed security dilemma which heighten the risk of conflict. The constellation endangers sound problem-solving as the macrosecritizations that form this constellation are outside of the realm of regular politics which justify extreme means and disavow conventional problem-solving practices. Its self-perpetuating structure also strengthens and reinforces the relationship between each side's referent objects and the associated threats.

Thus, this constellation hinders pragmatic foreign policy-making and reduces the already few possibilities to resolve the conflict peacefully. It is a paradox that one who seeks to securitize a 'threat' to advance one's own security goals may in the process lessen one's security. This dynamic is dangerous and a 'tragedy of great power politics'.<sup>27</sup> That in a securitizing actor's quest to maximize its referent objects' security it allows its hypersensitivity to threats to justify its behaviour that in turn, heightens the risk to its referent objects, is unfortunately ironic.

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<sup>25</sup> This is a reference to when the ardent anti-Communist US President Richard Nixon visited the Chinese Chairman Mao Zedong in 1972. At the time, China viewed the US as its top enemy, and the US had yet to recognize the Chinese government. As a political metaphor, it refers to the ability of a politician with an unassailable reputation among his supporters for representing and defending their values to take actions that would draw their criticism and even opposition if taken by someone without those credentials. Although Israel has somewhat similar examples of its own (Prime Minister Menachem Begin agreed to give back the Sinai to Egypt, and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon withdrew Israel from of Gaza), the perceived threat of a nuclear attack makes these issues incomparable to the current Iranian dilemma.

See more in: <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/worldview/090427/hitting-the-reset-button?page=0,1#1>

<sup>26</sup> Article IV: Nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in conformity with Articles I and II of this Treaty.

<sup>27</sup> A reference to John Mersheimer's 2001 book of the same name.

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