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(De)Securitization of Islam in Turkey

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Abstract

This article uses the Copenhagen School's securitization theory in order to analyze the attempts at desecuritizing Turkey's relations with Iran based on the foreign policy of the 'National Outlook' movement. Through analyzing Erbakan's policies, the article sheds light on his role in shaping foreign policy and the consequences of successful securitization and de-securitization acts. In doing so, the article also touches upon the agent-structure interplay in different levels of analysis and its cross-sectoral effects. The article shows that successful de-securitization and securitization occurred, although the acts resulted in suppression from existing dominant secular structures through military interventions.

Keywords: desecuritization, securization theory, Turkey, Copenhagen School, secularism.

Introduction

Relationship between states within the context of national identity has always been on the agenda of security studies. Although ontological security is an entrenched aspect of the domestic and foreign policy orientations of states, it also plays an important role in differentiation of the framing of the national identity and threat perception between the state and the individual. The behaviors of nation-states regarding their foreign policies are often assumed to be shaped independently from the individual actors. In other words, policy orientation is shaped by the structural, domestic and regional conditions and constraints. Having said this actors' decisions shaping Turkish foreign policies cannot simply be explained by structural causes. For example, the framing of Iran in Turkey changed drastically during Necmettin Erbakan's premiership. Erbakan's policy orientation and rhetoric have been dominated by framing of Iran as an ally to Turkey. This orientation and

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framing was due to Erbakan's perception of Iran and Turkey sharing a common Islamic identity and anti-western tendencies. In that respect, structural theories are inadequate in explaining the decisions of individual actor's that do not fit with the domestic or foreign structure. Furthermore, theories of security studies that have a constructivist turn, particularly the Copenhagen School, focus on identity at the subunit level, identity's homogenous and single-faceted character. The framing of national identity and ontological security of the individual and the state dichotomy is often neglected in the studies of International Relations.

Theoretically, in terms of the securitization process, the article benefitted the conceptualization of Copenhagen School's securitization theory and amalgamate it with a critical constructivist stance on ontological security and context-effect oriented production of image. Largely known through Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, the importance of the Copenhagen School is that it has a social viewpoint on security studies. As analyzed in depth below, the School introduced securitization as a speech act theory whereby a securitizing actor makes a claim through speech act identifying an existential threat. In this article, Necmettin Erbakan's acts are elucidated through the cases of Cyprus in the case of the West, Islamic acts and secularism in the case of Iran. Nevertheless, it is argued that although the individual can be successful in securitizing a case, the consequences may not result in acceptance of extraordinary measures and may ultimately lead to suppression from the existing hegemonic structure.

The article sheds light on the individual's role in securitizing foreign policy based on the individual's perception of national identity. Deriving from historical examples, the article examines Turkey between 1996-1997 as a case study and analyzes the individuals as securitizing or counter-securitizing actors regarding Islamic and secular identities. The main example is the desecuritization of Iran by former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan. Additionally, for a comparison, Erbakan's securitization act regarding Cyprus is also used by referring to his National Outlook ideology towards the West. In both cases, successful securitization and desecuritization occurred. However, having said this, in both cases, the success of securitization and desecuritization resulted in suppression from the existing secular structures through military interventions despite the support his political parties gained from the public audience in the ballots.

Erbakan was a very significant and active figure in Turkish politics. The decision to focus on him as the case study is because of his attempts at desecuritizing religion in the domestic and foreign policy making based on the Islamically oriented politico-religious 'National Outlook' movement that he founded in 1969. The movement continues to exist since that time, and Erbakan until his death served as the leader of several Islamist or Islamically oriented political parties based on the ideology.

His premiership between 28 June 1996 - 30 June 1997 and Cyprus intervention of 1974 are particularly important due to his accomplishments. Domestically

speaking, it is interesting to note that after each intervention by the military, his party managed to re-enter the Assembly and even after he and his parties were banned from active politics, he continued to provide counter-identity to the dominant secular identity. Secondly, regionally speaking, it is important to analyze the Cyprus intervention in order to understand his threat perception based on his foreign policy choices regarding the West. Thirdly, again in terms of regional matters, his threat perception and the desecuritization of Iran are important to understand his foreign policy choices regarding Muslim countries. During his premiership, he developed relations with other Islamic countries, particularly the post-Islamic revolution in Iran, and established the D-8 Islamic Initiative. Finally Erbakan was the first political figure to provide an "other" for the dominant secular identity within domestic and foreign politics in Turkey.

The Conceptualization of the Individual at the Copenhagen School

The Copenhagen School systematized the widening and deepening of the security studies, firstly through sectors and levels of analysis and secondly through the securitization theory. Buzan proposed that there are five intertwined security sectors in security analysis, namely military, political, economic, societal and environmental (Buzan, Waever, & DeWilde, 1998). Since the main focus of this research is on identity-based foreign policy making, it will largely concentrate on the societal sector. According to Ole Wæver, societal security is the defense of a community against a perceived threat to its essential character or 'identity' (Waever, 2008).

There are two problems that arise when taking Copenhagen School's terminology as it is. Firstly, the explanation of societal security arises with its acceptance of identities as homogenous and fixed for the purposes of analyzing the securitization process. This kind of ontological assumption causes national identities to be treated as monolithic and unitary, while also preventing the observation that identities are dependent on perceptions of the agents. One particular criticism in line with this problem of the conceptualization of identities came from McSweeney, although his criticism focused on societal identities rather than individuals. He argued that 'society' cannot be assumed to "embody "a single value, interest or identity, which stands alongside the values of the state as the only object of vulnerability and threat that is relevant to the security analysis problem" (McSweeney, 1996). Although the reflections of the identity problem in societal security discussions have been further explored in detail from differing theoretical views (Hansen, 2012; McSweeney, 1996; Williams, 1998) the individual's securitization of foreign policy based on his/her own identity has not been explored.

The second issue in societal securitization arises from the agent-structure relationship. In the existing International Relations (IR) literature, the agent-structure relationship and interplay have been analyzed, but it is often assumed that security is a subject where the existence or even the possibility of an existential threat motivates the individual actors to behave in similar ways, which is towards survival (Wolfers, 1962). Nevertheless, there are actors in international relations who, even when faced with the serious security issues, make decisions based on their personal character and perceptions, not the structural conditions or limitations.

The Copenhagen School's main contribution to the security studies literature is the inducement of the concept of securitization. Securitization is defined as the "discursive and political process through which an inter-subjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat (Buzan, Waever, & DeWilde, 1998). In that respect, according to Buzan, "the 'referent object' is the object that is/ claimed to be threatened, the 'securitizing actor' is the one who makes the claim, through speech act, of identifying an existential threat to this referent object and thereby legitimizing extraordinary measures, and the 'audience' refers to those have to be convinced in order for the speech act to be successful" (Buzan, Waever, & DeWilde, 1998). Hence, the securitization process by the agency of the securitizing actor inherently involves an individual level of analysis due to the fact that the designation of the securitization process relies heavily on the agent's capacity. Ultimately, how the securitizing actors perceive the given data and decide whether or not an issue poses a threat to the referent object is related to their own experiences and overall background.

In this respect, minimal amount of research has been conducted on individuals in general as securitizing actors particularly in foreign policy making. The few exceptions to that are Sinem Açıkmeşe's and Rita Abrahamsen's analysis of individual securitizing actors. Abrahamsen's focus was on Tony Blair's securitization discourse of Africa in relation to the war on terror and how his move shifted attention beyond the United Kingdom's (UK) foreign policy to Africa's place within global governance (Abrahamsen, 2005). Açıkmeşe focused on the parallels between the Copenhagen School's securitization theory and neoclassical realism in their assumptions of the agents' role in deciding whether an issue is a threat and therefore necessitates a securitization move (Akgul Acikmese, 2011).

These studies did not completely focus on the interplay between the individual and other levels of analysis in Copenhagen School. Therefore, the framing of the threat regarding ontological security of the state from the securitizing actor's lens and consequences at the higher levels of analysis to Copenhagen School's securitization theory will also contribute to the levels of analysis debate. At this stage, the article argues that the Prime Minister's background is likely to affect his threat perception and through his framing transform the domestic and regional structure and conversely, the domestic, regional and/or international structure may

both directly and indirectly affect the Prime Minister's identity securitization move by limiting or encouraging his maneuvers.

The chosen case for analysis is Turkey's Iranian foreign policy. As one of the main political actors in the Middle East with a majority Muslim population, their perceived national identity is different. Whereas Turkey officially highlights its secular identity, in Iran it is the Islamic identity that is definitive of the nation. Having said this, both countries have had dominant leaders who highlighted the Islamic identity. Thus, both countries have demonstrated different characteristics of identity under different leadership regimes. In this regard, this article aims to move away from the recent literature, which has generally solely focused on structural aspects at the unit and regional levels of the foreign policy decision making processes of Iranian and Turkish leaders along with the unchartered territory of individual agents' foreign policy behavior in securitizing the perceived identity of the state. The analysis focuses on Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan as he was the first Turkish Prime Minister from an Islamist party. As a politician, he was active in foreign policy making and was the first to challenge the secular order within the domestic and foreign politics.

Transformation of the Threat Perception at the Individual and Unit Level

In the early republic era, threat perception in Turkey was built upon domestic threat perceptions that were the pillars of the Ottoman era, such as Islam and the Eastern way of life. In that respect, the Takrir-i Sükun Law of 1925 is worth mentioning since it was aimed specifically against the Islamic establishments. Until the late 1940s, the main threat perception of the state elite was religion, which meant that securitization measures taken were aimed at protecting the secular identity of the state. The important thing here is that as seen in the Erbakan case, the threat for many individuals was not Islam. On the contrary, the important identity criterion was Islam and the securitization of Islam was necessary, not the reverse. In addition to the Takrir-i Sükun Law in 1925, with the introduction of another law, all orders, lodges, and other religious brotherhoods were officially banned, and sheikhdom and discipleship were prohibited. In the 1928 Constitution, the clause which defined the Turkish state's official religion was Islam was removed. Until that point, the judges' main guidance during the Ottoman era was the Quran. This was also replaced in the aftermath of the Republic with the duty holder of the Republic against Sharia in Independent Tribunals. Sharia and the Islamic lifestyle were replaced with the Western lifestyle and religious tutors were considered illegitimate in the aftermath.

During the Cold War era, the state elite had a new threat perception. This time, the threat was not rooted within the state borders but from neighboring

countries; communism became the major threat and the securitization measure for that took the form of Turkish nationalism polished with Islam that was predicated on obedience. Hence, up until the mid-1940s, the political structure that was a bulwark against the Islamists became the bulwark against Communists. Under the leadership of İsmet İnonu, a more religious discourse started along with new religious clauses such as the introduction of religious courses in primary schools and the establishment of Imam Hatip Schools (religious schools), while parties with leftist tendencies and syndicates were shut down. Similarly, in the late 60s and the 70s, particularly after the military intervention of 1971, the military and the bureaucracy utilized Sunni Islam to prevent chaos.

While the military regarded Sunni Islam as a unifying instrument against anarchy and as the source of the nation's moral life, (Eligur, 2010) it still regarded Erbakan as a threat to the secular structure. The National Order Party was shut down on 20 May 1971 after the first military memorandum due to its violation of secularism. It's successor party, National Salvation, was established in October 1972. In the 1973 general elections, it gained more support from the public than its predecessor. It formed a coalition government with the center-left oriented secular Republican Peoples Party. One of the coalition's most defining characteristics and Erbakan's identity-based security perception was related to Cyprus intervention. The Cyprus intervention of 1974 is important for analyzing Erbakan's foreign policy choices, which shows his National Outlook vision (Erbakan, 2014). Erbakan was strongly critical of secularizing republican reforms, against Turkey's accession to the EU on the grounds of treason to Turkish history, the concept of civilization culture and independence. Although the National Salvation Party formed coalition governments three times, it was also banned in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey. The ban was lifted in 1987 and he returned to the political arena as founder and leader of the Welfare Party and became the Prime Minister in August 1996.

In January 1996, Turkey and Greece were close to war due to the Kardak reef crisis in the Aegean Sea. Erbakan's premiership proved more problematic for the West, which was particularly related to his approach to military intervention in Cyprus by Turkey in1974. According to Philip Robins: "It was this reputation for intransigence that alarmed senior figures in Washington, London and the UN Secretariat, all of whom feared that Turkey would now be less forthcoming on Cyprus. This sense of foreboding seemed to be shared by senior foreign-ministry figures in Ankara. It was feared that Erbakan might come out against the idea of federation, and that he might be successful in persuading some Islamic countries to recognize the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, thereby increasing international criticism" (Robins, 1997).

Due to ideological factors, his premiership lasted until the military coup in February 28, 1997. Afterward, his party was once again banned by the Constitutional Court for violations of the secularism clause of the Turkish Constitution and he was excluded from active politics. He found the party again in December 1997,

which was subsequently banned on 22 June 2001. In July 2001, he founded the Felicity Party and it continues to be an Islamic oriented political party.

When the National Order Party is examined in terms of laws related to democracy, social justice, and foreign intervention, it is evident that the party had a clear vision of Islam as both a tool and a moral compass. The party manifesto stated that "We are opposed to instrumentalization of secularism that is described as freedom of religion and conscious meanwhile oppressing religion and pious people. We are opposed to an education system that ignores partially or fully religious education" (Milli Nizam Tuzuk, n.d). "Even though none of the principles of the democratic regime are against national morals and historical consciousness, the educational curriculum followed an anti-national path. This vicious policy has increased the courage and activity of the imperialists of the bureaucratic culture, who are eager for the spiritual invasion of our country. This is the reason for the spread of Marxism, cosmopolitanism and the spread of other ideological foreign interventions. It is a result of ideological and not economic factors." (Milli Nizam Tuzuk, Art.8From these articles, it is clear that Erbakan has a clear ideological standing. As mentioned above, the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" combining nationalism and Islamism and formulating ideologies of the right that emphasized order, obedience, and deference to tradition (Heper & Sayarı, 2012) became the major state ideology from the 1980s onwards.

The dichotomy is clear in Erbakan's foreign policy discourse on Iran. In Iran, he openly praised Khomeini and the Islamic Republic, whereas in Turkey, he showed a more neutral side focusing on the commercial necessities of the bilateral relations and neighborhood diplomacy.

Erbakan's desecuritization of Iran through religious discourse

After becoming Prime Minister, Erbakan made his first official visit to Iran. At the time, Iran was labeled as a rough state at the West. In this respect, the secularist establishment, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the military, were hesitant with the foreign policy choices of Erbakan, largely because they alienated Turkey from the West and would lead to an Islamic foreign policy clash with Kemalist commitments (Hale, 2000) It also was not helpful and made the situation even worse that during the meeting with the Iranian President Rafsanjani, Erbakan said that the Turkish national intelligence organization *Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*-MIT may have been under the influence of the CIA and Mossad (Fırat & Kurkcuoglu, 2008). The visit to Iran took ten days and mostly focused on economic matters. The visit concluded with the signing of a twenty-three-billion-dollar gas deal that would be implemented over a 23-year period. The deal was agreed at the

time when the USA had placed sanctions on Iran that prohibited any economic trade greater than forty million dollars in value.

Throughout this period, by highlighting the brotherhood among Muslims and Muslim identity in all of his speeches, Erbakan shifted the threat perception towards the West and designated Iran as an ally on the grounds that both have Islamic populations and share the same faith. Traces of his ideas and his character profile were reflected in his sympathy towards the Islamic Republic in his quotes on Khomeini, as well as how he achieved the most important and necessary revolution (Fırat & Kurkcuoglu, 2008). Indicating that secularism is also a Western concept, he preferred and attempted to develop economic cooperation with the Islamic world. Erbakan's rhetoric in similar speeches demonstrate his overly ideological, rigid and polarizing background, focusing on "us vs. them", in that "us" was not just Turks, but implied the entire Muslim world and "them" referred to the West and Israel. For Erbakan, the defining element of Turkish identity was not secularism but Islamic religion. Within this referent object, his threat perception was contrary to the traditional Turkish elite discourse that focuses on the Islamic threat and not the West. However, the move has a serious backlash in domestic politics due to the differing views of the audience, notably the military, bureaucracy and secular civil society establishments, which has led to counter securitization of secularism. His societal desecuritizing move can be considered a success on two grounds: political and economic.

Economically speaking, Erbakan achieved what no other ministers had achieved until that point with the gas deal. The official visits to Tehran had been accelerated since Süleyman Demirel's era in 1992,and economic negotiations also increased during Tansu Ciller's era in 1995 (Robins, 1997). However, it was Erbakan's accomplishment to create the necessary trust to sign a deal that would be binding for the next 23 years between the Turkish and Iranian governments through his desecuritizing move in the societal sector through religious discourse.

Secondly, Erbakan created the D-8 (Developing-8) Organization for Economic Cooperation through his Islamic Initiative to counter balance the G-7 (Group of 7) consisting of the seven largest advanced economies with Western and Christian identities namely Canada, Italy, Germany, Japan, France, the UK and the USA. In addition to Turkey, the foreign ministers from the group of developing Islamic states, namely Bangladesh, Iran, Indonesia, Egypt, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Pakistan, came together in Istanbul on 22 October 1996 with the aim of socio-economic development. The organization aimed to reduce the dependency of those states to the USA, the EU, and Japan (Olsen, 2004).

Consequences of desecuritizing Iran in domestic political and military structures

The desecuritization of Iran proved successful with further improved cooperation between the two countries in the economic sphere in areas such as transportation, tourism, industry, and commerce. In the political sphere, the two countries agreed to cooperate on security intelligence against the PKK. On the other hand, the Islamic identity based desecuritization had a negative impact on the judiciary, foreign affairs and military structures in the domestic realm. In the post-Cold War era, the military that had dispensed the Soviet threat, focused on maintaining the continuing allegiance with the West via broadening the relations with Israel. Evidently, that policy did not receive the approval of the Prime Minister, who openly approved of the Iranian Islamic Revolution.

The dichotomy between the secular and pro-Islamic domestic structures characterized as state and government reached the lowest point on the Jerusalem Memorial Night that was hosted in Sincan between 31 January and 2 February. The memorial was also the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Sincan's mayor, Bekir Yıldız, invited the Iranian Ambassador, Mohammed Reza Baqeri to speak in Turkey. Baqeri criticized Israel in his speech by saying "The English gave birth to this illegitimate child and the Americans raised it." (Elik, 2013). In the immediate aftermath of this event, the military and bureaucratic structures counter securitized secularism and re-established Iran as a threat against the Turkish nation. Turkish Military Forces entered Sincan and Baqeri was later declared *persona non grata* and eventually expelled from the country. While Erbakan tried to prevent the expulsion, Mesut Yılmaz, the leader of the Motherland Party, declared "Baqeri is a terrorist, not a diplomat" (Hunter, 2010). Meanwhile, Iran retaliated against the expulsion of its diplomats by deporting Osman Korutürk, Turkey's Ambassador to Iran, and Ufuk Özsancak, the Turkish consul in Urmiya (Elik, 2013).

The former expectations from the Turkish Islamic synthesis only lasted until the 1997 postmodern coup. Although political Islam was initially overlooked, the military soon took steps due to the increasing role and power of the religious identity in the public sphere vis-à-vis the secular state structure and once again intervened in the Erbakan government. On 28 February, the National Security Council presided by Süleyman Demirel issued a memorandum that precipitated the resignation of Necmettin Erbakan and the end of his coalition government. The operation was planned by Generals İsmail Hakkı Karadayı, Çevik Bir, Çetin Doğan, Necdet Timur, Teoman Koman and Erol Özkasnak. In the aftermath of the so called 'post-modern coup', the Welfare Party was banned by the courts, Erbakan was banned from politics and Mesut Yılmaz was appointed as Prime Minister. Fifteen years later, during the Justice and Development Party (JDP) rule in 2012, Çevik Bir was detained with several other generals for their roles in the military intervention into politics in 1997.

As previously mentioned, Erbakan and the February 28 incident proved to be a learning curve for the Justice and Development Party and even for the successive leaders of the Virtue Party after Erbakan. Recai Kutan, the leader of the Virtue Party (VP), which succeeded the WP after the latter party's prohibition in 1998, indicated that "the Virtue Party (now) views the EU in a positive light and thinks that the process will improve West-Turkey relations and help contribute to Turkey's democratization" (Resul, 2008). The WP and the VP, and later the JDP, had been severely oppressed during the February 28th process, and, as a result, they started to see the democratic conditionality imposed by the EU and the subsequent diminution of the role of the military as beneficial to their own survival (Dagi, 2005).

Conclusion

The role of the political figure in the societal (de)securitization of Turkey's foreign and domestic politics is among the neglected topics in International Relations. This article examines the societal securitization of foreign policy from the political actor's lens through analysis of the act of securitizing actors. Furthermore, the consequences of such securitization act in the societal sector when the individual's perception of national identity clash with the existing hegemonic structure's perception of national identity has been analyzed. In doing so, the research touched upon the agent-structure interplay in different levels of analysis and its cross-sectoral influence.

The article focused on Necmettin Erbakan as a securitizing actor focusing on his foreign policy and acts in relation to Iran in 1996. Erbakan is a very significant figure in Turkish politics as it is evident that the National Outlook movement that he founded in 1969 has ideologically guided many ruling political parties including the current JDP government. He demonstrated the duality of the state and government, and the dichotomy between state and individual threat perception. As a politician, Erbakan's legacy is that of an active politician who was the first to challenge the secular order within domestic and foreign politics in Turkey.

The article also used Erbakan speeches and choices of action related to Cyprus as a control case. In both cases, the article demonstrated that societal securitization and desecuritization of Turkish foreign policy towards Iran and Cyprus have been affected by the individual actor's threat perception regarding the case. On the other hand, desecuritization of relations with Iran and the securitization of Cyprus with respect to identity deteriorated the political sector at the domestic level, despite the support from society. The domestic military structure, which at the time was heavily embedded in the political structure, left little room for political maneuver and when Erbakan pressed to take action, he was suppressed through military interventions.

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