

SECURITIZATION OF NETANYAHU'S RHETORIC POST 7 OCTOBER 2023 ATTACKS

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze how Netanyahu's securitization construction after the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023 in Israel, by using securitization theory and theory of speech act. The results show that the securitization focused by Netanyahu's speech act which carried out by three stages; the identification stage can be observed on how Netanyahu in his statements and actions towards Hamas after 7 October 2023; The emergency action can be observed on how Israel responds to it by devastating bombardment of Gaza; Impact on inter-unit relations can be observed on how Hamas responded to Israel's counterattack after its attack on 7 October 2023. In the constellation that occurred, there were several actors involved, namely Israel-IDF, Hamas, and Hezbollah. Moreover, non-securitization observed on conditions before 7 October 2023, where Israel focused only on its own internal problems. Politicized observed on how Netanyahu by his speech to his audience (Israeli citizens) who suggested them that they were in a 'war' situation with Hamas. Securitized observed on how Netanyahu along with his staff Defense Secretary Yoav Gallant and Secretary Benny Gantz in his press conference rejected growing international criticism over the civilian cost of the war, and urged Western leaders to lend their support to them because victory would mean victory for the rest of the world.

Keywords: Israel, Netanyahu, Palestine, Securitization

INTRODUCTION

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the humanitarian issues that has been highlighted by the international community for a long time, and can even be called an eternal conflict because the conflict has been going on for decades, namely since 1948. Not only humanitarian issues with Palestine, ever since its emergence in 1948, Israel has involved in many conflicts even with the Arab countries (Hakim et al., 2023). The events of October 7, 2023 are one of the events that marked the peak of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the last decade. This event was marked by attacks carried out by Hamas from the Gaza Strip to

the Israeli-occupied territory. In fact, the Hamas attack was said to be the most violent resistance attack carried out against Israel in the last 50 years (Setiawan, 2024a). Since the war began on October 7, 2023, the recorded war casualties as of Friday, October 20, 2023 have reached 5,618 people with details of 4,137 people killed in the Gaza Strip, and 1,661 of them were children, and 81 Palestinians died in the West Bank as a result of the war, as reported by the Gaza Ministry of Health. With the Israeli side, which claimed 1,400 victims (CNN Indonesia, 2023).

In the attack, Benjamin Netanyahu as Israeli Prime Minister stated that there were more than 260 Israeli civilian casualties found in the Kibbutz Re'im, near with the festival site (Cuddy, 2023). In response to the attacks, Benjamin Netanyahu declared war on Hamas (Muhamad, 2023) and said that Israel was at war after Hamas launched a surprise attack on Saturday, and vowed to exact an unprecedented price from the terror group (Staff, 2023b). Netanyahu announced to the Israeli public the actions that Israel should take in responding to Hamas attacks "Citizens of Israel, we are at war. Not an operation, not a round [of fighting,] at war! This morning Hamas initiated a murderous surprise attack against the state of Israel and its citizens," Netanyahu said in his statement in Hebrew. After the declaration, Netanyahu also said "I urge the public to follow strictly the directives of the military, the Home Front Command. We are at war and will win," (Staff, 2023b).

From this statement, it can be observed that Netanyahu is serious about facing Hamas which has attacked Israel in its territory by informing the Israeli public that Israel is in a state of war against Hamas in the hope that the public will know the condition of the Israeli army in facing Hamas. This was even supported by the President of Israel, Isaac Herzog, via his social media account on X, "The State of Israel is at a difficult moment. I am wishing much strength to the IDF, its commanders and fighters and the entirety of the security and rescue forces" (Staff, 2023b). Through Isaac Herzog's support, this has indicated that Israel is in a critical situation that must be handled by the IDF along with

other Israeli military components to protect the existence of the state of Israel from the threats it faces.

After Israel's declaration of war, countries around the world responded to the declaration with criticisms directed at Israel. In a press conference by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and Minister Benny Gantz, they rejected international criticism of the civilian costs of the war and urged Western leaders to support Israel, arguing that victory over Hamas is a victory over the entire world (Staff, 2023a). In the opening of the Winter Assembly of the 25th Knesset's Second Session on October 2023, Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in his press release "Hamas is part of the axis of evil of Iran, Hezbollah and their minions. They seek to destroy the State of Israel and murder us all... Many people around the world now understand who stands against Israel. They understand that Hamas is ISIS. They understand that Hamas is the new version of Nazism... I tell our friends in the enlightened world: Our war is also your war. If we do not stand together in a united front, it will reach you as well" (Netanyahu, 2023).

Based on Netanyahu's statement at the event, it is known that Netanyahu emphasized that Hamas is an ally of Iran, Hezbollah and other allies who are considered terrorist organizations that must be eradicated. Netanyahu also explained that Hamas wants to destroy Israel and the people in it, so the world community must support Israel's actions to eradicate Hamas to jointly fight Hamas. Netanyahu's statement was of course intended to seek support from the world community regarding Israel's actions against Hamas, and efforts to eradicate Hamas by uniting with Israel. However, Israel's efforts in Gaza have been criticized by various countries due to Israel's excessive actions against civilians, showing their concern over the worsening humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. In fact, Emmanuel Macron to urge Israel to stop (Staff, 2023a). In addition, Joe Biden also stated that the United States fully supports the Israeli people, in line with the NATO spokesman who also stated that they strongly condemn the terrorist attacks carried out by Hamas against NATO partners, and

acts of terrorism are a threat to society and Israel has the right to defend itself (Setiawan, 2024b).

Of course, the efforts made by Netanyahu in gaining international support are based on Israel's desire to achieve its national security. This is because the international community is considered the guilty party in the case of its aggression in Gaza. The UN and the international community tend to claim that Israel has double standards, creating an environment where Israel is seen as a defendant before the international community (Column, 2024). Therefore, Israel will do everything to win international sympathy and support for its cause (Yeo, 2023). In addition, international media and social media also have played a role in the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because the news covered by these media has shown the facts that are happening on the ground, with the facts on the ground, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has escalated following the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023.

This can be observed in Ukka's research found that online reporting of conflicts by international media is foreign policy propaganda that can shape the future of Israel and Palestine (Ukka, 2022). Apart from international media, it is also undeniable that social media has also played a significant role in raising awareness of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The rapid and global reach of social media platforms has helped spread a sense of solidarity among people around the world by bringing the realities of the conflict to people's social media pages. In such conditions, social media is flooded with real-time updates, images, and videos that provide a first-hand look at the conflict, so the personal stories that people share on social media platforms tend to be particularly powerful (Taqiya, 2024). Therefore, it cannot be denied that with the coverage carried out by international media and social media in shaping public perceptions related to the constellation that occurred between Israel and Palestine, it can affect the actions of a country and their alignments.

Apart from the news that occurred, there were also things that influenced the dynamics related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, namely the emergence of boycotts of Israeli products based on Israeli aggression against Palestine to solidarity actions carried out through digital media, both mass media and social media. The boycott represents the failure of the peace process to resolve the Palestine-Israel conflict in accordance with the agreement reached in Oslo (Krylov, 2021). Demonstrations in solidarity with Palestinians under Israeli siege in Gaza have spread across university campuses in the United States and around the world. More than 2,000 people have been arrested at US campuses since April 18, amid polarized debates over the right to protest, the limits of free speech and accusations of antisemitism. In UK, At Newcastle University, a small pro-Palestinian encampment has been set up on a lawn in front of the college's buildings, video and pictures on social media showed (Regan, 2024).

At least forty-four countries have condemned Hamas and denounced its tactics as terrorism, but regional players such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Syria and Iraq have blamed Israel. In addition, there are twenty countries have firmly stated that Israel has the right to defend itself, while others have called for an immediate de-escalation of the violence. Even, over the weekend, several countries changed their initial statements as details of the attack emerged. The UAE, Bahrain, and China all changed their main statements to include strong condemnation of the killing and kidnapping of Israeli civilians. Also, UAE and Bahrain revised their initial statements to specifically condemn Hamas (Waldo et al., 2023). This action can be linked to the theory of securitization and the purpose of securitization itself, which Netanyahu as prime minister of Israel should make decision which can support its decision on Hamas' actions to Israel.

Securitization Theory

Securitization theory is a theory used to analyze why an issue can become a threat to a country. Securitization is a process where an actor declares a

particular issue, dynamic, or actor as an existential threat to a particular reference object (Williams, 2008). In line with Buzan, securitization is an effort made to change a public issue that was initially non-politicized, to become politicized, and then securitized (Buzan et al., 1998). Nonpoliticized means that the state does not cope with the issue; Politicized means that the issue is managed within standard political systems. Securitized means that the issue is framed as a security question through an act of securitization (Shah, 2024).

However, securitization can also be understood as a speech act process where intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to discourse an existential threat to a referent object that allows for urgent action to overcome the threat (Bintang, 2019). Speech acts are used to express ideas about threats and security, by labeling threats and referent objects in providing legitimacy to countries to deal with emerging threats. Speech acts are said to be successful if the construction of threats in the material realm can be confronted with referent objects that can be understood by the public as an audience (Rachmat, 2023). Dwivedi added that the speech action theory tells us that speech itself is an action; and be able to represent and acknowledge "security", and be able to assign a special status to it, accompanied by efforts to legitimize subsequent extraordinary measures. This theory is also a reductionist approach that reduces social phenomena to textual markers, and studies them through the lens of speech action (Dwivedi, 2021).

Speech Act

The speech act approach to security requires three types of units, namely referent objects, securitizing actors, and functional actors. Referent objects means things that are seen to be existentially threatened and have a legitimate claim to survival. Securitizing actors means that actors who securitize issues by declaring something that existentially threatened. Functional actors means that actors who affect the dynamics of a sector (Buzan et al., 1998). In the speech act process, there are three stages that must be passed when wanting to make an

issue into a security issue, namely the identification stage, emergency action, and impact on inter-unit relations. The first stage is to identify a threat, then the next stage is to take emergency action to respond to the threat. Finally, how actors observe the impact of the threat on their intra-unit relations (Taureck, 2006). For Copenhagen School, security rests on a symbiotic relationship between actors and audiences, which is related to securitization. Successful securitization is determined by the audience of the speech action because they are the ones who must accept that something is an existential threat to shared values (Glover, 2011). Regarding the background of the problem that occurred, therefore, this study aims to analyze how Netanyahu's securitization efforts construct threats to Israel after 7 October 2023 in gaining international support.

DISCUSSION

Hamas's attack on October 7, 2023 was the beginning of Israel's declaration of war in response to Hamas's actions. Taking a deeper look at the international community's response to Israel's aggression against Palestine as Israel's response to Hamas's attacks on Israel. The attack also sparked debate from two sides, the first side was those who supported the action on the pretext that Hamas' actions were caused by Israel's actions which had colonized the Palestinian territories for years before. Meanwhile, the other side argued that Hamas' actions were acts of terrorism (Ramadhan, 2024, hal. 320). Regardless of the argument, of course the two perceptions are a representation of the international community's public opinion on the phenomenon of October 7, 2023. With the public opinion that has been formed, of course Israel needs to balance or respond to the formation of this opinion by convincing the world community that the actions taken by Israel are correct, and the attacks carried out by Hamas are terrorist acts that must be eradicated. There are several statements made by Netanyahu related to Hamas on several occasions in the forums he participated in. On 30 October 2023 Netanyahu said in his speech:

“The horrors that Hamas perpetrated on October 7th remind us that we will not realize the promise of a better future unless we, the civilized world, are willing to fight the barbarians... It is time for all of us to decide if we are willing to fight for a future of hope and promise; or surrender to tyranny and terror.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel, 2023).

In his argument, Netanyahu emphasised that the presence of Hamas must be destroyed in order to achieve a better future. In addition, Netanyahu gives the audience the option of choosing to keep Hamas as a terror organisation that can threaten a better future, or to destroy Hamas by supporting Israel's actions. Following the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, Israel responded to the attack with a declaration of war on Hamas and an offensive against Hamas. Israel's military operations focussed on protecting its citizens by focusing its operations on dismantling Hamas infrastructure, command centres and weapons stockpiles (Lyakhov, 2024). On 27 October 2023, IDF forces carried out tank attacks on northern Gaza, which saw IDF forces clash with Hamas fighters in Beit Hamnoun and eastern Bureij, Gaza, marking the beginning of Israel's ground invasion of Gaza. Then, in January 2024, Israel signaled a gradual withdrawal of troops from northern Gaza. The IDF has shifted from large-scale bombing to a more targeted campaign of attacks and killings aimed at eradicating the Hamas military leadership (Pusztaszeri & Harding, 2024).

It has been mentioned before that speech act approach to security requires three types of units, namely referent objects, securitizing actors, and functional actors. *Referent objects* means things that are seen to be existentially threatened and have a legitimate claim to survival. In this study, it can be identified from the existential threat in question, namely the presence of Hamas, which is considered by Israel as a terrorist organization. The attack carried out by Hamas on October 7, 2023, was a form of threat to Israel. This can also be observed from how Netanyahu mentioned it in his speech, “Hamas is part of the axis of evil of Iran, Hezbollah and their minions. They seek to destroy the State of Israel and murder us all...”. Netanyahu clearly stated that Hamas is a threat to Israel

and its citizens. In addition, his statement also mentioned, “It is time for all of us to decide if we are willing to fight for a future of hope and promise; or surrender to tyranny and terror.” Through the statements made by Netanyahu, it has been clear that Israel must attack Hamas for a better future for Israel. With these two statements it has been clear that Israel's existential threat is Hamas.

Securitizing actors means that actors who securitize issues by declaring something that existentially threatened. In this case, it can be identified that Netanyahu has always emphasized that Hamas is a threat to Israel. Starting from the aftermath of the Hamas attack on October 7 in Israel, Netanyahu has told Israeli citizens that they are at war against Hamas, and convinced them that the actions taken by Israel are something that must be done, in order to protect Israel from the threats it faces, namely Hamas. Apart from Netanyahu, there are also several actors who support Netanyahu's statement, namely President Isaac Herzog. Through Isaac Herzog's support, he stated in his social media account on X “I am wishing much strength to the IDF, its commanders and fighters and the entirety of the security and rescue forces”. In his statement, Isaac emphasized that Israel is in a critical situation that must be handled by the IDF to protect the existence of the state of Israel from the threats it faces.

On the contrary, Israel has denied and defended its actions, stating that what the international community and organisations are alleging about Israel's actions is wrong. In the Amnesty International report, the Israeli Foreign Minister stated, “The deplorable and fanatical organization Amnesty International has once again produced a fabricated report that is entirely false and based on lies”, Israel also accuses Hamas of having vowed to annihilate Israel, of carrying out a genocidal massacre in the attack that triggered the war, and said it is defending itself in accordance with international law (AP & Staff, 2024).

Functional actors means that actors who affect the dynamics of a sector. In this case, there are several actors who play a role in influencing the dynamics

that occur in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially after the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023. As is known, international media and social media have an important role in reporting the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, to Israel's defense and efforts to gain support in the eyes of the international community. With the news that is carried out both through social media and international media, forming public opinion to respond to the news with support, both their support for Palestine, as well as support for Israel. This is due to social media playing an important role in raising awareness of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In short, with the rapid and global reach of social media platforms, it can certainly help spread a sense of solidarity among people around the world by bringing the reality of conflict to their social media pages (Taqiya, 2024). This is also as in Ukka's research state that online reporting can shape the future of Israel and Palestine (Ukka, 2022).

In the speech act process carried out by Netanyahu regarding Israel's response to Hamas attacks, there are three stages to make an issue into a security issue, namely the identification stage (the stage to identify a threat), emergency action (the stage to take emergency action to respond to the threat), and impact on inter-unit relations (the stage which how actors observe the impact of the threat on their intra-unit relations).

In this study, the *identification stage* can be observed on how Netanyahu in his statements and actions towards Hamas after 7 October 2023. On 7 October 2023, Hamas fighters from the Izz- al-Din al-Qassam Brigade cross into Israel, killing 1,196 people and taking 251 hostages back to Gaza, where the operation carried out was called operation Al-Aqsa Flood. The provocation of Hamas' attack on Israel was caused by the rivalry between Fatah, Hamas, and the triangular conflict between Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Iran. Hamas. In the conflict, Hamas fears that the basis of their existence will be shaken when Saudi Arabia seeks to establish diplomatic relations with Israel mediated by the United States. The deal allegedly offered Saudi Arabia increased security from the Iranian threat. Therefore, Hamas launched an attack on Israel to destroy the

détente. According to Hamas, if regional détente is achieved, Fatah will monopolise the legitimacy of the Palestinian government and benefit economically (Ji-Hyang, 2024). On the other hand, Hezbollah also launched rockets and artillery into Israeli-occupied Shebaa farms, in solidarity with Hamas (Pusztaszeri & Harding, 2024).

The *emergency action* can be observed on how Israel responds to it. Israel responded to the attack with a devastating bombardment of Gaza. According to Palestinian Authorities in the territory, the attack of Israel killed more than 25,000 people of Gazan (Al Jazeera, 2024). On October 9, 2023, Israel ordered a "complete package" to Gaza by stopping the supply of electricity, food, water, and fuel to the territory. Then, on October 27, 2023, the IDF carried out a tank attack on northern Gaza, and IDF forces clashed with Hamas fighters in Beit Hanoun and eastern Bureij, Gaza, marking the start of Israel's ground invasion of Gaza (Pusztaszeri & Harding, 2024). In fact, Israel isolated most of the area and moved from one place to another, from Gaza City to Rafah. In September 2024, three divisions of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) involved in Gaza carried out an offensive to destroy Hamas units (Bruchmann et al., 2024).

Impact on inter-unit relations can be observed on how Hamas responded to Israel's counterattack after its attack on 7 October 2023. In the constellation that occurred, there were several actors involved, namely Israel-IDF, Hamas, and Hezbollah. Since 7 October 2023 until now, Israel has been in a conflictual relationship with this actor. The relationship between Hamas and Israel-IDF is still tense, related to hostages Israel and Hamas are still negotiating where on 20 and 23 October 2023, Hamas has released four Israeli hostages, until finally Hamas released 105 hostages, and likewise with Israel which released hostages from Gaza in the range of 24-30 November 2023 (Neuman et al., 2023). A few months earlier, Hamas leader Ismail Janiyeh was found dead in an explosion shortly after he attended the inauguration ceremony for Iranian president Masoud Pezeshkian in Tehran (Bergman et al., 2024). Of course, Israel's attack on Iran has added to the escalation in the Middle East conflict, including the

death of Taleb Abdallah, the Hezbollah commander for the central region of the southern border strip, southern Lebanon, to Iran's launch of 300 projectiles into Israel, including 170 drones, 30 cruise missiles, and over 120 ballistic missiles (Federman & Gambrell, 2024).

Based on the discussion, it can also be observed that this can be identified as a securitization effort. Non securitization can be observed on conditions before 7 October 2023. Previously, Israel has its own internal problems. Between 2019 and 2022, Israel held five general elections, an unprecedented event in Israel's constitutional history because conservatives, centrists, and progressives failed to form a coalition government. As a result, in January 2023, there was the largest anti-government protest in Israel's history that was successfully organized, and the members involved included almost all classes of society (Ji-Hyang, 2024).

In addition, throughout 2022 Israel has experienced numerous terrorist incidents and massive military operations that led Israel to launch "operation breakwater", a long-term military operation in several Palestinian cities in the West Bank, lasting several months to prevent further Israeli casualties. On the other hand, Israel has also experienced tensions on the Lebanese and Syrian borders where Hezbollah tried to launch several attacks into Israel but were unsuccessful. Israel is also focusing on strengthened its foreign relations with newly established diplomatic ties with Arab countries via conferences, other diplomatic and economic agreements that strengthened Israel and placed it as a main actor in the Middle East region (Ganel, 2023). By these things in focus for Israel, the issue of Hamas was not a priority for Israel until its attack on 7 October 2023 and killed Israeli civilians.

Politicized can be observed on how Netanyahu by his speech to his audience (Israeli citizens) who suggested that they were in a 'war' situation with Hamas. Netanyahu said, "We have been in this since the early morning hours.... I've given directives, first and foremost, to clear the [affected] urban areas of the

terrorists who penetrated them”. The statement emphasized that Hamas attacks on Israel were intolerable. This was then discussed by Netanyahu to civilians that Hamas was at fault because they had attacked their country. This was responded to by Yesh Atid head Yair Lapid, National Unity head Benny Gantz, Yisrael Beiteinu head Avigdor Lieberman and Labor party head Merav Michaeli who said, “In days like these there is no opposition and no coalition in Israel, We are united in the face of terrorism and the need to strike with a strong and determined fist,” The statement then legitimized civil society's efforts against Hamas, and supported Israel's efforts to fight it (Staff, 2023c).

Securitized can be observed on how Netanyahu along with his staff Defense Secretary Yoav Gallant and Secretary Benny Gantz in his press conference rejected growing international criticism over the civilian cost of the war, and urged Western leaders to lend their support to them because victory would mean victory for the rest of the world. Netanyahu also urged world support for his opposition to the ceasefire (which does not include the return of hundreds of hostages held in Gaza by Palestinian terrorists) and called on the United States to join the demands of the destruction of Hamas, which he said posed a danger to them as well (Staff, 2023d).

CONCLUSION

Based on the previous discussion, it is known that Netanyahu's securitization construction gained international support after the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023 in Israel can be observed on Netanyahu's actions in giving statements containing 'threat discourse' against Hamas. Hamas is the referent object of Netanyahu as the securitising actor for the attack on Israel which is considered to threaten the existence of the state. The presence of various parties and conditions involved, such as Hezbollah, Hamas, IDF-Israel, and the conflictual dynamics between Israel and Middle Eastern countries are considered as functional actors which also influenced the escalation that occurred. The securitization carried out by Netanyahu departed from the speech

act he carried out, where previously Israel only focused on restoring relations with Arab countries and improving domestic stability both in terms of politics and security through operation breakdown. However, after the attack carried out by Hamas on October 7 2023, Israel also responded to the attack with a declaration of war. In fact, Israel is trying to convince its people that Israel has made a mistake so that support from its people grows to unite against Hamas. As a result, with the threat discourse building, Israel also asked for support from the public and other countries to support their actions against Hamas.

Moreover, the speech act process carried out by three stages. The identification stage can be observed on how Netanyahu in his statements and actions towards Hamas after 7 October 2023. On 7 October 2023, Hamas fighters from the Izz- al-Din al-Qassam Brigade cross into Israel, killing 1,196 people and taking 251 hostages back to Gaza, where the operation carried out was called operation Al-Aqsa Flood. In the conflict, Hamas fears that the basis of their existence will be shaken when Saudi Arabia seeks to establish diplomatic relations with Israel mediated by the United States. The deal allegedly offered Saudi Arabia increased security from the Iranian threat. The emergency action can be observed on how Israel responds to it. Israel responded to the attack with a devastating bombardment of Gaza. In fact, Israel isolated most of the area and moved from one place to another, from Gaza City to Rafah. In September 2024, three divisions of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) involved in Gaza carried out an offensive to destroy Hamas units. Impact on inter-unit relations can be observed on how Hamas responded to Israel's counterattack after its attack on 7 October 2023. In the constellation that occurred, there were several actors involved, namely Israel-IDF, Hamas, and Hezbollah.

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