

# UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT

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Securitization through Mass Media



National Youth Model United Nations

## HISTORY & MANDATE

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and is in charge of, as the UN Charter says, the **maintenance of international peace and security**, as well as accepting new members to the United Nations and approving any changes to its Charter.

On October 24, 1945, the victors of World War II — China, the U.S.S.R., France, the United Kingdom, and the United States — ratified the UN Charter, creating the Security Council and establishing themselves as its **five permanent members** with the unique ability to veto resolutions. Originally there were six temporary members, rotating every two years and distributed on an equitable geographic basis. That rule was more explicitly defined in 1965, when the number of temporary members was increased to ten (five from Africa and Asia, one from Eastern Europe, two from Latin America and the Caribbean, and two from Western Europe).

The Security Council held its first session on 17 January 1946 in London. The first UN peacekeeping mission was deployed in 1948 to the Middle East. Over the last 60 years, the Security Council has taken action to defuse innumerable international crises, the most recent of which include those in North Korea, Syria and Crimea.

## POWERS

Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, always according to the principles and purposes of the UN; to investigate any dispute or situation that might lead to international friction and to recommend methods of adjusting such disputes or the terms of settlement, To sum up, it has the power and duty of determining the existence of a threat to the peace or an act of aggression and to recommend what action should be taken.

Therefore, it is also in charge to authorize military action through Security Council resolutions (it is the only UN body with the authority to issue **binding resolutions** to member states). It can also call on members to apply economic sanctions and other measures not involving the use of force in order to prevent or stop aggression. Finally, the Council recommends to the General Assembly the **admission of new members** and the appointment of the Secretary-General and, together with the General Assembly, elects the judges of the International Court of Justice.

For further and more concise information refer to articles 24 to 25 UN Charter, Functions and Powers:

- **Article 24:** *In order to ensure prompt and effective action by the United Nations, its Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and agree that in carrying out its duties under this responsibility the Security Council acts on their behalf. In discharging these duties the Security Council shall act in accordance with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations. The specific powers granted to the Security Council for the discharge of these duties are laid down in Chapters VI, VII, VIII, and XII. The Security Council shall submit annual and, when necessary, special reports to the General Assembly for its consideration.*
  
- **Article 25:** *The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter.*
  
- **Article 26:** *In order to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources, the Security Council shall be responsible for formulating, with the assistance of the Military Staff Committee referred to in Article 47, plans to be submitted to the Members of the United Nations for the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments.*

#### VOTING PROCEDURE

The voting procedure in the United Nations Security Council has three basic rules:

1. Each member of the Security Council shall have one vote.
  
2. Decisions of the Security Council on procedural matters shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members.
  
3. Decisions of the Security Council on all other matters shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members

## AGENDA: Securitisation through Mass Media

### INTRODUCTION

Originating from the Copenhagen School of Security Studies in 1997, securitisation has become a highlighted concept in the sphere of international relations and can be fundamentally described as *the action of state entities transmogrifying subjects into concerns of security*. The purpose of this process being undertaken by a government is to justify the employment of exceptional means by representing a particular issue as an imminent and highly detrimental threat. The process is not an official one of “securitizing” an issue in official dictum, but rather a gradual **process of shifting opinion and policy** to prioritize a certain issue as a primary security risk.

Through much analysis and debate amongst scholars, there has been a **consistent evolution** of this theory and its scope of applicability over the years. Initial writings of Buzan et al (1995) describe four actualities that are necessary for the securitisation process

- the securitizing actor, usually a state entity that communicates the threat
- an existential threat, object or concept considered dangerous
- a referent object, that which is depicted to be under threat, and
- an audience, that which must be convinced to accept this matter as a threat

However, O’Reilly (2008) expresses how the referent object and the audience can be the one and the same, such as in the case of the Bush administration’s securitisation of Iraq, where the American people can be attributed under both components - they were portrayed to be under imminent danger and needed to be convinced to accept said danger as a top priority. Likewise, Balzacq (2005) epitomizes only three “faces” namely a political agency, an audience and a context, where he argues the success of securitisation to be a matter of the degrees of congruity amongst these three components.

Furthermore, Buzan's writings also considered merely the securitising efforts of the actor and the acceptance of the audience as the sole variables in the process of securitisation. This perception has been **highly contested** as such comparatively archaic writings fail to recognise the existence of a multipolar influence through major actors such as individual networks, intelligence agencies, think tanks, non-governmental organisations and, most importantly, the media, which is where our core discussion lies.

Securitisation is often viewed as an extreme form of politicization and **can occur across five sectors** – military, economic, social, political and environmental. Often, these sectors overlap for certain issues that become securitized – for example the Iraq War was securitized for military, political, economic and social reasons. However, in general an issue will not be securitized by a securitizing actor unless it poses a threat that falls within one of these five dimensions.

It must be noted that **points of consistency** amongst these various writers exist as well. For example, the characterisation of securitisation as a speech-act, where a subject is considered a threat by virtue of being described as such, remains prevalent along with the salient notion that the process of such representation is more pertinent than the genuine security risk to the referent object.

While securitisation as a concept is not entirely new, its introduction into the formal discourse of international relations is, and it has not been utilized conceptually by the United Nations in its applicability to current discussions and issues.

## DISCUSSION

Mass media generally involves *any forms of large-scale communication in public forums* and this extends across all platforms - radio, advertising, newspapers, movies, the Internet etc. It has often been used as a **vehicle for securitisation** of an issue. For example, immigration, in recent years, has been heavily

securitized on a social level largely as a result of extensive media coverage on such issues, in particular the refugee crisis.

Before we look at securitisation through mass media, it is important to understand the **role of mass media** in a societal context. A primary attribute of media is its impartiality in communicating information to the public, which includes representation of government policies. The significance of mass media lies in its inert ability to shape public opinion through its utilised representation. For example, the sinking of a Chinese submarine in the South China Sea by US forces can be depicted as an act of terrorism or war in a particular network while another network reports it as a technical malfunction leading to an accident. The external context remains paramount therefore the nature of the incident/threat remains the same. However, the ensuing perception, response and action depends greatly on its journalistic expression because that is the source through which the referent object discovers the existence of such a threat.

As a result, the role mass media plays in securitizing an issue is of exceeding importance. Media coverage on issues determines whether they are taken seriously and classified as security risks in the public consciousness. This results in the arising of several subsidiary issues. The power of the media in **shaping public opinion** is a significant force, however it is not necessarily a force for good. Increasing politicization of media globally has led to an era of questionable media ethics. The involvement of political actors in the media and growing media espousal of set agendas has led to not only a growing public disenfranchisement from the media in several contexts, but also an increasing concern over the misuse of the power the media holds, particularly when it comes to the framing of issues and the determination of their securitisation in the public opinion.

Probably the most consistently securitised subject is that of **terrorism**. Even though casualties due to motor vehicle accidents and preventable diseases greatly outnumber those due to terrorist activity, it nevertheless remains a highly prioritised concern amongst state agendas. A prime historic example is the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Post 9/11, the world witnessed an American people in what can be considered a state of “hyper-patriotism”, a situation where political dissent was seen as treason. It allowed the US government (securitising actor) to convince the American people (audience/referent object) that Iraq was the existential threat by consolidating the claims of Saddam Hussein being in possession of WMDs, Iraq having links with Al-Qaeda and the international community being favourable towards a US war against Iraq - all three claims of which were misrepresented to the point of falsehood and only came to light post-invasion. Pilfering off the patriotic fever of the people, the media

augmented this righteous picture, and shoved aside any dissension against it - American mainstream communications had holistically become a mere spokesperson for the Bush administration, due to either incompetency, gullibility or intentional effort.

A prominent example of the securitisation of an environmental issue was the conflict in Darfur, Sudan which was often termed as the world's first "climate war". **Climate change** in this region led to the extreme scarcity of resources which triggered a civil war. In this instance, the securitizing actors were the different tribal groups who initiated the conflict, the existential threat was the dwindling resources as a result of climate change and the referent object and audience were both the members of the tribes that were convinced to enter into the conflict. This is a clear example of the securitisation of an environmental issue, and that securitisation then being used to justify extreme (militant) actions, and shows the social process occurring at a very basic level. However in this instance the medium that was used to securitize the issue was likely more informal than most mass media channels, and therefore this case acts as a microcosm of larger cases of securitisation with more significant international impacts, which are often magnified by the greater information dissemination capabilities of mass media.

## CONCLUSION

Regardless of multiple contestable writings and the much deliberation that ensued, a core essentiality of securitisation can be attributed to be its **inevitable intersubjectivity** between its existent components. Furthermore, the analysis, material and examples presented within this study guide comprise of merely the surface of the ocean of debate that can be dissertated on this topic. By debuting this agenda within a Security Council, delegates are expected to

- Evaluate the level of applicability and its subsequent parameters of securitisation as a theory in current status quo
- Re-define the components of securitisation, considering the prevalence of such speech-acts within ongoing state practices
- Epitomize the role of mass media in the paradigm of government policies and its inherent attribute of neutrality
- Demarcate and justify, as a collective committee, the boundaries that can be domestically construed for the betterment of public conscience

With these core values in mind, we warmly welcome delegates to the Security Council simulation at NYMUN 2018. Good luck!

**Links for further reading:**

- <https://www.libraryofsocialscience.com/assets/pdf/Waever-Securitization.pdf>
- [http://www.eisa-net.org/eisa-net.org/be-bruga/eisa/files/events/turin/Trombetta-the securitization of the environment and the transformation of security.pdf](http://www.eisa-net.org/eisa-net.org/be-bruga/eisa/files/events/turin/Trombetta-the%20securitization%20of%20the%20environment%20and%20the%20transformation%20of%20security.pdf)
- <http://www.saisjournal.org/posts/the-securitization-of-environmental-policies>
- [http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/1082/1/WRAP Floyd Securitization theory and securitization studies WRAP.pdf](http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/1082/1/WRAP_Floyd_Securitization_theory_and_securitization_studies_WRAP.pdf)