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Desecuritizing intractable conflicts

Siniša Vuković

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Introduction

The theoretical notion of 'securitization' most commonly refers to a discursive dynamic through which a particular issue gets transformed into a security threat. So far, this concept has had an impressive level of applicability, as it has been used to explain the creation of security concerns in a wide variety of areas, stemming from immigration and minority rights, to political dissidence and even health. While a growing number of studies have explored the link between securitization and conflict emergence (Diez, Stetter, & Albert, 2006; Stetter, Herschinger, Teichler, & Albert, 2011; Zeitoun, Talhami, & Eid-Sabbagh, 2013), we still lack an overarching conceptual framework which would expound the extent to which securitization can be used to craft more appropriate conflict management strategies. The aim of this chapter is to fill this conceptual gap, by exploring whether and how securitization can be applied to the complex world of conflict management.

It is widely understood that conflicts are an essential feature of everyday social life, where two or more parties perceive their interests as mutually incompatible and irreconcilable (Mitchell, 1989; Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994; Kriesberg, 2012). This perception in turn is fueled by incomplete information which prevents the parties from fully understanding each other's essential interests and needs, and creates self-enforcing images of enmity (Kriesberg, 1993; Fearon 1995). In cases where parties show an inability or unwillingness to manage their differences, conflicts may become more protracted and destructive. Such conflicts are commonly characterized by recurring violence, psychological manifestations of animosity, intense mutual feelings of fear and distrust, amplified stereotypes, and reservations over each other's intentions. Moreover, the issues at stake become ingrained in each party's identity, because each side develops a system of beliefs that reflects their understandings and perceptions of the conflict and past events (Coy, Woehrle, & Dayton, 2000; Bar-Tal, 2013). With the passing of time, conflict becomes ingrained in peoples' daily routines and such behavior even becomes institutionalized. In such intractable conditions, the persistence of the status quo provides a unique opportunity for some parties to maintain their socio-political and economic power. The increased saliency of

issues, coupled with a conflict's potentially profitable nature, encourages leaders to accept higher costs. Sunk costs become sources of entrapment, which cannot easily be disregarded. As a consequence, parties tend to be less inclined to compromise, making any conflict management activity extremely elusive.

The formative process of conflict eruption and escalation is preceded by an act which transfers the perception of incompatibility to a specific type of confrontational behavior. This act is commonly verbalized through a 'call and response' dynamic: where an actor presents the incompatibility as a matter of pressing urgency that poses an existential threat to their interests and the audience responds with acceptance of such formulation. When an issue is framed or presented as an existential threat, the authorities may decide to employ special measures to manage the issue. If this 'speech act' successfully posits an issue as a security concern, and consequently justifies moves "which take politics beyond the normal rules of the game," then this issue is securitized (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998, p. 23).

So how does securitization as a process contribute to and fuel protracted conflicts, and can that process be reversed through the use of conflict management? There is a clear, yet largely overlooked, link between conflict processes and securitizing speech acts. On the one hand, speech acts unequivocally generate mutually exclusive perceptions, which replace trust and increase suspicion and uncertainty, leading parties to resort to confrontational and often destructive strategies as a way of protecting and/or promoting their particular interests. On the other hand, speech acts are frequently exploited as a strategic tool that consolidates and furthers the status quo for those who are profiting from a protracted conflict.

Consequently, the link between conflict emergence and securitization calls for a better conceptual understanding of whether, and if so how, desecuritization processes and conflict management activities may inform one another. To desecuritize implies a process of unmaking securitization, opting for an alternative way to regulate security issues. According to Wæver, there are three fundamental ways to desecuritize: one, not talking about the issue in terms of security, two, if an issue gets securitized then to avoid employing measures that may generate a security dilemma, and three, bringing those security issues back into "normal politics" (Wæver, 1995). Wæver warns that the last two face significant resistance due to the "self-reinforcing character" of securitized issues as they become embedded in the narratives of existential threats to collective identities (Wæver, 2000). Although comprehensive in scope, Wæver's taxonomy has not yet been operationalized in order to expound specific techniques that may reverse the speech act and desecuritize an issue.

In order to fill this conceptual gap, the present chapter explores how different forms of conflict management activities fit with, and enhance, our understanding of desecuritization as a concept and process. By addressing escalating conflicts, conflict management activities aim to affect parties' antagonistic perceptions of each other and of the issues at stake, and thus minimize the potential of a speech act or other securitizing 'move' to elicit or perpetuate a security dilemma

between the parties. The chapter will also indicate how these adverse perceptions have a tendency to become self-perpetuating when peacemaking, peacebuilding, or peacekeeping efforts fail. The sense of insecurity and lack of trust are the core aspects that any conflict management activity needs to deal with. Irrespective of the point in the conflict cycle in which a certain activity is undertaken – be it peacemaking, peacekeeping, or peacebuilding – the success of conflict management efforts rests on the ability to provide sufficiently credible commitment by external parties, which can take forms of security guarantees, (promises of) implementation assistance and political cover for the parties to perceive the utility of a mutually acceptable peaceful solution to their problem.

The relationship between conflict management and desecuritization processes is not one-sided, but rather intertwined and reciprocal. A more nuanced exploration of various desecuritization techniques may offer a new way of structuring and juxtaposing various conflict management activities, which so far have been subject to scholastic parochialism. Therefore, by focusing on methods that are designed to manage speech acts, this chapter will assume a holistic approach and look at all conflict management practices (either as a sequence or as a specific combination of methods), and create a three-step approach to prevent, mitigate, and reverse conflict escalation using desecuritization as a benchmark. As such, this chapter offers a comprehensive, hybridized conflict management approach as a means of desecuritizing intractable conflicts.

Securitizing intractable conflicts

Among all social processes, conflicts are commonly perceived as the most sinister and harmful. Yet, as experience shows, not all conflicts are violent or destructive. On the contrary, to the extent that they epitomize social interactions where two or more actors perceive their interests and goals as irreconcilable, conflicts can be observed on nearly all social levels. As noted by Ramsbotham, Miall and Woodhouse, conflicts represent a universal feature of human society, exemplified through processes of economic differentiation, social change, cultural formation, psychological development, and political organization (Ramsbotham et al., 2016, p. 7). All of these dynamics are conflictual by nature, as participating actors may express their disputing views over the issues that are being contested. However, this is generally done through the rules and procedures that parties have agreed to in advance, making such processes predictable and routinized. These 'constructive' conflicts are regulated through a set of pre-existing political and judicial institutions and, as such, represent an essential feature of democracy (Kriesberg, 2012). They can be observed on daily bases on various levels, from traffic regulation, to elections, from the request for tenders and public procurement procedures, to job hiring processes. In such circumstances, participating actors resort to persuasion, compromise, and positive inducements in order to achieve outcomes that are mutually acceptable. As a consequence, such conflicts can 'construct' new social value both in the short and long term.

Nevertheless, many conflicts are not channeled through pre-existing institutional systems. This is particularly common for conflicts that take place at the international level, or have a capacity to become internationalized. In an international system that lacks an overarching authority and enforcement mechanisms comparable to the ones on the domestic level, conflictual relations may assume a destructive and intractable character. Such conflicts may last for a long period of time during which the parties resort to severe and harmful methods, show complete disregard for the other parties' interests and needs, focus on unilateral solutions, and resort to escalatory tactics (Crocker, Hampson, & Aall, 2005). Moreover, they imply a systematic application of various forms of violence, ranging from physical to cultural and structural (Galtung, 1969, 1990). The human causalities and material damage resulting from such destructive conflicts are generally considered the most significant type of socio-political costs (Gartner & Segura, 1998; Berinsky, 2007; Gartner, 2008). Not surprisingly, there is an increasing demand for managing conflicts coming from the same (political) actors that are involved in them, accompanied by pressures from both local and global civil society.

Unmanaged and destructive conflicts are fostered by parties' incomplete information about the other side's actual interests, capabilities, and levels of resolve (Fearon, 1995; Powell, 2006). In turn, impaired communication exacerbates mutual suspicion and distrust, reducing the parties' willingness and ability to establish a cooperative regime that would deliver them from the predicament. Failed attempts at managing the dispute reduce the appeal for any future efforts at finding a compromise solution. As conflicts become self-perpetuating, the parties look for ways to justify the inevitability of staying in a conflict. This is manifested through the establishment and perusal of appropriate military, economic, and political measures, which help the parties cope with imminent intractability of their conflict. According to Bar-Tal, such measures are grounded in a set of societal beliefs which include: justness of one's own goals, security, the adversary's delegitimization, positive self-image, own victimization, patriotism, unity, and one's own wish for peace:

> […] what makes these beliefs special in time of intractable conflict is their complementary wholeness, unidimensionality extremism, black and white view, blind adherence to them, strong belief in their validity, and their intensive and extensive use in the society.
>
> (Bar-Tal 1998, p. 26)

Securitizing logics

As securitization theory tells us, conflict protraction is contingent upon conflicting parties' premeditated rhetorical action (Balzacq, 2005, 2014). As noted by Huysmans (2006, p. 25), "security rhetoric defines existential challenges which endanger the survival of the political order. As a result it alters the premises for all other questions; they become subjugated to the security question." Building

on this argument, Balzacq (2010, p. 36) argues that "every securitization requires a prior politicization, even if the consequence of securitization is depoliticization." An effective securitization process presupposes that a securitizer's claim defines an existential threat, which in turn through audience's (i.e., constituency's) consent enables emergency measures and suspension of "normal politics" (McDonald, 2008).

In conflict dynamics such as these, each party constructs and furthers a master narrative of self-victimization through discourse and speech which in turn becomes a central theme in their respective collective memories about the conflict (see Rosoux, Chapter 8 in this volume). These master narratives are used to transmit a sense of injustice inflicted by the other sides' actions, which is then translated into an unequivocal devotion to pursue unilateral solutions, and loyalty to the group cause (Bar-Tal et al., 2009). Throughout time, such devotion becomes a routinized and institutionalized part of everyday life (Kriesberg, 2005). Parties in conflict accept the sunk costs of an ongoing conflict, gradually perceiving it as bearable and necessary. For the elites – the ones responsible for constructing and maintaining such master narratives – conflicts become an indispensable source of political legitimacy (Zartman, 2005).

Mitzen argues that "where conflict persists and comes to fulfill identity needs, breaking free can generate ontological insecurity, which states seek to avoid" (Mitzen, 2006, p. 343). Challenging the state-centric approach to security, McSweeney notes that

> security cannot be reduced to defense, to a balance of threats and vulnerabilities, or to any such objective and material equation […] security and insecurity are a quality of a relationship, and reflect stability or change in the identity of the collectives involved.
>
> (McSweeney, 1999, p. 101)

In other words, the referent object of security is not just the state (i.e., government, or a territorially defined entity), but the shared identity that defines a social 'we,' or as Wæver and his colleagues put it, "the security of a society can be threatened by whatever puts its 'we' identity into jeopardy" (Wæver, Buzan, Kelstrup, & Lemaitre, 1993, p. 42; Williams, 1998, p. 435).

Securitizing mechanisms

In intractable conflicts, the master narratives deployed through speech-acts become ingrained in groups' collective identities, thereby securitizing intergroup relations and the social environment in which they take place. The conflict is presented as an existentialist struggle, often associated with historical grievances. In such conflicts, new generations are socialized into a grudge culture and conspiracy thinking. Through the employment of a targeted speech-act, the securitizers (i.e., the elites) exploit the process of 'othering,' presenting the other side as evil, dangerous and threatening (Marsella, 2005). On the other hand, a sense

of superiority is promoted, based on a particularly affirmative reading of one's own historical legacy (Greenfeld, 1992). Critical interpretations of the past are strongly discouraged, as they may produce uncertainty and put in question the policies aimed at countering the security threat coming from the Other.

The resulting sense of superiority, coupled with the perception of a security threat, often yields policies aimed to undermine or suppress the Other (McManus, 2017). Even if a group constructs its superior in-group identity around a strong sense of liberal and democratic values, these values can be compromised in the name of security (Brewer & Higgins, 1998). As a way of countering a perceived threat from the Other, various measures that promote the spirit of segregation, inequity and oppression may be employed. Paradoxically, these measures are frequently intended to strengthen the negative images of the Other as intolerant and repressive.

When the securitizing rhetoric is translated into specific domestic policies that discriminate, persecute and vilify members of the Other group, such policies represent a very vivid manifestation of institutionalized violence. As previously mentioned, conflicts are often associated with violence that is expressed in a direct and physical form, where parties employ measures intended to inflict harm on their rivals, thus limiting them from meeting their basic needs. However, as such direct violence is both costly and impractical in the long term, securitized conflicts may inspire a different type of violence, more institutionalized in its form, and routinized in application. This structural violence – where discrimination and persecution are embedded in the existing social structures, and legalized through an existing institutional framework – protracts the conflict, as securitized policies become a societal standard (Galtung, 1969; Coleman, 2000).

In order to avoid conceptual ambiguity, it is important to specify that the policies or mechanisms of securitization of conflict may consist of a variety of tools and instruments. Balzacq defines tools (or instruments) of securitization as an "identifiable social and technical 'dispositif' or device embodying a specific threat image through which public action is configured in order to address a security issue" (Balzacq, 2008, p. 79; see also Linder & Peters, 1984; Salamon, 2002, p. 19). According to his conceptualization, "not all instruments of securitization are securitizing tools," the latter consisting of instruments which, by their very nature or by their very functioning, transform the entity (i.e., subject or object) they process into a threat; in other words they represent a substitute for the discursive logic of securitization (Balzacq, 2008, p. 80). While securitizing tools are certainly technical in nature, they carry a strong political and symbolic securitization message which explains how the securitizing agent perceives the issue, and how the intention of a policy can be translated into operational activity (Balzacq, 2008, p. 81). For Balzacq, "selection and use, as well as the effects of securitization instruments depend on political factors and, in turn, require political mobilization" (Balzacq, 2008, p. 81; Peters, 2002, p. 552).

In intractable conflicts, securitization tools aim to routinise the interaction both within a given society and between conflicting parties, define issues identified as threats, and specify a suitable method for addressing that threat. Such

tools may be imbedded in a broad range of policies, ranging from trade (Sohn & Koo, 2011), to migration (Ibrahim, 2005; Adamson, 2006; Watson, 2009), border control (Diez et al., 2006, Côté-Boucher, Infantino, & Salter, 2014), health (Maclean, 2008; Hanrieder & Kreuder-Sonnen, 2014), development (Stern & Öjendal, 2010), distribution of resources (Stetter et al., 2011), and foreign affairs (Roe, 2008). Building on a taxonomy developed by Salamon (2002, p. 20), Balzacq suggests that, in order to be effective, these policy tools ought to have four fundamental facets: one, a type of good or activity (such as reconnaissance, interdiction, education, etc.), two, a delivery mechanism (such as various forms of media, digital devices, etc.), three, a delivery system (such as educational systems, public agencies, etc.), and four, a set of rules, either formal or informal, which define the relations between entities in the delivery system (Balzacq, 2008, p. 81). In intractable conflicts, the routinization of structural violence occurs once the rules have been defined, accepted, and repeated to the point of making discrimination, marginalization, and alienation a new normalcy. As securitizing tools become more widely implemented, societal complacency toward securitization becomes more apparent, which in turn enables the existentialist interpretation of an identified threat that swiftly intensifies the conflict.

Conflict management and desecuritization

As noted above, over-investment in creating and maintaining a security regime traps the parties in a conflict. The more they commit to countering a perceived security threat from the Other, the costlier a compromise solution becomes. As such, conflicts are frequently characterized by a sense of entrapment. According to Meerts:

> entrapment means increasing efforts, expanding demands, adding unilateral issues, upping investments, drawing in other actors, demonizing the other party, enhancing risks, increasing expenditures, and making stronger commitments.
>
> (Meerts, 2005, p. 112)

In other words, entrapment is a race to the bottom, where parties increasingly diminish their range of possible alternatives. Not surprisingly, due to their over-commitment in securitizing the Other, parties are frequently either unable or unwilling to find a compromise solution to their dispute on their own. For this reason, the responsibility to peacefully manage their conflict is necessarily delegated to a distinct third party.

Depending on the third party's interests, commitment, and resources, conflict management activities may range from very passive verbal appeals for peaceful solutions, to more active diplomatic approaches such as mediation, institutionalized judicial processes, administrative assistance in peacebuilding efforts, and the use of military force either for peacekeeping purposes or to enforce peace (Frazier & Dixon, 2006; Butler, 2009; Melin, 2014; Diehl & Regan, 2015).

Looking at practice, despite their evident diversity, all conflict management activities demonstrate a significant degree of interdependence. Particularly inter-linked are verbal appeals and mediation efforts, where the former is often projected with an offer to conduct the later (Greig & Diehl, 2012). According to Oswiak, third parties are most inclined to use (and reuse) less costly methods, while in more than 50 percent of cases, mediation efforts were followed by verbal action through which violence was denounced and parties were called to reach a cease-fire, and mediators were more reluctant to resort to more costly strategies such as economic sanctions or military intervention (Oswiak, 2014).

Despite an evident link between securitization and conflict escalation, thus far the literature pertaining to each has largely overlooked or ignored the related link between conflict management and desecuritization. A notable exception to this trend has been a conceptual reflection developed by Bonacker and his colleagues (2011), who reviewed the applicability of this link in relation to the articulation of human rights in ethno-political conflicts. They observed that conflict management approaches view "desecuritization largely as a process of agreeing on or upon new institutional arrangements that allow for peaceful management of conflict through the provision of information and the stabilization of mutual expectations through the codification of rules" (Bonacker, Diez, Gromes, Groth, & Pia, 2011, p. 22). Unfortunately, their study did not provide an in-depth analysis of how specific conflict management approaches treat information provision and codification of rules, nor did their study look at the sequencing of specific conflict management activities as a way of maximizing the effectiveness of desecuritizing instruments. Therefore, building on their claim that the range of desecuritization strategies pertinent to conflict management activities include primarily coercive measures (such as power mediation, sanctions, and arbitration), the following section aims to expound a more comprehensive taxonomy of conflict management activities, which will include any form of third-party involvement in managing the dispute.[1]

The involvement of third parties inevitably shapes conflict dynamics. Their behavior and resources influence the conflicting parties' preferences and priorities in an escalating conflict. At the same time, third-parties' ideas and agendas frame the range of potential solutions conflicting parties may subsequently explore as viable solutions to their conflict (Vuković & Hopmann, 2019). Although their involvement is not associated with the root causes of conflict which have shaped the initial speech-acts and related securitization tools employed by conflicting parties, third parties assume a specific role of a 'party to the conflict.' As such, they may explore ways to contain and reverse further escalation though targeted desecuritization instruments. These measures may not only mitigate the conflict, but help the parties address the underlying causes that generated various forms of violence, and guide them toward a more robust transformation of their relations, through new structures and rules that promote desecuritized discourse and practices. Having in mind this phased approach, it is important to look at the most common type of conflict management, i.e., mediation, and explore how it may be expanded to include

other forms of third-party involvement in order to promote a more holistic approach to desecuritization.

Mediation as a tool for desecuritization

In line with its popularity in practice, mediation has been deemed the most efficient method of managing conflicts through peaceful means. As experience shows, a large number of internationalized conflicts were not as often and as easily handled by other modes of conflict management, such as legal tribunals, arbitration, or the use of force (Bercovitch & Houston, 1996; Frazier & Dixon, 2006; Grieg & Diehl, 2012). In fact, compared to other forms, mediation represents a relatively low-cost alternative to the options of doing nothing and conducting a large-scale military intervention. Mediation represents a form of 'assisted negotiation' in which an external actor enters the peacemaking process in order to influence and alter the character of previous relations between the conflicting sides (Touval & Zartman, 2001; Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009). It does so by providing new narratives that reduce the perception of insecurity, downplay the need for extraordinary measures, and – most relevant to this research – delegitimize securitizing tools employed by conflicting parties.

Publicly, third parties often justify their involvement on humanitarian grounds (Blechman, 1995; Dowty & Loescher, 1996; Regan, 1998). Yet, given the sheer variety of international actors and mediation contexts, it would be implausible to expect that mediators are only driven by humanitarian concerns to intervene. Keeping in mind the considerable investment of resources that mediation calls for, it is reasonable to presume that mediators are no less motivated by self-interest than by humanitarian impulses (Touval & Zartman, 1985, p. 8). These interests may range from preventing adverse spill-over effects of an escalating conflict – ranging from unmanageable refugee flow, to illicit economic activities conducted in conflict-affected areas, from rebel incursions across porous borders, to potential unwanted importation of terrorist activities – to improvement of a mediator's international reputation. At the same time, for many peacemaking is the *raison d'être* for the existence of many international and regional organizations, which are interested in promoting norms, principles, and values that have peace and security at their core. Lastly, many non-governmental organizations and prominent individuals are prompted to get involved in order to assert their expertise on a disputed issue, or knowledge of a context in which the conflict is unfolding (Vuković, 2014, 2015a).

This variety of motives that induce mediators to intervene generate an equally diverse set of tools that they may employ in order to achieve their goals in the peacemaking process. By extension, four strategies of desecuritization, as identified by Hansen (2012) – stabilization, silencing, rearticulation, and replacement – can find practical applicability in mediation. **Stabilization** entails a process through which parties may step away from the explicit security discourse. Facilitative mediation, which posits a carefully assisted form of information exchange, aims to help the parties transform the negative perceptions and reduce hostile

rhetoric (Touval & Zartman, 1985; Bercovitch, Anagnoson, & Wille, 1991). Similarly, the second desecuritization strategy, **silencing**, through which parties are discouraged from using language of security, may find its applicability both in preventive mediation efforts and in previously described facilitative mediation strategies which alter the way parties communicate with one another (Beardsley, Quinn, Biswas, & Wilkenfeld, 2006). The third desecuritization strategy, **rearticulation**, implies a process through which an issue is 'unmade' and 'deconstructed' from a security threat to a completely new formula (Huysmans, 1998). From a mediation perspective, mediators are frequently tasked with the role of formulating specific solutions which parties themselves are either unable or unwilling to do, and are ready to accept those formulas only because mediators provide (domestic) political cover and international legitimacy for such discourse (Bercovitch & Wells, 1993; Beardsley, 2011) As Zartman and Touval noted, "formulas are the key to a negotiated solution to a conflict; they provide a common understanding of the problem and its solution or a shared notion of justice to govern an outcome" (Zartman & Touval, 1996, p. 454). Finally, the strategy of **replacement** assumes the possibility of substituting one issue with another, and can be found in mediators' most assertive types of activities that prescribe the alteration of pay-off structures and inclusion of new issues into the discourse, so that the parties may recalibrate their cost-benefit calculus (Beardsley et al., 2006; Vuković, 2015a).

Evidently, the link between desecuritization and mediation strategies requires further scrutiny. As the information exchange and provision of incentives stand at the core of mediation activities, they may also expound in greater detail how certain issues can eventually be desecuritized. More importantly, they may provide a more nuanced explanation of specific desecuritization tools that can be part of various desecuritization strategies. As mentioned earlier, tools imply a good/activity, a delivery mechanism and system, and rules that regulate relations within those systems. Since mediation activities are ad-hoc, non-coercive and legally non-binding, they will potentially operate outside of existing systems and related rules. Nevertheless, through the provision of information and incentives, mediators offer specific goods/activities, delivered through both direct and indirect communication and through the provision of tailor-made incentives. These activities will address the nature of existing securitized systems and their rules, and offer new formulas that will regulate relations between the parties.

Mechanisms: how mediation desecuritizes

While mediators are motivated by their self-interests, the demand for mediation is based on an expectation that mediators will transform the existing conflict between the parties and desecuritize their relations. This does not imply that all mediation efforts will result in full conflict settlement, or that all parties that invite or accept mediators' initiatives will be fully committed to transforming their securitized policies. On the one hand, mediation needs to produce a solution that is better than that which parties can achieve through confrontational

methods; on the other, mediators still need to project a higher utility of a proposed solution that desecuritizes their relations, at least higher than the one parties can negotiate on their own. When mediators are unable or unwilling to deliver such outcomes, parties may resort to accepting mediation for purely devious reasons: trying to 'catch a breath' from an ongoing conflict, rally international support, regroup and rearm for subsequent conflict dynamics, etc. (Richmond, 1998).

In other words, accepting mediation is a useful, yet insufficient, indicator that desecuritization may be initiated or underway. Therefore, the level of commitment mediators project is contingent on their interests and capabilities. The commitment can vary from a passive (albeit essential) facilitation of communication, so that the parties can reframe their conflictual positions and start realizing a zone of possible agreement (ZOPA), to a more active formulation of potential solutions within a facilitated ZOPA, to the most assertive provision of side payments that alter the parties' cost benefit calculations to further pursue their conflict and explore options within a newly-created ZOPA (Touval & Zartman, 1985; Bercovitch et al., 1991; Beardsley et al., 2006; Vuković, 2015b). Consequently, such commitments translate into specific mechanisms that mediators can apply to 'de-securitize' an issue.

Information control

Mediators may provide, manage and manipulate the information which can undermine or eliminate the perception of a security threat. Mutual distrust, hatred, suspicion, and fear generated by conflict are both the source and the result of incomplete information parties have about the Other's preferences and capabilities (Rauchhaus, 2006; Savun, 2008; Halperin, Bar-Tal, Nets-Zehngut, & Drori, 2008). The perception of a security threat and related security provisions aimed at countering those threats are thus reinforced throughout the conflict due to incomplete information that parties possess. Therefore, the ability to desecuritize an issue is directly related to the availability of missing and necessary information, which can help the parties gain a better understanding of each other's interests, capabilities, and resolve.

Information provision by a mediator may diminish a sense of uncertainty, and eliminate the perception of a security threat. As parties get locked in a conflict, facing a complete breakdown of communication, the responsibility of providing desecuritizing information falls on the mediators. As mediators provide the relevant information, they embark on a process of improving mutual perceptions between the parties, creating the necessary momentum in the peacemaking process where talking, exploring viable options, and committing to a specific formula are no longer perceived as signs of treason. As a result, as parties soften up to diplomacy and start humanizing each other, previously established security policies may lose practical significance and political legitimacy, to the point of becoming obsolete and unnecessary.

Incentivizing

Even when mediators apply the best facilitation techniques, and help the parties realize that they have more in common than they initially perceived, parties may still be reluctant to settle on a specific solution on their own. The dominant zero-sum perceptions and hard-liner bargaining strategies, coupled with increased levels of distrust, enmity, and perceived threat, induce the parties to still view potential solutions as mutually exclusive and unacceptable, even though the solutions are actually in line with everyone's interests (Beardsley et al., 2006; Wilkenfeld et al., 2007). In such situations, mediators may propose specific formulas, giving guidance and structure to the parties on which solutions will merit mediators' backing. Zartman and Touval argue: "formulas are the key to a negotiated solution to a conflict; they provide a common understanding of the problem and its solution or a shared notion of justice to govern an outcome" (Zartman & Touval, 1996, p. 454). Although formulas diminish uncertainty regarding the future relations of the parties, parties will commit to such formulas if they are perceived as more attractive than continuing a conflict. More importantly, formulas provide a novel framework through which the issue can be desecuritized, either by dismissing the securitizing speech-act that existed until then, or by prescribing measures that bring the issue back to 'normal politics.'

In order to increase the appeal of proposed formulas, mediators may provide enticing incentives (Cortright, 1997; Fey & Ramsay, 2009; Beardsley, 2011). These incentives may take the form of a *political cover* for policies intended to replace previous ones stemming from securitized narratives; *conferral of international legitimacy* for a new approach that abandons previous security provisions; *implementation assistance* through various types of economic aid, humanitarian relief, and development support intended to reduce the profitability of the previously securitized regime; and *security guarantees* through peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and peacebuilding provisions which undermine or eliminate the perception of a security threat, and assist the parties in maintaining a regime of trust.

Mediation and desecuritization: a question of timing?

The application of different desecuritization tools via mediation will inevitably have differing effects depending on the stage of the conflict in which they are employed. In their study on the relevance of articulating human rights as a security issue in ethno-political conflicts, Bonacker and his colleagues found that a timely recognition of damaged relations, and subsequent application of measures that address structural causes of conflict, may contribute to the creation of institutions that desecuritize relations between parties in the long-term (Bonacker et al., 2013, p. 41). At the same time, the invocation of human rights at the early stages of conflict may be viewed as a genuine securitizing move, which may further intensify the conflict on the short and medium-term (Bonacker et al., 2013, p. 38). Evidently then, the appropriate timing of specific mediation initiatives becomes a crucial

challenge in managing relations in a securitized and/or (potentially) securitizing environment.

The decision to manage intractable conflicts is never random nor unilateral, but rather a result of a careful analysis by all sides of whether or not a conflict has become "ripe" for resolution (Zartman, 1989, 2001). According to Zartman's ripeness theory, the parties first need to perceive that they are locked in a 'mutually hurting stalemate,' (MHS) which is an unbearable, painful and costly impasse experienced by both parties in which neither party is able to escalate the conflict unilaterally to achieve victory, and in which both parties can expect an impending catastrophe if confrontational strategies continue. They gradually start perceiving the futility of their securitization policies, and realize that they are approaching a precipice that will lead them to an even more destructive catastrophe. Under such conditions, the parties may begin to perceive mediators' initiatives as a preferable alternative to the continuation of belligerent activities and see them as a 'way out' (WO) of the impasse (Zartman, 2001, p. 8).

Given the prevailing concern here with securitization and desecuritization, it is essential to point out that both conditions – 'mutually hurting stalemate' and 'way out' – are based on the conflicting parties' subjective perceptions: they have to recognize that they are at a painful impasse (no matter what the 'evidence' on the ground says and/or how the situation is perceived by other actors), and develop a sense of seeing a compromise solution as an alternative to continued fighting. While the mutually hurting stalemate pushes the parties out of the conflict, and the perception of a way out pulls them into a negotiation process, a third element is required to keep them locked in and committed to compromise and reaching a mutually acceptable solution. Parties will perceive the utility of a negotiated agreement if they are presented with 'mutually enticing opportunities' (MEO). These enticements are: *exclusively* tied to the ongoing peacemaking process and unavailable elsewhere, and *mutually* beneficial, and subject to the parties' willingness to embrace *cooperation* both in the short and long term in order to sustain the regime of *interdependency* they are creating (Vuković, 2019). Moreover, MEOs offer new narratives, ideas and rules that deconstruct existing securitizing policies, leading the parties to desecuritize their relations.

All three elements – mutually hurting stalemate, way out, mutually enticing opportunities – are a matter of perception. Even though they are based on objective inputs, they are still socially constructed and embedded in a master narrative projected by elites. As a consequence, ripeness theory also assumes the existence of a strong leadership or a 'valid spokesman,' that can bring their parties into compliance and compromise (Zartman, 1989, 2001, p. 11). The role of a mediator is to engage with valid spokespersons and promote a sense of ripeness by constructing a de-securitized narrative characterized by the spirit of cooperation with the other side.

The appropriate timing of mediation initiatives to de-securitize the relations between conflicting parties is subject to considerations that fall into three broad categories.

Proactive (or preventive)

Mediators are seldom mere bystanders who passively observe the unfolding of a conflict. In fact, given the high material and non-material costs conflicts can generate, mediators are frequently inclined to tackle the issue at hand before it escalates into physical violence (Lund, 1996; Jentlson, 1999; Ackermann, 2003; Zartman, 2015). Preventive efforts are aimed at addressing the existing structural arrangements which have been developed by the securitization speech act, and that gradually provide a legal and legitimate baseline for conflict escalation. By detecting early warning signals – an indication that a certain policy, activity or decision may create a sense of discrimination, marginalization, or violation of existing rights among members of a specific community – mediators may tackle specific issues that have the potential to become securitized. As a result, mediators offer new frames through which the issues can be viewed, and consequently assist the parties in developing new and desecuritized narratives which can reduce the sense of insecurity and the need for extraordinary measures to mitigate potential security threats.

An important limitation to any preventive action arises from the counterfactual nature of early warning signals, making it very difficult to document prevention (Zartman, 2015). For this reason, academics and policy-planning experts have devoted much of their attention to finding statistically verifiable sources of conflict. Although the bulk of these indicators have been associated with economic factors (Homer-Dixon, 1994; Barbieri, 1996; Collier, 2003), recent studies have emphasized the significance of political elites as instigators of violence (Chiozza & Goemans, 2011; Horowitz, Stam, & Ellis, 2015). Regardless of the type, violence (i.e., against civilians, terrorism, ethnic cleansing, genocide, etc.) is seldom irrational and/or random, nor is it caused solely by existing socio-economic cleavages. It is a premeditated tactical choice devised by political elites and influential leaders as a way of realizing concrete political or military objectives (Valentino, 2014). In order to justify the inevitability of conflict escalation, and consequently galvanize and mobilize communities to commit to 'the cause,' leaders intentionally use 'ethnically-loaded rhetoric' that has the potential to create a sense of intercommunal distrust and suspicion (Wennmann, 2016).

Detecting this type of rhetoric at the earliest stages may offer an entry point for mediators to provide alternative narratives and technical assistance that may reduce the need for further securitization of the issue (Crisis Group, 2016). Furthermore, mediators' early engagement may reduce the likelihood that the securitizing speech-act assumes a self-reinforcing character. In the earliest stages, when securitizing narratives are still not coupled by extraordinary measures, mediators may break the securitizing pattern by assisting the parties in reducing the inflammatory rhetoric, and help parties refrain from talking about the issue in terms of security. At the same time, by detecting specific structural arrangements that may have the potential of legitimizing securitizing policies, mediators may offer new formulas and ideas of how a seemingly looming existential threat may be treated by reformed and improved institutions and policies.

Reactive

If prevention does not yield results, and conflict still escalates into either sporadic episodes or full-blown systemic use of direct violence, then mediators are tasked with the responsibility of defusing the escalation in the short-term (Hopmann, 1996; Sisk, 1996; Bercovitch & Diehl, 1997; Gartner & Bercovitch, 2006). Preventive activities embody measures that Wæver identifies as the principal way an issue may be desecuritized, i.e., "not talking about the issue in terms of security." However, reactive activities are employed in circumstances that Wæver associates with the second method of desecuritization; i.e., "if an issue gets securitized then avoid employing measures that may generate a security dilemma" (Wæver, 1995).

Mediators are often called upon to address the security concerns parties project when conflictual activities are suspended. On the one hand, in such circumstances, mediators may commit security guarantees, through peacekeeping and peace enforcement measures. On the other, they can also assist the parties to downplay the usage of securitized rhetoric, and develop narratives that are aimed at establishing integrative solutions to the conflict. While the former is intended to create conditions which can promote a spirit of cooperation, the latter aims to help parties internalize the change so they don't relapse into violence. Moreover, mediators also provide political cover and international legitimacy for policies that can avert the political intentions to implement extraordinary measures (Beardsley, 2011). This is particularly important in circumstances where such measures yield high political benefits for specific elites. Conferral of external political cover and international legitimacy for non-extraordinary measures may serve as an essential trade-off, which can deter political elites from acting upon an already securitized issue.

Interactive

Long-term measures that abate the securitization narrative are those that help to undermine the utility of any and all self-victimization narratives. Mediators may set the tone for comprehensive peacebuilding and reconciliation policies, which promote the spirit of cooperation and generate new structures that diminish the sense of security threats coming from the Other (Hampson, 1996; Doyle & Sambanis, 2000; Jarstad & Sisk, 2008; Rosoux, 2013; Rosoux & Anstey, 2017). While mediation is by definition intended to primarily manage a situation from further escalating, peacebuilding and reconciliation take the entire process a step further, each one aspiring to achieve the ultimate aim of conflict resolution: full transformation of relations between the parties (Butler, 2018).

Both peacebuilding and reconciliation aim to overcome structural violence between the parties. This is most frequently tackled through the employment of provisions that foster a new sense of security, economic interdependence, and political cooperation between the parties. While these provisions are predominantly manifested through institutional reform and/or creation of new systemic

features (i.e., legal procedures, institutions, and decision-making practices), they also contribute to what Wæver (1995) identifies as "bringing back particular security issues into 'normal politics'". These structural changes provide a new platform through which new narratives may be promoted, while at the same time marginalizing or fully eliminating those speech-acts that fostered the sense of insecurity and uncertainty between the parties. As a consequence, for these structures to have a long-term effect, they require continuous interaction between the parties, and their commitment to make these policies work.

Alongside structural changes, true transformation is only possible if socio-psychological aspects of the past conflictual relations are also addressed. Parties are encouraged and assisted in restoring their broken relations, and supported to find ways through which they may learn to live non-violently, despite their past radical differences (Rosoux, 2009). This process is much lengthier than the structural changes. The transformation requires 'reframing the other': developing a sense of empathy about the other's victimhood, and accepting one's own responsibility for possible past transgressions (Halpern & Weinstein, 2004; Kelman, 2004). During the conflict, each party engages in a process of self-glorification and self-praise, while at the same time intentionally dehumanizing the other in order to avoid viewing oneself as the victimizer (Kelman, 1999). Jackson notes that, although it may be a lengthy and politically costly process, deconstructing discursive structures that reinforce violence and conflict is both possible and necessary (Jackson, 2009).

Accepting the past for what it is, and not for what it should be, is the ultimate aspiration of the reconciliation process. Breaking away from the institutionalized images of the enemy and narratives that demonize the other may take several steps, and the responsibility of undergoing these efforts falls primarily on the elites that have established, reinforced, and defended discursive structures that ignited conflict in the first place. As noted by Rosoux, due to initial resistance from the population to embrace full transformation of the discourse, leaders may opt for "partial amnesia" or "willful ignorance" (Rosoux, 2009, p. 550; Bargal & Sivan, 2004). This may give enough time for the elites to gradually reflect on their own side's responsibilities for past offenses, and decide on the best way this may be projected publicly. These may take the form of various 'reconciliatory events,' ranging from symbolic gestures of visiting sights of past atrocities, to formal and informal apologies, to concrete legal acts that may provide a sense of justice for the former opponents (Rosoux, 2009, p. 551). Such events have both a rational and emotional component, as they provide a much-needed signal through which parties indicate a credible commitment to transform their relationships (Long & Brecke, 2003; Kaufman, 2006).

Moreover, on the socio-psychological level, these events imply a significant shift in the way past events are portrayed. Through new speech-acts – such as apologies, emphasis on past episodes of cooperation, calls for resetting relations, acknowledgement of the others' victims and pain, etc. – the issue that ignited the conflict is gradually no longer portrayed as a security concern, and the existence of the other is not deemed an automatic existential threat. While these gestures

may bring back the securitized issue into normal politics, in order to be effective, the parties need to have a basic level of trust, which may be grounded in previously established institutions and structures that may reduce the sense of insecurity between them.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was twofold. On the one hand, it explored if and how securitization – a discursive dynamic through which an issue is transformed into a security threat – applies to conflict dynamics, and in particular intractable conflicts. On the other, this chapter explored how different forms of conflict management activities may enhance our understanding of desecuritization as a concept and process using insights from conflict management. By addressing intensifying and protracted conflicts, conflict management activities aim to affect parties' antagonistic perceptions of each other and issues at stake, and thus minimize the potential of a speech act to perpetuate a security dilemma between the parties.

Evidently, there is a significant link between conflict management activities and measures aimed at desecuritizing an issue. Due to an imminent breakdown in communication, third parties are commonly tasked with the role of providing relevant information which may reduce the sense of insecurity and help parties refrain from labeling a contentious issue as a security threat. At the same time, in order to help parties maintain a sense of trust and security, external actors may offer specific inducements in the form of political cover, implementation assistance, and international legitimacy.

As shown above, depending on the degree to which an issue has been securitized, third parties may act either preventively, in order to help parties refrain from addressing a specific issue in terms of a security threat; reactively, by halting further escalation of bellicose rhetoric in case an issue has already been securitized, so that extraordinary measures would not be employed; or interactively, to assist the parties in bringing back the issue into normal politics, by offering assistance in creating new structures, institutions and fostering a sense of ripeness. With all this in mind, existing studies in conflict management may offer ample insight on how to desecuritize an issue, how to time those initiatives, and which types of provisions are most suitable given the stage of securitization. This chapter provided a first step in conceptualizing this link, expecting that future studies may deepen our knowledge of this nexus in a more nuanced manner.

Note

1 It should be noted that the emphasis will be on activities intended to manage and abate further escalation of conflict, and as such should not be equated with the more elusive notions of conflict resolution and conflict transformation.

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