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### Who Really Dictates What an Existential Threat Is? The Israeli Experience

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# Who Really Dictates What an Existential Threat Is? The Israeli Experience

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**ABSTRACT** National security conception or securitization theory frames threats and conceptualizes the responses towards them. But in many cases, and especially in the Israeli context, there is a tendency to blur the nature and essence of different threats; security threats become strategic threats and then existential threats. In the Israeli context, because the broad concept of security is perceived, in most cases, as equivalent to military security, the meaning of the strategic threat will be framed, mostly, militarily, derived from military thought.

The article examines the nature of existential threats in the Israeli context and seeks to find the implications of securitization theory in this regard by analyzing the unique role of the military establishment and the influence of the military thought on strategic thought in Israel. The article also deals with the centrality of 'military wisdom' in the Israeli ethos and the sense of insecurity embedded in the Israeli narrative that leads to an 'intellectual symbiosis' between the political and the military echelons and finds this phenomenon as one of the major explanations for the influence of the military establishment on defining the nature of security threats as well as on the crucial decision to launch wars.

**KEY WORDS:** Existential Threats, Israel, Civil-Military Relations, National Security, Securitization, Military Wisdom, Intellectual Symbiosis

The purpose and foremost responsibility of political leadership in a state is to ensure national security, defined as the 'defense of the nation's existence and its vital interests'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Israel Tal, *National Security – The Few Against The Many* (Tel-Aviv: Dvir 1996) (Hebrew).