Foreign or Domestic? Desecuritization and the Bureaucratic Politics of Indian Affairs

Abstract
Is securitization normatively undesirable? Many scholars who have studied this process by which issues come to be treated as pertaining to "security" have argued that it is indeed preferable to keep as many issues as possible from being securitized. Rather, most issues ought to remain politicized such that they are seen as the legitimate subject of public debate. By contrast, I argue that we ought not to ascribe any inherent moral valence to securitization or the reverse process of desecuritization. Instead, each attempt to (de)securitize an issue ought to be debated on its own terms. To support my argument for the moral ambiguity of (de)securitization, I examine the U.S. Senate's debate over whether to transfer the Bureau of Indian Affairs from the Department of War to a new Department of the Interior in 1849. I argue that this an inflection point in a longer desecuritizing process by which the United States—acting on a presumed hierarchy—coercively assimilated Native nations into its domestic political order. I conclude that scholars should not discard (de)securitization as an analytical tool but can instead use work on (de)securitization to inform public debate on the likely consequences of any particular (de)securitizing move, thereby serving a chastening role in public discourse.

I.   Introduction

Is securitization normatively undesirable? Is it inherently good or bad for a policy issue to be deemed a matter of "security" and therefore deserving of special treatment? For International Relations (IR) scholars, securitization theory (ST), both in its original theoretical formulation and in many subsequent applications, has generally provided a consistent answer to this question: ST cautions against securitization because this process removes policy from the arena of public contestation, an arena that should be quite capacious in liberal democracies.[1] Securitization is "a failure to deal with issues of normal politics" (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 29). For most proponents of ST, it is thus preferable to prevent issues from being securitized or to "desecuritize" any securitized issues to put them once more in the domain of "politicized" issues. In this article, I add to the work of dissenting scholars (Floyd 2007; Roe 2012) in arguing that we ought not to ascribe any inherent moral valence to (de)securitization. That is, while (de)securitization is a helpful analytic construct with which we can debate the merits of any given case of (de)securitization, we ought not to begin with normative assumptions about the virtue thereof.

Why should we doubt the typical normative generalizations that have been built into ST? I argue that both securitization and desecuritization can constitute forms of domination— "institutionalized power relations" (Laiz and Schlichte 2016b, 171) that have been central to the typical skepticism of securitization. I illustrate the moral ambiguities of (de)securitization with a study of U.S. policy on "Indian Affairs" and, in particular, debate over whether to move the Bureau of Indian Affairs from the Department of War to the Department of the Interior. ST,

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[1] This body of work often refers to "securitization theory," and I generally follow that convention here, but as Balzacq and Guzzini (2015) note, this may overstate the homogeneity of work on securitization that can take at least four different forms of "theorizing".

especially in its original formulation, assumes a preexisting polity in which contestation over what constitutes an existential threat to the polity takes place. This process becomes more complicated when the boundaries of this polity are more fluid—in particular, when one considers global historical processes of state (trans)formation, territorial expansion, and assimilation of other peoples.[2] This process, however, may include both securitization—in the form of classifying another group as a threat to the polity—and a later process of desecuritization insofar as governments will generally need to convince their existing populations that a conquered or otherwise subordinated people can be brought into the political system without still constituting a threat.

I posit that the transfer of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to the Department of the Interior was a desecuritizing move in the U.S. government's process of bringing Native nations into its domestic sphere. If, as I argue, both securitization and desecuritization can entail practices of domination, this is especially clear in the settler colonial context. As Coulthard (2014, 6-7) writes:

> A settler-colonial relationship is one characterized by a particular form of *domination*; that is, it is a relationship where power…has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the *dispossession* of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority.[3]

Rather than attributing any inherent moral valence to (de)securitization, scholars should thus should continue to use securitization as an analytic construct and as a means of chastening political efforts to (de)securitize any given issue.

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[2] See Tilly (1992 [1990]), Spruyt (1996), Rae (2002), and Costa Lopez (2020). While this literature often refers to "state formation" as the outcome of interest, Nexon (2013) notes that Tilly regretted using this term and that he might instead refer to "state transformation" if he were to re-write his book.
[3] Emphasis in original.

In the next section, I will discuss how (de)securitization has been conceptualized, how scholars have addressed the normative question of (de)securitization's desirability, and how other scholars have offered critiques of ST on which I build. I will then provide a study of the U.S. decision to move the Bureau of Indian Affairs from the Department of War to the Department of the Interior. I will then discuss the legacies of this decision, and I conclude with implications for future research.

II.   Securitization and Desecuritization

ST takes as its focus the process by which issues are "securitized" by actors (usually policy-makers or activists) who seek to designate issues as posing an existential threat to some referent object and therefore as necessitating special treatment (a treatment that may be granted if the speech acts suffice to win over the relevant audience). This literature calls attention to the fact that the perception of and reaction to threats is intersubjective and political. "Security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance itself is the act" (Wæver 1995, 53). But the same is true of the reverse dynamic of desecuritization—the process by which some "security" issue may come to be seen as no longer necessitating such treatment. A desecuritized issue thus enters the realm of the political once more—it is subject to legitimate political debate in a way that securitized issues are not, and this explains the normative preference for desecuritization in ST. In a liberal democracy, few things should ever be put beyond the public realm if citizens are to be able to hold politicians accountable for their actions.

As desecuritization has received less attention than securitization, it has been used in "unsystematic or even contradictory" ways (Hansen 2012, 527). It has been used to describe, among other things, instances in which one security issue is superseded by another or in which a

securitized issue returns to the realm of "normal" politics. It is this latter meaning that I adopt as I believe this best captures the core of desecuritization as originally conceptualized—"a moving of issues off the 'security' agenda and back into the realm of public political discourse and 'normal' political dispute and accommodation" (Williams 2003, 523).[4]

This concept of (de)securitization is typically associated with the "Copenhagen School" (Huysmans 1998, 479-480), a key text of which (Buzan, Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde 1998, 23) offers a usefully representative description of securitization and the spectrum on which securitized issues reside that is worth quoting at length:

> "Security" is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics. Securitization can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicization. In theory, any public issue can be located on the spectrum ranging from nonpoliticized (meaning the state does not deal with it and is not in any other way made an issue of public debate and decision) through politicized (meaning the issue is part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocations or, more rarely, some other form of communal governance) to securitized (meaning the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure).

As this suggests, those associated with the Copenhagen School generally treat (de)securitization as involving public speech acts and audiences who must be convinced to accept these (de)securitizing moves. A variety of facilitating conditions such as the speaker's social capital, moreover, might make the acceptance of any given (de)securitizing move more likely (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998, 33).

As Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998, 204) put it, their understanding of ST is "radically constructivist" in that they see no issue as naturally or objectively a security issue—all security issues must be constructed as such. This is indeed consonant with constructivist work in

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[4] Hansen (2012) attributes this view of desecuritization to Åtland (2008).

IR that emphasizes "intersubjective expectations and normatively stabilized meanings" (Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986, 775) and the mutually constitutive character of agents and structures. [5] This co-constitution means that foreign policy itself ought not to be seen as a static domain describing a certain set of issues but as "a political practice that makes 'foreign' certain events and actors" (Campbell 1998 [1992], 61). While there are different varieties of constructivism in IR (Srivastava 2020), including its manifestation in the "practice turn" and relationalism (McCourt 2016; Baele and Bettiza 2020), I maintain what Hacking (1999, 6-7) describes as a minimally constructivist position here—"the existence or character of *X*," in this case what is deemed a security or non-security issue, "is not determined by the nature of things". U.S. policy on Indian Affairs, as I will detail below, is illustrative of this.

Those writing about securitization, however, have often gone beyond descriptive or analytic claims about the potential for any issue to go from a politicized to securitized state or vice versa. That is, much of the work associated with the Copenhagen School has demonstrated a normative preference for keeping issues from becoming securitized or, failing that, for desecuritizing issues when possible (Mortensgaard 2020, 144). Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998, 4) first define desecuritization as a process by which an issue is moved "out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere". The word "normal" here could be used in a value-neutral way to refer to the most frequent state of affairs—a baseline of sorts—but it is more commonly given a positive connotation in the literature. Indeed, Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998, 4, 29) explicitly argue that desecuritization is "better" than securitization and the "optimal long-range option" as it is preferable to keep political issues in

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[5] Furthermore, the Copenhagen School's emphasis on public speech and attempts at persuasion is part of a broader trend in constructivism in IR that uses speech acts to delineate how agents might reshape the social structures in which they are embedded (Gould 1998, 81).

"the ordinary public sphere". "We are on the record here and elsewhere," they say, "arguing in favor of desecuritization as the long-range political goal" (1998, 210). Subsequent work on ST has considered the securitization of issues like HIV/AIDS (Elbe 2006), climate change (Hayes and Knox-Hayes 2014), and gender-based violence (Meger 2016)—that is, an array of issues not typically considered to constitute a "traditional" threat of interstate violence—while generally taking a similarly skeptical view of securitization.

While quite influential, especially in Europe, ST has received much critique over the years.[6] The Copenhagen School's focus on speech acts and the posited process by which (de)securitization succeeds primarily by following procedural rules correctly, for example, has been critiqued as insufficiently capturing the "strategic (pragmatic) practice" of public political debate and the various institutional settings and media that lend themselves to different kinds of (de)securitizing moves or exclusions from the (de)securitizing process (Balzacq 2005, 172; Hansen 2000; Williams 2003; Salter 2010). A related critique is that the the Copenhagen School provides an overly narrow view of how actors (and which actors) might try to securitize an issue (McDonald 2008, 571-575).[7] Moreover, there is a temporal issue in the Copenhagen School's focus on moments of (de)securitization; contestation over whether an issue is properly

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[6] Indeed, beyond the Copenhagen School, the less frequently invoked Paris School and Welsh School offer somewhat different perspectives on securitization. The Paris School takes a similar view of the basic idea of securitization, but it shifts the focus from speech acts and policy-makers to the non-verbal everyday practices of "professionals in charge of the management of risk and fear," including local and national police organizations (Bigo 2002, 63). The Welsh School, on the other hand, takes its cues from critical theory in aiming to craft a more emancipatory politics of security and in maintaining that efforts at securitization are fundamentally misguided: "true security can only be achieved by people and groups if they do not deprive others of it" (Booth 1991, 319; quoted in Floyd 2007, 332).

[7] This is also related to a concern that the Copenhagen School risks "reifying both dominant voices and traditional security discourses (McDonald 2008, 565). See also Sheikh (2014, 257) on ST's treatment of religion. The narrative of Europe's hybridized development in Buzan and Lawson (2015) would seem to cut against a notion of securitization theory as inherently Eurocentric, but some works on ST do evince a particular sense of political normalcy—that is, one that "derives largely from the context of (Western) liberal democratic states" (Roe 2012, 251; cf. Aradau 2004, 392).

considered a "security" issue does not necessarily stop when an issue has been (de)securitized. An already securitized issue—as Iran's nuclear program has long been treated in Israeli politics (Lupovici 2016, 413)—may be brought back into political discourse for the purpose of making the case that the issue now presents an even greater threat demanding further action and yielding a "securitization climax". More generally, we might see (de)securitization less as sequential and more as processual.

I build on these critiques of ST while nonetheless maintaining securitization's utility as an analytic tool. First, I focus less on speech acts *per se* and more on the bureaucratic political machinations by which an issue can be (de)securitized. Second, the Congressional debate I examine here was public, but it was not generally directed at an audience beyond those policy-makers involved. While this debate and its result may have been informed by perceptions of what the public would countenance, I do not believe we can make generalizable statements about which audience needs to accept a (de)securitizing move for it to come into effect. Third, while I do focus on a specific "moment," I situate this moment in a longer-running process of desecuritization, an account that is informed by processual-relational perspectives on politics (Jackson and Nexon 1999).[8] I thus use my case study to relate policy-makers' "security articulations…to their broader discursive contexts" (Stritzel 2007, 360).

The main argument I am making here is similar to Floyd's (2007, 337) contention that the moral valence of any given (de)securitization process is "issue-dependent," because "every incidence of securitization is unique". ST's positive view of desecuritization, she argues, "does

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[8] While I argue that this long desecuritizing process was relatively successful, I concur with Ruzicka's (2019) argument that more examination of failed attempts at (de)securitization is necessary if we want to ascertain why (de)securitizing moves vary in their degree of success. Given the ubiquity of efforts at (de)securitization, however, I doubt that scholars could ever assemble something approximating a complete universe of cases from which confident generalization would be possible.

not stem from actual empirical observation of how politics operates but rather from Ole

Waever's view of how politics, including security policy, *should* be done" (Floyd 2011, 428). I

agree on this point and seek to illustrate why observers should indeed debate the merits of

(de)securitization on a case-by-case basis.[9] Where I depart from Floyd is in eschewing an effort

to craft definitive standards by which we may judge acts of (de)securitization, an effort in which

she draws on consequentialism and just war theory, traditions of thought that have their own

limitations (Floyd 2019; Morkevičius 2015). In contrast, I argue that where scholarly work on

(de)securitization can most helpfully inform debates over the merit of any (de)securitizing move

is in chastening all sides in such debates. That is, amid public contestation that seeks to erect one

policy response as *the* right choice, scholars can serve to caution against the most optimistic

projections or universal pretensions of advocates by laying out "the limitations inherent in *all*

conceptual thought" insofar as any given policy proposal emerges from "historically contingent

convergences of interest, identity, and understanding" (Levine 2012, 33).[10] In other words, rather

than offering a "just securitization theory," I am suggesting that ST can be used not to establish

the justice of any particular (de)securitizing move but to bring a critical lens to bear on all of

them, something that is especially important given "the danger of perverse and unintended

consequences" resulting from any such process (Van Rythoven 2020, 479).[11]

     Securitizing and desecuritizing moves should be subject to the same critical scrutiny, I

argue, because both can constitute practices of domination. I am referring to domination in a

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[9] Here my argument is also similar to Roe's (2012, 261) argument that engagement with the normative content of (de)securitizing moves "should…strive not to escape from security (securitization) but rather to 'break back in' precisely to reclaim it as a site for such contestations over the possibilities for inclusion/exclusion".

[10] Emphasis in original.

[11] If Aradau (2004) argues for "a politics of emancipation which would unmake securitization and its non-democratic, exceptional and exclusionary logic," I am arguing not for an emancipatory politics but for a refusal to attach any inherent moral valence to (de)securitization that might allow us to ask whether any given (de)securitizing move is likely to emancipatory.

Weberian sense—domination as "institutionalized power relations," relations that increase "the probability of a command being obeyed without employing coercion" (Laiz and Schlichte 2016b, 171; Laiz and Schlichte 2016a 1,452). Laiz and Schlichte (2016b, 169) invoke Weber's contention that "in daily life domination means primarily: administration," thereby highlighting the political nature of "techniques of administration" that present themselves as apolitical. Domination by this definition in my reading is not necessarily desirable or undesirable; it has no inherent moral valence. Rather, its desirability will vary across particular cases. For Copenhagen School theorists, however, securitization involves a normatively undesirable sort of domination in which some issues are removed from the public sphere and designated as issues on which a very small group of people (or even a single person) can make decisions on behalf of the polity. I share with Aradau (2008, 72) the view that "security practices buttress"—or can buttress— "institutional arrangements and legitimize forms of domination and exclusion," but I maintain that desecuritization (or, for that matter, any political project) can do the same thing.

I argue that a study of the way "Indian Affairs" shifted from being treated as a foreign policy issue to a domestic issue in the United States can help demonstrate the moral ambiguity of (de)securitization and the role of bureaucratic actions in (de)securitizing any given issue. The key events in this domain of federal policy are sufficiently recent that we have good written records that can speak to this transformation of Indian Affairs, and the varying ways and extent to which U.S. policy-makers aimed for the elimination and/or assimilation of Native peoples over time make this a key case on which future research might seek to build.

III.   Desecuritizing Indian Affairs

For early U.S. political elites, Indian Affairs was considered to be a foreign policy issue of paramount importance. Yet, by the mid-nineteenth century, the Bureau of Indian Affairs would be moved to the Department of the Interior, and these relationships would increasingly be treated as part of American domestic politics. This shift, I argue, can best be described as part of a process of desecuritization that the U.S. government undertook as part of its broader efforts to dispossess Native nations and to delegitimize Native claims to sovereignty. I stipulate that this was only a part of the process of desecuritization because I would argue that this was neither the first nor the last desecuritizing move in that process, and this relationship is still contested.

In this section, I will use primary and secondary sources to delineate the process by which political elites came to construct Indian Affairs as a domestic issue. I will pay particular attention to the 1849 debate over whether to shift the Bureau of Indian Affairs from the Department of War to the Department of the Interior. First, however, I will address the question of whether policy-makers ever truly considered Indian Affairs to be a foreign policy or security issue.

Even if there were violent disputes between the United States and Native nations, one might still question whether this is properly considered an issue of U.S. foreign policy—or whether anyone at the time thought of it as foreign policy. Indeed, to the extent that political scientists have studied U.S. relations with Native nations, relatively little of it has approached the topic from the standpoint of International Relations.[12] From the early colonial period until well into the nineteenth century, however, private citizens and the American government alike often

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[12] For some important exceptions that relate Indigenous experiences to contemporary international politics and related theoretical debates, see, e.g., Crawford (1994), Beier (2005), Marion Suiseeya (2014), Cha (2015), and Lightfoot (2016).

treated Native nations as distinct (if not always wholly sovereign) peoples (Schultz 1972; Saler 2015). The federal government formed treaties with Native nations until 1871 and made frequent use of military force in interactions with them both before and after its own independence (Szarejko 2021; Barder 2021, 71-94). The debate over the Indian Removal Act of 1830 in the Senate was framed in part by the question of whether Native Americans were sovereign entities or not, and the Supreme Court was often unhelpfully ambiguous on the question. Finally, until 1924, Native individuals as a class were not eligible for U.S. citizenship, and the federal government still characterizes relations with federally recognized tribes as government-to-government relationships (Deloria, Jr. and Wilkins 1999). Such relations, I argue, do indeed appear to have been considered "foreign" relations by many political elites for a sizable portion of U.S. history, especially in the first several decades thereof.

To further underscore this last point, militarized disputes between the U.S. and Native nations constituted a significant, costly experience for early U.S. policy-makers. These so-called "Indian Wars" in which an independent United States engaged varied in the extent of federal involvement, casualties, and expenditures. Still, "wars against Native Americans were the most common kind of conflict involving the United States. These were costly affairs…and were a primary American security concern" (Grynaviski 2018, 48). Roughly 50 conflicts between 1783 and 1890 were considered serious enough for the U.S. government to call them "wars," and these conflicts—not to mention civil administration of Indian Affairs and veterans' benefits—were costly. As reported in the 1890 U.S. Census, military spending between March 1789 and June 1890 totaled $4,725,521,495; the Census Bureau attributed about 17% (or $807,073,658) to the Indian Wars (United States Census Bureau 1890, 644; cf. Szarejko 2021).

It is in this context—a general understanding of Native nations as being a threat to U.S. security alongside some uncertainty as to how exactly to characterize the relationship—that Congress delegated relations with Native nations to the Department of War in 1789. This perception of threat, however, was not new. From the earliest days of colonization, but especially after Powhatan resistance to settler expansion in Virginia in the 1620s and after King Philip's War (1675-1678), many colonists felt that Native nations presented a rather acute threat to their continued flourishing in the "New World," something that was rightfully theirs by virtue of discovery and their ability to make "better" use of the land (DeLucia 2018, 36-37; Robertson 2005, 4-8). The treatment of Indian Affairs as a security issue to be dealt with as part of foreign policy— thus had ample precedent and resonance with the general public, and the delegation of Indian Affairs to the Department of War would be formalized with the creation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and its placement in the same department in 1824. If Congress had wanted to create something like a "home" or "interior" department in 1789, it certainly had other institutions of the time that it could have used as a model (Learned 1911). Ultimately, however, the BIA would not be transferred to a newly created Department of the Interior until 1849.

The rest of this section will proceed in three segments. First, I will discuss the history of Indian Affairs in the United States before the BIA was formally established. Second, I will discuss the history of the BIA as an agency of the War Department. Third and most substantially, I will discuss the decision to move the BIA to the Department of the Interior. Throughout, I will focus on the ways that policy-makers sought to keep Native nations "foreign" or to make them "domestic".[13]

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[13] This narrative draws primarily on Prucha (1994), Rockwell (2010), Fixico (2012), White (2012), and United States Department of the Interior (n.d.), but I also make note of these or other relevant sources where the history is less well-known.

In managing relations with Native nations, an independent United States built on pre-existing political practices. The Articles of Confederation did not establish a formal agency for this task, but it did maintain the pre-independence structure that centralized Indian Affairs in the Department of War. There were, however, important regional divisions in the practice of Indian Affairs—the three pre-independence regions ("Northern," "Southern," and "Middle") shrunk to two ("Northern" and "Southern") by 1786—and even after the ratification of the Constitution placed the Department of War in the executive branch, Congress retained significant influence in the making of American Indian policy, including (in the case of the Senate) the power to approve treaties with tribes. From the beginning, the responsibilities of Indian agents (as officials in this field were often called) were framed in terms similar to any normal diplomat. They were to try to maintain amicable relations with tribal governments, ensure at least tribal neutrality in the Revolutionary War, and, after the war, ease the way for U.S. settlement and expansion through the negotiation of treaties and land purchases. Indeed, George Washington structured much of early U.S. policy on Indian Affairs around an understanding of these relations as a security issue while also trying to avoid costly conflicts. In a 1783 letter he wrote to Congressman James Duane, Washington summarized his position as follows: "In a word there is nothing to be obtained by an Indian War but the Soil they live on and this can be had by purchase at less expence, and without that bloodshed, and those distresses which helpless Women and Children are made partakers of in all kinds of disputes with them." Duane, a New York delegate to the Confederation Congress and the Chair of the Indian Affairs Committee, presented the Congress with a report based largely on Washington's lengthy letter, and this report would be the Congress's primary statement of its position on Indian Affairs for decades.

In these early days, there was little official pressure on Indian agents to push for the assimilation of Native nations; that is, there was not yet consensus on whether Native peoples would or should be absorbed into the Union as equal citizens therein. Throughout this period of 1783 to 1824, however, there were at least two important continuities in U.S. policy on Indian Affairs, both of which constituted practices of domination. First, the acquisition of Native land was the central goal of settlers and political elites alike, but the political process was often *ad hoc* as policy-makers necessarily adapted to the desires and capacities of heterogeneous Native nations.[14] In the South, for example, illegal state claims of Native territory would complicate federal plans for negotiation, and tribes of the Northwest Territory varied in the concessions they were willing to make to a U.S. government that claimed to have conquered their land through the Revolutionary War. Second, federal policy in this period aimed at the "civilization" of Indigenous peoples even as long-term assimilation remained an open question.[15] Policy-makers at this time tended to support purportedly civilizing measures being included in legislation and treaties—the supply of farming equipment, for example, or a ban on the sale of alcohol to Native peoples—but this was widely seen as the appropriate thing to do even if Native nations would remain somehow distinct polities. Alternatively, if this civilizing program failed, many self-servingly assumed that Native nations would simply fade away (Dippie 1982). These continuities both presumed and enacted "institutionalized power relations," however, and they established a long-term pattern of U.S. efforts to reformulate relations with Native nations such that they would not constitute a threat to the United States (Laiz and Schlichte 2016b, 171).

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[14] Indeed, as Wolfe (2006, 388) puts it, "[T]he primary motive [of settler colonialism] is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory."

[15] As Jordheim and Wigen (2018, 429) note, this civilizing process was bound up with a homogenizing logic of progress: "From the late 18th century onwards, progress, in singular, meant progress of mankind, of civilisation, or simply of history – thus synchronising and indeed integrating different types of progress into a singular historical movement."

After decades of relatively unsuccessful attempts to regulate the interactions of U.S. persons with Native nations, Congress authorized the creation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Department of War in 1824. John C. Calhoun, then the Secretary of War, was the impetus for this change, but Congress's refusal to give Calhoun the authority to add employees to the new BIA meant that the reorganization ultimately amounted to little *de facto* change. Rather, the key development was Calhoun's designation of Thomas L. McKenney as Superintendent of Political Affairs. It was not until 1832 that Congress would establish within the BIA the position of Commissioner of Indian Affairs, but in McKenney's six-year tenure as *de facto* head of the BIA, he would play a key role in generating support for President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act, which Congress ultimately passed in 1830 (Rockwell 2010, 160-162). McKenney and Jackson alike made their argument on humanitarian grounds—Native nations would not survive sustained contact with settlers who were already spreading far beyond the original thirteen colonies—and McKenney ensured that the BIA civilizing programs continued alongside these efforts. But there remained an ambiguity in U.S. relations with Native nations even amid this effort to "remove" Native nations. In relaying the Indian Removal Act to Native nations, BIA officials—sometimes relaying the words of Jackson himself—typically gave these nations an ultimatum. They could either leave their homelands, resettle on some designated territory west of the Mississippi, and remain a tribal government, or they could instead remain in their homelands while forfeiting any claim to tribal sovereignty and being incorporated into the American domestic sphere. To the extent that one can refer to such demands as offering a "choice," this left Native peoples with the choice of remaining foreign or becoming domestic. Either way, however, U.S. relations with Native nations would be structured around the presumption that the latter were subordinate polities.

From War to Interior

A key inflection point in the history of Indian Affairs—in the process of turning it from a security issue alongside other such aspects of the country's foreign policy into a desecuritized issue of domestic policy—was the transfer of the BIA from the Department of War to the Department of the Interior in 1849. There were abortive talks of establishing some such department in the decades prior to 1849, but this expansion of the federal government had previously struggled to attain sufficient political support. This support, however, would ultimately arise after the significant territorial expansion of the 1840s and the Mexican-American War (Fixico 2012, 23-26; White 2012, 24-25). The proposal to create a new Department of the Interior came from the administration of President James K. Polk, representatives of which argued that this would allow for more coherent federal management of an increasingly large swath of public lands. The proposal—for what Congressmen often called a "Home Department"—met with little resistance in the House of Representatives, and it passed there on February 16, 1849 (Blair and Rives 1849, 544). More substantial debate, however, would occur in the Senate. This was, in effect, a debate over whether to make a foreign policy issue a domestic issue instead.

Initial discussion of this proposal in the Senate first centered on questions about the proper scope and arrangement of government. The first substantive comment on the matter, in which Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi noted that most of the functions in the new Home Department would be transferred from the Department of the Treasury, justified his support for the bill with reference to checks and balances: "The officer who is charged with finding the ways and means to carry on the Government properly, never should have been charged with the disbursement of those ways and means" (Blair and Rives 1849, 670). By contrast, Senator

William Allen of Ohio shortly thereafter expressed his opposition to the bill on the grounds that it would inappropriately rush an expansion of government: "I am utterly opposed to taking upon ourselves the responsibility of this augmentation of patronage and consequent expense to the people" (Ibid.)[16]

This early debate about the size and scope of government—no doubt informed by Democratic majorities in both chambers that were reluctant to create more positions for the incoming Whig administration of Zachary Taylor—quickly turned to the proper place of Indian Affairs.[17] Senators understood the implication entailed in creating the Department of the Interior and placing the Bureau of Indian Affairs in it; much of the Senate's debate on this proposal turned on whether "Indian Affairs" was properly considered part of foreign or domestic policy. The first to raise this issue, Senator Allen, registered his opposition: "What the bill proposes to do for the Secretary of War, in relieving him from the Indian Affairs, is not only unnecessary, as I believe, but I fear is as likely to be pernicious" (Blair and Rives 1849, 671). Likewise, Senator James Murray Mason, a Democrat of Virginia, argued that there was little reason to bother moving the "Indian Bureau" (Ibid.):

> These Indian Tribes are decreasing in number every day; and they are driven
> further to the west, till I apprehend they will be driven to the very verge of the
> Pacific. How do our relations with them stand in comparison with those great
> departments of the Government which were carved out of the original power of
> managing our foreign relations? They are purely subordinate.

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[16] Both Davis and Allen were Democrats.

[17] Senator Henry S. Foote of Mississippi, a Democrat, made explicit the conspicuous timing, but he and some other Democrats nonetheless supported its passage: "I shall not decline voting for it because a Whig Administration is about to come into power. The general and permanent welfare of the Republic will always be with me a leading a paramount consideration; and even were I to view this measure only with reference to party considerations…I can perceive no impropriety in adopting it at once" (Blair and Rives 1849, 674).

While these initial explanations for senatorial opposition indicate an awareness of one of the questions at hand—whether Indian Affairs should be considered an issue of foreign or domestic policy—the senators were not explicit in justifying their votes along those lines. Rather, that would have to wait until after a failed call to table the motion when John C. Calhoun, another Democrat and by that point serving in his second stint as a senator from South Carolina, expressed his opposition precisely because he considered Indian Affairs to be a security issue (Blair and Rives 1849, 43).[18] It was, he argued, a matter self-evidently for the War Department:

> Who does not see that the Indian affairs are immediately connected with the War Department? Who does not see that the preservation of peace and harmony on our frontier, both between ourselves and the Indians, and between the Indian tribes themselves, depends upon the action of the War Department. In my judgment, the Indian affairs are so intimately connected with the War Department that they cannot be separated without producing mischievous consequences.

After a brief break in the debate to consider other pending matters, Democratic Senator Robert M.T. Hunter of Virginia echoed Calhoun's sentiments. For Hunter, Indian Affairs "very properly belongs [to the War Department], inasmuch as they involve matters of war and peace with the Indian tribes," and as Allen had noted earlier in the debate (before it explicitly turned to Indian Affairs), "The Government has got along in peace and war with our present departments. They have got along most triumphantly" (Blair and Rives 1849, 674, 670). A more recently serving senator might have invoked the idiom, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

In arguing for BIA's placement in Interior, on the other hand, Senator Henry S. Foote of Mississippi made the opposite argument (Blair and Rives 1849, 674, emphasis in original).

> The honorable Senator from South Carolina has discovered great incongruity in this bill: he contends that there is neither similarity nor affinity between our Indian policy—our policy in connection with the public lands, and the Patent

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[18] Note that page 43 here represents a section break of sorts and appears between pages 673 and 674. My narrative still relays this in chronological order—Calhoun's argument appears shortly after Mason's.

Office arrangements. Why, sir, is not the honorable Senator in error? Do not all these several matters relate to the *domestic* policy of the Republic, as distinguished from its *exterior* concerns? What two things can be mentioned more closely connected than our Indian policy and the policy of the public lands?"

Nor was Foote, another Democrat, the only one to make this argument. After several failed attempts to amend the bill, for example, Whig Senator Daniel Webster of Massachusetts asked (Blair and Rives 1849, 677), "Do not the duties of the Indian bureau as much affect our internal affairs now as they will when this bill is passed?" Davis (Blair and Rives 1849, 677), speaking immediately after Webster, pressed opponents on this same point:

Under what other head than domestic relations will he [Mason] place the district courts, the transmission of the mails, the collection of revenue, the intercourse with Indian tribes, the disposal of the public lands, the protection of frontier inhabitants, and the many other duties of the General Government to the people of the United States?

Indeed, Davis continued to elaborate on his argument that U.S. relations with Native nations had once been a matter of foreign policy but were no longer appropriately labeled as such because (Blair and Rives 1849, 678):

When our intercourse with the Indian tribes was held under the protection of troops, and wars and rumors of wars came annually with the coming of grass, it was proper to place Indian relations under the War Department. Happily for them, honorably for us, the case has greatly changed, and is, I hope, before a distant day, to assume a character consonant with the relations of guardian and ward, which have been claimed by us as those existing between our Government and the Indian tribes. After having been partially civilized and prepared for agricultural life, tribes have been removed to the western frontier. It is now equally a duty to them and ourselves that we should, as far as we can, prevent them from lapsing again into barbarism. …War being the exception, peace the ordinary condition, the policy should be for the latter, not the former condition.

While several other senators spoke after Davis, much of the remainder of the debate focused on procedural issues. Proposed amendments to the bill that would have produced significant delays in the final bill's passage ultimately failed, and the legislation passed in a 31-25 vote (Blair and Rives 1849, 680).

One of Polk's last acts in office was to sign the bill into law, and while the BIA itself would remain much the same albeit with an expanded staff (Stuart 1985), this was a significant moment in the gradual movement toward treating Indian Affairs as a domestic issue. To describe this as an act of desecuritization does not wholly comport with the Copenhagen School's portrayal of such processes; this was primarily a debate among elites, and it not so much success in public persuasion that enabled this legalistic act as it was simply the possession of sufficient political power. In moving the BIA from the Department of War to the Department of the Interior, however, U.S. policy-makers firmly established their expectations as to the future character of U.S. relations with Native nations. Even as the Constitution would *de jure* require the federal government to respect previously established treaties and its government-to-government relationship with tribes, moving the BIA into Interior would legally entrench and make habitual the practice of thinking about relations with Native nations as a domestic issue rather than a foreign policy issue. Whether or not individual Congressmen earnestly sought to change or maintain the status of Indian Affairs as it was then practiced—that is, whether this bureaucratic maneuver was ultimately about partisan politics, sectional differences, or sincere disagreements on Indian Affairs—this vote ultimately had the practical effect of serving as an inflection point in a long-running process of desecuritization.

For decades after 1849, there were still militarized disputes between the United States and Native nations as it continued to consolidate its hold on what is now the contiguous United States (Szarejko 2021). Nonetheless, a critical mass of policy-makers had apparently come to see Native nations as no longer representing an existential threat to the United States and its realization of expansion across the continent. As Rockwell (2010, 247) puts it, many by that point assumed that "the time when Indians posed a threat to the viability of the republic had

passed". There was still occasional debate in Congress—some of it stoked by military officers eager to bring the BIA back into their remit—as to whether Indian Affairs should be returned to the Department of War (Ostler 1996). Nonetheless, the BIA would stay in Interior, and the United States would spend much of the following century further desecuritizing this issue area to bring these once-foreign Native nations more fully into the domestic order.[19]

While the push to civilize Native nations continued to shape post-1849 federal Indian Affairs policies, policy-makers came to focus more intently on assimilation, which they often justified with reference to the domestic nature of Indian Affairs. President Ulysses S. Grant's "Peace Policy," for example, relied largely on Christian missionaries to try to make Native peoples more "civilized" to prepare them for assimilation into the American body politic (Hopkins 2020, 119). Grant justified this policy, moreover, with reference to the purported inability of Native nations to remain free-standing, sovereign nations. As he noted in discussing Indian Affairs in his first annual message to Congress, "I have attempted a new policy toward these wards of the nation (they can not be regarded in any other light than as wards), with fair results so far as tried, and which I hope will be attended ultimately with great success" (1869).

Likewise, President Grover Cleveland described in his first inaugural address the sentiment that, "The Indians within our boundaries shall be fairly and honestly treated as wards of the Government and their education and civilization promoted with a view to their ultimate citizenship" (1885). Cleveland would later sign the Dawes Act, which sought to break apart reservations and trust lands and which was justified as an effort to make individual tribe members more "civilized," individualistic capitalists befitting their status as part of an American

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[19] Indeed, even some states started to treat relations with Native nations as a law enforcement issue rather than as a national security issue to be handled with state militias or federal assistance. See, e.g., Graybill (2007, 12-16) on the creation of the Texas Rangers.

domestic sphere.[20] In short, the BIA's placement in the Department of the Interior helped to grant legitimacy to subsequent speech acts and political maneuvers that rhetorically and bureaucratically reinforced the place of "Indian Affairs" in the domestic sphere.

In 1924, perhaps the apotheosis of this desecuritizing process came when the Indian Citizenship Act granted U.S. citizenship to "all non citizen Indians born within the territorial limits of the United States". Peoples with whom relations had once been conducted through the Department of War could now readily enlist to serve that department (and the later Department of Defense). Notably, the Indian Citizenship Act had supporters and detractors among tribes. As Deloria (2015, 5) describes, while the U.S. government did not conduct serious consultation with tribes on this or earlier reforms, there was much intra-tribal debate: "Was citizenship a force of political empowerment or a tool of disempowerment?" That there was disagreement within tribes underscores the moral ambiguity of (de)securitization. The United States had enacted practices of domination in its relations with Native nations in its early, more securitized relations, and these practices changed in form as these relations were slowly desecuritized. Even as the administration in Indian Affairs shifted from a reliance on instruments of foreign policy—war and diplomacy—to instruments of domestic policy such as law enforcement and assimilationist schooling, the underlying aim to institutionalize power relations remained much the same.

IV.   Discussion

I have argued that the debate over whether to move the Bureau of Indian Affairs from the Department of War to the Department of the Interior constituted a desecuritizing move in a

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[20] As Cleveland's Commissioner of Indian Affairs, J.D.C. Atkins, described it, the goal of the policy was to turn "idleness, improvidence, ignorance and superstition...into industry, thrift, intelligence and Christianity" (Glass 2011).

broader process of desecuritization. "Politics," however, "is about providing stability to social relations" (Hansen (2012, 528), and if we take the relational character of securitization seriously, we might see this desecuritization as an ongoing process.[21] As Simpson (2014, 10) argues, "sovereignty may exist within sovereignty," albeit "in terrific tension," the relevance of which here is that the federal government must continually seek to reproduce the status of Indian Affairs as a domestic issue. Indeed, from the state's perspective, this is all the more necessary in the face of Native activism and legal decisions that question or undermine the legitimacy of the subordination of tribes to the federal government. It should thus not be surprising that some challenge laws that treat members of federally recognized tribes as members of distinct political communities with related rights (as opposed to members of a racial or ethnic group) (Rector 2018). Similarly, the U.S. Supreme Court was subject to political attacks after the recent *McGirt v. Oklahoma* decision that upheld Creek Nation claims to a large portion of Oklahoma that Congress had previously reserved to them.[22] Likewise, the 2021 nomination and the narrow, contested confirmation of Representative Deb Haaland to be Secretary of the Interior underscores the backlash that Native activists and their allies may face in seeking to change the status quo (Chavez 2021).

As any given process of (de)securitization will entail active work to maintain the issue's (de)securitized status, I am hesitant to say that any such process is ever truly successful (or not).[23] Nonetheless, the efforts at desecuritization that I discuss have produced relatively durable stabilities in U.S. relations with Native nations. In defining success, securitization has received

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[21] See Jackson and Nexon (1999) on relationalism.
[22] As Healy (2020) notes, Senator Ted Cruz responded to the decision on Twitter by claiming that, "Neil Gorsuch & the four liberal Justices just gave away half of Oklahoma, literally. Manhattan is next."
[23] To draw an analogy to work in Comparative Politics, I would be similarly reticent to describe any given democracy as "consolidated" (Carothers 2002).

more attention than desecuritization. Citing Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998, 6), for example, Taurek (2006, 5) notes that, "a successful securitization consists of three steps. These are: (1) identification of existential threats; (2) emergency action; and (3) effects on inter-unit relations by breaking free of rules". Floyd (2016, 679) offers a similarly tripartite standard:

> I suggest that securitization is 'successful' only when (1) the identification of a threat that justifies a response (securitizing move) is followed by (2) a change of behaviour (action) by a relevant agent (that is, the securitizing actor or someone instructed by the same), and also (3) the action taken is justified by the securitizing actor with reference to the threat they identified and declared in the securitizing move.

By those standards, policy-makers certainly seem to have been successful in keeping Indian Affairs mostly desecuritized for a long period of time, and the 1849 decision does look to have been an important inflection point in that process. While the shapers of the Constitution and Supreme Court justices had already provided the legal framework necessary to think of Indian Affairs as "domestic" policy, the ensconcement of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior brought the federal bureaucracy in line with this framework and sent a very public message about how the government would relate to Native nations going forward. The extent to which this domestic relationship is now normal is only made more visible by occasional ruptures in this otherwise relatively stable state—for example, by the seizure of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building by American Indian Movement activists in 1972 or the more recent Keystone XL Pipeline and Standing Rock protests (Treuer 2019). This does not foreclose fuller realizations of Indigenous sovereignties (Wildcat and de Leon 2020), but it does present Native activists with difficult choices.

V.   Conclusion

I began this paper by asking whether securitization is normatively undesirable as many who have written on the topic would have it. On the contrary, I have argued that we ought not to attach any inherent moral valence to (de)securitization. I have focused primarily on desecuritization, which I have argued will often be necessary for polities that seek to incorporate a "foreign" population into their "domestic" order. As is clear from the long, coercive process by which the U.S. government turned Native nations into its "wards," both securitization and desecuritization can involve practices of domination. Moreover, these processes may entail slow, steady shifts in policy largely removed from general public debate and seemingly banal forms of bureaucratic restructuring to which the Copenhagen School has not always been attentive. That agents of the United States perpetrated acts of genocide against Native individuals both before and well after the 1849 debate on the Department of the Interior should give us pause when considering securitization theory's typical preference for desecuritization.

This does not mean that we need to rid the field of (de)securitization studies. Rather, we ought to retain the concept of (de)securitization as a useful analytic construct—as "a theoretical tool of analysis" (Taureck 2006, 55)—that draws our attention to a ubiquitous phenomenon. This phenomenon, however, can have varying effects that we need not imbue with any inherent moral valence *ex ante*. So long as political communities exist, we can expect there to be debate over what constitutes a threat to their security, and academics can draw on securitization theory to chasten public discourse that is not sensitive to the "equally political" nature of both securitizating and desecuritizing moves (Hansen 2012, 531).[24] We need not "impose moral

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[24] Van Rythoven (2021, 266), for example, explores contemporary politics in Canada in which racialized justifications for securitizing Indigenous protest movements have become less publicly tenable. Nonetheless, he argues, state coercion remains central to that settler colonial relationship even as politicians "distance" themselves from overtly racialized constructions thereof: "strategies of distancing

certitude where there often is none," but we can use the theoretical tools available to us to inform public debate when states seek to use the rhetoric of "security" to enact genocidal or otherwise troubling policies (Van Rythoven 2020, 488; Gallagher 2021).

Finally, there is more work to be done on the relationship between (de)securitization and settler colonialism. While I have used settler colonial processes in the United States to argue that desecuritization can involve practices of domination in the same way that securitization can, this is certainly not the only context in which a government has used coercion to make a once-foreign population part of its domestic sphere. Indeed, Pearcey (2016) argues that European colonization in the Americas and elsewhere relied on a process of this sort to incorporate the Indigenous "Other" into the domestic sphere, and Beier (2005, 80) notes that, "Perhaps better than any other measure, the perfection of an advanced colonial system of domination is signaled by its capacity to (re)make its Others in ways consistent with its own logics rather than theirs." Such processes have also occurred in the Russian expansion into Central Asia—a long series of events shaped by "prejudices, paranoia and anxieties about prestige" among Tsarist Russia's elites (Morrison 2021, 50). Likewise, imperial and modern Chinese governments have treated "the Uyghurs and other local Turkic people as fundamentally different from and inferior to the dominant Han population and, thus, incapable of either becoming equals to the Han or of even knowing how best to care for themselves" (Roberts 2020, 24). On the other hand, Indigenous peoples have also made (de)securitizing moves of their own, which suggests a decolonizing possibility in these processes as well (Greaves 2016). A comparative consideration of (de)securitization in settler colonial projects and Indigenous resistance movements could help us to better understand how

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create opportunities for actors to feign the appearance of racial sensitivity while at the same time enabling, or at least tolerating, racialized constructions of threats through less visible avenues." In writing about the politics of Indigenous "recognition" in Canada, Coulthard (2014) is similarly interested in the ways this allows politicians to make coercion less visible.

related practices of domination differ and whether (de)securitizing moves can alternatively be

used to liberatory effect.

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