Securitisation as a Norm-Setting Framing in The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

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Abstract

Since 2009, International Relations scholars have researched the role of big advocacy groups in giving access to the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots in the United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). To further these studies, the focus of this thesis is on the progress of negotiations for the 6-year period since the issue has been adopted, asking the question – How has the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots chosen to frame lethal autonomous weapons systems, and how successful has that framing been for the period of 2013 to 2019? I argue that advocates undertook a normative securitisation process to frame the existential threat lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) pose to human beings. This argument is supported by a dual method research approach of 1) semi-structured elite interviews; and 2) qualitative content analysis of reports. The findings of this research show that, while the advocacy group has not achieved success in the form of a legally binding agreement at the CCW, they have successfully developed a process of moral stigmatization of LAWS that contributes to the creation of a new humanitarian security regime.

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Key Words: framing, international negotiations, lethal autonomous weapons systems, normativity, transnational advocacy networks, securitisation
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List of Abbreviations

HRW – Human Rights Watch
ICRAC – International Committee for Robots Arms Control
ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross
IR – International Relations
KRC – The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots
LAWS – Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems
UNGA – United Nations General Assembly
1. Introduction

Lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) have been a part of the international humanitarian disarmament agenda since 2013, when the issue was adopted by the United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). The US Department of Defence defines the technology as “a weapon system that, once activated, can select and engage targets without further intervention by a human operator” (US DoD, 2012:13). The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots (KRC) is the primary transnational advocacy group campaigning for a pre-emptive ban on the future weapons technology, stating that LAWS “would lack the human judgment necessary to evaluate the proportionality of an attack, distinguish civilian from combatant, and abide by other core principles of the laws of war” (KRC 2019).

Previous International Relations (IR) literature (Carpenter 2011, 2014, 2016; Elcim 2015) has focused on the manner in which LAWS turned from a non-issue to becoming a part of the international arms control agenda, arguing for the importance of relative network position within the transnational advocacy network as a key reason for success in negotiations. Few studies have focused on the role of the KRC as a norm-setting actor in the CCW in the 6 years of negotiations on LAWS. This is why, in this thesis, I pose the question – **How has the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots chosen to frame lethal autonomous weapons systems, and how successful has that framing been for the period of 2013 to 2019?**

The two concepts of my research question are framing and success. Focusing on framing first, I use Entman’s (1993) definition of the concept, as selected aspects of reality that “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (1993:52). I argue that the KRC undertook a normative securitisation framing approach, which portrayed the future weapons technology as an existential threat to human beings, who I identify as the primary referent object. The KRC, as an extraordinary action, demanded a ban on LAWS.

As to the second concept in my research question, namely on how to measure the success of that framing, I argue that combining the transnational advocacy scholarship’s concept of normative entrepreneurship together with securitisation theory’s normative understanding of success will provide me with an in-depth view of what constitutes success for a humanitarian disarmament advocacy group. Both securitisation and advocacy group literatures engage debates
on whether setting up a new system on norms and creating a moral stigma (in this case – the use of a future weapons technology) constitutes success.

Thus, the research question is relevant to the field of IR in three ways: 1) ontologically, by further expanding the understanding of how securitisation can be a normative and emancipatory practice for non-state actors; 2) epistemologically, by combining two strands of IR scholarship – securitisation and transnational advocacy networks – in order to avoid the “production of parallel literatures and the duplication of concepts, terminology” (Watson 2012:279 in Elcim 2015:6), in this case by analyzing the concepts of framing and success through both lenses of the literature; and 3) methodologically, by combining research methods from both scholarships to achieve a deeper understanding of intent and sincerity of securitizing non-state actors. In this thesis this is achieved by applying interviews as conducted by advocacy group scholars, in combination with qualitative content analysis for a single case study conducted by securitisation scholars.

Having identified the main concepts within my research question as well as this research’s relevance to IR, the thesis is structured as follows: firstly, the literature review provides a brief overview of the ethical and legal discussion surrounding the use of LAWS. This consequently informs the analysis on the moral and ethical discussion identified in the data; the two main debates of the chosen scholarships are engaged. The first one focuses on the normative value of securitisation. On one side, scholars argue that securitisation theory is purely discursive and has no normative dimension (Buzan & Waever 1998; Hansen 2015). Moreover, even if a normative understanding could be conceptualized, desecuritisation would be the preferred alternative, seeing the process as a return of issues back to the realm of normal politics (Aradau 2004, 2008; Waever 1998). On the opposing side, scholars assert that, for certain issues, normative securitisation is the desired approach, as it brings attention to the urgency of threats raised by civil society, thus acting as an emancipatory process in the international scene (Floyd 2010, 2011; McDonald 2008, Williams 2003). The literature on normative securitisation is the main framework by which I structure the analysis, arguing that it is a unique framing opportunity for civil society to portray urgency to future threats and create pre-emptive norms for future weapons technologies such as LAWS.

The second debate is situated within transnational advocacy group scholarship, which centers on the value of securitisation as a unique framing by advocacy groups to achieve success in international negotiations. On one side, Garcia (2015, 2016) and Petrova (2018) argue that
securitisation, in its normative dimension, facilitates the creation of new regimes that focus on human rather than state security. Petrova (2018) states that the unique value of securitisation is in shifting the referent object from the state, to that of human beings as the primary victims of weapons used by state militaries, thus contributing to the creation of emancipatory security practice (2018:631). By contrast, Carpenter (2011, 2014) and Elcim (2015) dispute the idea that any type of unique framing, including normative securitisation, is the key factor that decides the success of advocacy group campaigns. Rather, both scholars argue for the importance of the participation of powerful advocacy groups in arms control campaigns. They act as gatekeepers to the inclusion of issues on the international agenda and thus facilitate the passing of legally binding agreements.

While relative network position is indeed an important factor of whether an issue is picked up by the international negotiations community, I contend that its success is dependent more on the creation of new norms and moral stigmatization. As Garcia (2015) exemplifies with the cases of landmines and cluster munitions – despite the fact that the most powerful states such as the United States did not sign the ban treaties, the moral stigma of the use of these weapons has successfully deterred even the biggest players from using them. In Garcia’s (2015) words “constructivist scholars have taken power and material constraints seriously and have showed that meaningful humanitarian change is possible and can be translated into practical ethics. In the words of one activist in Geneva: ‘They may not join the treaty, but the treaty will join them.’” (2015:60)

This is where the scholarship of transnational advocacy success and normative securitisation intertwine. The definition of what is successful framing moves away from an objective analytical understanding of a passed legislative treaty, to a normative understanding of what ought to constitute success, and which group ought to be protected in these new security regimes. This conceptualisation found in the analysis, where I operationalize this redefinition of success in section 4.3 of the analysis.

For what concerns the methodological approach used in this thesis, I look at a single case study of the KRC’s campaigning against LAWS utilizing two methods – interviews with seven members of the KRC, asking questions regarding: 1) framing: 2) perceived success and 3) ethical and moral motivation of their work. The first method is inspired by research of transnational advocacy groups (Carpenter 2011, 2016; Garcia 2015, 2016; Boräng et al. 2014). I conduct inductive content analysis to determine the textual codes by which to later analyze my chosen
documentation. The second method is qualitative content analysis of eleven KRC Reports on Activities, as well as one statement from March 2019 inspired by securitisation scholars (Floyd 2010, 2011; Roe 2012).

Finally, in my analysis, I utilize Floyd’s (2010) normative securitisation checklist to identify what constitutes: 1) having an objective existential threat; 2) having a morally legitimate referent object; and 3) the sincerity of the securitising actor in asking for a measured security response, while also developing an original final category of 4) success of the securitising act. Following the analysis of interviews and documentation, I argue that LAWS are defined as the existential threat, while human beings are firmly positioned as the morally legitimate referent object. Both the material from the interviews and Reports on Activities engage ethical debates to legitimize the referent object, arguing for the moral impermissibility of delegating the decision to kill to a machine.

I received mixed results as to what constitutes success of the securitisation; while actors expressed disappointment and regret over the stalled process of negotiations at the CCW and an uncertain path towards a legally binding agreement, they also acknowledged the growing number of states that agree to a pre-emptive ban. This supports my argument that, while the securitising actor might not achieve success in the form of a passed legislative treaty, the setting of new norms in the form of a moral stigma can prove to be a valuable step towards the creation of humanitarian security regimes. Moreover, these arguments also portray the sincerity of the securitising actors, as Floyd (2010) asserts “often in failed securitisation it is easier to determine sincerity of actors, since they did not achieve the extraordinary measures they were fighting for” (2010:54).

2. Literature Review

In this chapter, I argue that the campaign to ban LAWS is an appropriate case of normative securitisation due to the predictive nature of the issue in order to create a moral stigma of the use of the future weapons technology. Additionally, studying how that securitisation was constructed and its success to date will be enriched by combining securitisation scholarship with advocacy network scholarship. In this way, normative securitisation can be complemented by research that focuses on advocacy framing and success within transnational advocacy networks.

The literature review is structured as follows: firstly is an overview of the ethical and legal debate for the use of LAWS. Secondly, I define securitisation theory and discuss the debate
surrounding the normative value of de/securitisation and how that related to my case selection of the KRC. Furthermore, transnational advocacy networks are defined in terms of their composition, framing practices and success in campaigning. This relates to the work of the KRC, equating normative securitisation to a form of norm-setting framing, and issue salience to securitisation success. Finally, I engage with the debate on the value of combining these two strands of scholarship; scholars arguing for the unique value of securitisation as an emancipatory frame that contributes to the creation of new norms regimes (Garcia 2015; Petrova 2018) and scholars positioned against the uniqueness of using security frames as a reason for success, focusing rather on network position of the advocacy groups (Carpenter 2011, 2014, 2016; Elcim 2015). My original contribution to that literature is an in-depth look of the case of the KRC, testing hypotheses developed following the previous arguments from scholars that studied similar normative practices in the past.

2.1 The Ethical and Legal Debates Surrounding LAWS
To understand the validity of the call for new norms on LAWS, I look at the ethical and legal critiques to the call for a ban on the future weapons technology. Umbrello et al. (2019) argue against the view of LAWS as an objectively existential threat stating that once autonomous levels reach their full capacity, they will become the only ethical means of warfare (2019:1). The scholars point out that the “ease-of-use” of the technology will have a similar effect to that of mutually assured destruction present in nuclear arms possession. When most states possess a “credible means of retaliation” (2019: 3), they would become reluctant in initiating conflict. Moreover, Baum (2015 in Umbrello et al. 2019:4) contends that LAWS will create “winter-safe deterrence” where there would be the credible fear of retaliation without the assured annihilation of nuclear weapons.

On the legitimacy of the referent object, Nadeau (2006) and Arkin (2015) argue that human beings are not as moral as a normative securitisation framing supposes them to be. They claim that LAWS will act in an ethically superior way to human combatants, as they will not face the emotional and psychological consequences of war that lead combatants to commit crimes against humanity. Additionally, LAWS will alleviate human combatants from physical and psychological burdens, as the machines will not get fatigued, and continue to perform accurately as expected for a much longer time.
By contrast, Scharre (2018) points to a problem in the creation of an *accountability gap*, which will result from the lack of clarity of who will be accountable for the killings conducted on the battlefield if soldiers are not making the decisions (2018: 261). He focuses on an issue specific to the performance of autonomous weapons, referring to a so-called “flash war” (2018:210). Since machines have better and faster performance in detecting threats and retaliating, this also means that in a case of an attack between opposing LAWS, the speed of escalation would be unmatched to what human beings, leading to a “firestorm of unintended lethality” (2018:210).

While Scharre (2018) is critical of many aspects of autonomous weapons, him and Horowitz (2016) stand against a full ban, as powerful states developing these technologies would not sign a treaty that includes a prohibition of LAWS. They propose a more measured response of regulation on certain aspects of LAWS, rather than the complete ban of their use. Garcia (2015) opposes this argument stating that despite important players refusing to sign a prohibition treaty, the norms that emerge from that treaty end up deterring even non-signatories from utilizing banned technologies (2015:60).

### 2.2 Securitisation and the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

In this thesis I argue that the framing of the KRC on the issue of LAWS can be conceptualized through the lens of securitisation theory. Since the securitising actor is a non-state entity, an interesting debate that arises is on the normative value of framing an issue as an existential threat.

#### 2.2.1 Defining Securitisation Theory

Securitisation is a process-oriented theory in Constructivism that was developed by the Copenhagen School in the 1990’s. It is defined by Buzan et al. (1998) as the use of 1) a *speech act* to convey; 2) an *existential threat* to; 3) a *referent object* intended for; 4) a *select audience*. The speech act in itself does not automatically mean the issue is securitized but rather is considered a *security move* (1998:25). For the speech act to be successful, it needs to be recognized as legitimate by the group that has authorized the agent to speak (1998:33). Buzan et al. (1998) identify three components for a successful securitisation: “existential threat, emergency action, and effects on interunit relations by breaking free of rules” (1998:26).

To understand the epistemological foundations of this theory I look at the different distinctions within international security studies (ISS). Buzan and Hansen (2009) define
epistemology in ISS as the “principles and guidelines for how knowledge can be acquired […] how one should study security” (2009:32). The scholars divide the field of ISS into three epistemological distinctions – 1) objective; 2) subjective; and 3) discursive. According to its founding scholars, the Copenhagen School falls into the third discursive distinction. Discursive conceptions assume that “security cannot be defined in objective terms and hence both the objective and subjective conceptions are misleading” (Buzan and Hansen, 2009:33). What is key to this understanding of security is that the most important aspect of its existence is the construction of the existential threat to a speech act.

Critics of the Copenhagen School point to several issues with this conceptualization, most notably from the so-called Welsh School of Critical Security Studies (Booth 2007; McDonald 2008, Williams 2003). Williams (2003) advocates for a broader understanding of the speech act to expand to a political ethics understanding of the speech act that moves it beyond the discursive social practice definition of the Copenhagen School. Under this expansion the speech act becomes “a process of argument, the provision of reasons, presentation of evidence, and commitment to convincing others of the validity of one’s position” (Williams 2003:522). Furthermore, Williams (2003) argues against the limited use of speech as the measurement for a securitised move. He refers to the expanding nature of visual content and imagery used in security speech, with a notable example of the image of the twin towers falling during the terrorist attack of September 11th, 2001.

The Welsh School (Booth 2007; McDonald 2008, Williams 2003) has a third main critique on the Copenhagen School definition of securitisation, namely the lack of a normative dimension to conceptualizing the practice. McDonald (2008) and Petrova (2018) contend that critical constructivist understandings of security have moved away from the traditional focus on the state and militaries to focus on the individual. This is an emancipatory practice that democratizes the producers of security and lets marginalized groups have a voice (McDonald 2008:568).

2.2.2 The Normativity Debate
This section focuses on the normative tenets of these critiques, specifically focusing on the debate between the normative value of securitisation versus desecuritisation, as it is relevant to my choice of the arms control advocacy of the KRC. Moreover, in answering my research question I engage with the changing definition of success under the theory of normative securitisation.
According to its founders, securitisation focuses on middle scale limited collectivities, such as states, and thus does not make normative emancipatory claims (Buzan et al. 1998:36). A critic of normative securitisation derives from one of its founding scholars – Ole Waever (Weaver 1995; Buzan et al. 1998), who questions the value of extraordinary politics to solve security crises; rather, he advocates for a process of desecuritisation that returns issues back to the realm of normal politics where they can be resolved in a democratic and transparent, albeit slower, manner (1998:209).

In response to this position, Petrova (2018) proposes that securitisation does, in fact, have some form of consequentialist thinking, as formative scholars within the Copenhagen School (Hansen 2015; Weaver 1995, 2000) advocate for desecuritisation as the preferred ultimate outcome in dealing with security issues, thus making a normative claim. According to them, moving threats back to the realm of normal politics ensures more rigorous democratic processes in decision-making. Both Weaver (2000) and Hansen (2015) conduct case studies of migration rhetoric within the EU context in different historical periods, pointing to the undesirable extraordinary actions that follow the securitisation of immigrants.

Aradau (2004) expands on the idea of desecuritisation as a morally desirable practice. She disagrees with the normative value of securitisation claiming it excuses fast-track politics that undermine democratic norms, furthermore, that securitisation perpetuates the us versus the other differentiation (Aradau 2004:402). She presents a dichotomy between desecuritisation versus securitisation as: “democratic politics of universal norms and slow procedures or the exceptional politics of speed and enemy exclusion” (Aradau 2004:338). The scholar studies cases of “refugees, migrants, trafficked women, or even AIDS-infected persons” (2004:397) arguing that securitisation produces an exclusionary process for these marginalized groups, creating this othering discourse. Thus, she refuses the Welsh School’s conceptualization of security as an emancipatory practice arguing that “their circular definition of emancipation as security deprives the former of its truly transformative potential” (Aradau 2004:390).

In critique to this understanding of desecuritisation, Floyd (2010) who is a proponent of normative securitisation points out that an issue falling out of the securitised frame does not necessarily remain politicized; it can disappear from the policy agenda completely. She supports this argument by a comparative look at environmental securitisation during the Clinton and Bush Administrations in the US. Floyd (2010), argues that a de-politicized issue does not disappear from
discourse completely, but that “even if other actors within the wider political field (for example, NGOs, academics, opposition party politicians, mid-level-staffers) continue to work on some of the same issues after desecuritisation, such activity does not constitute politicisation. Only if the government itself continues to work on the issues do we have a case of ‘desecuritisation as politicisation’” (2010:pp 57-58).

Furthermore, since desecuritisation can be understood as a normative concept, Floyd (2010) argues that the same ethical consequentialist thinking can be applied to securitisation as well. She states that whether a securitisation process is normative or not, depends on the issue that is being securitized and the intentions of the securitizing agent. Floyd (2011) lists three main qualities that define a securitisation process as normative: 1) having an objective existential threat; 2) having a morally legitimate referent object; and 3) the securitising actor must be sincere in asking for a measured security response (2011:428).

This does not necessarily come into conflict with Aradau and Waever’s desecuritisation arguments. With a focus on the importance of issues, Floyd (2011) shows that, in some instances, securitisation is the appropriate response to an ethically unacceptable threat. As mentioned earlier, the scholar defends her argumentation through a qualitative case study of discourse in environmental negotiations, specifically looking at environmental policy developments during the Clinton and Bush administrations in the US.

A weakness in Floyd’s (2010, 2011) conceptualization is on the limited applicability of her chosen empirical case of normative securitisation. Floyd (2010) addresses criticism that points to that weakness and asks: “what else in other sectors can be said to have the same status?” (2010:193). I argue that the case of the KRC provides an expansion to the empirical cases of normative securitisation for two reasons. Firstly, both environmental issues and LAWS issues are future threats, meaning that there is a need for pre-emptive measures, where a focus on portraying an urgency of the threat is required to achieve success. Secondly, concerning the referent object, both cases deal with an existential threat to human beings and humanity as a whole.

I contend that the KRC aim for a pre-emptive ban on using and developing LAWS in order to preserve humanitarian values within warfare and protect all human beings that might be subject to an attack. According to Petrova (2018), LAWS are re-framed from a technology that strengthens national security from foreign threats, to becoming the threat in themselves (2018:631). when it comes to LAWS, I further argue that this is an emancipating practice; the naming of a security
threat move the role of securitising actor from states to transnational advocacy networks (including NGOs, AI specialists, scholars, legal specialists), in this way giving power to underrepresented and marginalized voices in the realm of arms proliferation and control. Since normative securitisation facilitates a democratized definition of who the securitising actor can be and what their intent is, the next section focuses on scholarship dealing with transnational advocacy networks, specifically when it concerns humanitarian disarmament and arms control.

2.3 Transnational Advocacy Networks

Securitisation theory has received criticism from scholars for a lack of clarity on what constitutes successful securitisation (Balzacq 2005; Stritzel 2007; McDonald 2008). I maintain that bridging securitisation theory and advocacy success scholarship when analyzing the KRC, will provide a valuable contribution to the former, as it will further the studies on securitisation as a normative framing practice.

2.3.1 Defining of Transnational Advocacy Networks

To be able to answer the question of how the KRC framed LAWS, I will look at literature that defines the creation and structure of the advocacy group. Transnational advocacy groups have been a central topic of study in the field of IR. In a review of advocacy literature, Price (2003) identifies transnational civil societies as “self-organized advocacy groups that undertake voluntary collective action across state borders in pursuit of what they deem the wider public interest” (2003:580). As to what those actors do, Price (2003) states that they “seek to change not just the interests and identities (and thus practices) of actors but also the environments within which those actors operate—that is, the structures of power and meaning” (2003: 583). Referring back to transnational advocacy groups, this change of meaning can be understood in terms of norm entrepreneurship (Carpenter 2011:70). This is a key discursive relation between advocacy group literature and normative securitisation studies, as the key aspect of advocacy group success is dependent not only on the relative position within advocacy structures but on the framing of an issue over time. Keck and Sikkink (1999) argue that this process develops into a creation of a transnational advocacy network that “includes those actors working internationally on an issue,
who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services” (1999:89).

2.3.2 Framing and Success in Transnational Advocacy Networks

Moving on from the formation and motivations of transnational advocacy networks, scholars (Keck & Sikkink 1999; Carpenter 2011, 2014; Elcim 2015) have focused on the success in issue salience and how it relates to framing. Entman’s (1993) defines framing as:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (1993:52).

Scholars have focused on the success in issue salience and success in global governance that non-state actors achieve. Carpenter (2011) undertakes a structural in-depth understanding of framing success and advocacy issue salience. She bases her work on existing definitions of transnational advocacy networks (Keck & Sikkink 1999) and argues that it is the “network position itself—relative to the norm entrepreneur—that allows some organizations in an advocacy network disproportionate influence in setting the advocacy agenda” (Carpenter 2011: 70). In her research, Carpenter (2011) focuses on arms control negotiations, further arguing that successful weapons bans were not dependent on general advocacy interest in banning specific weapons technologies. Rather, success in negotiations was directly related to interest from the most powerful advocacy nodes within the network – The Human Rights Watch (HRW) and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (2011:96). In her research, Carpenter (2011) examines cases of successful weapons advocacy campaigns (such as bans on blinding lasers, landmines, and cluster munitions) and unsuccessful ban efforts (such as LAWS and depleted uranium) comparatively through qualitative textual analysis of advocacy group reports, as well as interviews. She contends that big advocacy groups’ gatekeeping is directly related to issue success, rather than solely the type of framing that they choose to use (Carpenter 2011:83).

Carpenter (2014) later revisits the case of the KRC and utilizing the same methodology. She comes to the conclusion that it was indeed big advocacy groups that were the gatekeepers for early advocates to reach the international negotiations framework. LAWS moved from a non-issue
to a widely accepted international issue in the transnational arms control network and were included in the permanent agenda of the CCW (Carpenter 2014:90).

While Carpenter (2014:152) undertakes a structural analysis that is focused on relative network position in advocacy relations, she underlines the importance for a constructivist discursive understanding of advocacy success to compliment her approach. The scholar does this through identifying advocacy groups as norm-entrepreneurs – non-state actors with the potential of changing international norms and create moral taboos (Carpenter 2014:153). This is where normative securitisation comes into play as a fitting theory in understanding the process by which discourse is formulated to change norms, and this change in its turn can be understood as success in transnational advocacy group campaigns – such as that of the KRC to pre-emptively ban LAWS.

2.4 Normative Securitisation as Norm Entrepreneurship

Previous literature (Garcia 2015, 2016; Elcim 2015; Petrova 2018) has focused on combining critical security conceptualizations with studies on humanitarian disarmament advocacy networks. This relates to Floyd’s (2011) argumentation for a similar approach to understanding securitisation. In this way, both scholarships receive appeals for a moral consequentialist epistemic development.

Two distinct positions emerge from the literature on complementing normative securitisation to advocacy success. On one hand, Garcia (2015, 2016) and Petrova (2018) argue for the unique value of a security framing as a way to achieve new normative regimes. Garcia (2015) focuses on the creation of moral taboos by arms control advocacy groups. She analyzes the changing of norms brought upon by humanitarian disarmament groups by equating them with developing humanitarian security regimes. Garcia (2015, 2016) studies public documentation of the Geneva disarmament communities and conducts series of interviews with advocacy elites over the course of five years. She states that the Campaign to Ban Landmines (most of whose activists are currently part of the KRC campaigning against LAWS) “started in traditional negotiating frameworks within UN channels using the consensus rule but ended using an unconventional route that ultimately broke free from consensus. From the outset, the first two processes generated a moral stigma” (Garcia 2015:56). Garcia (2015) maintains that “constructivist scholars have taken power and material constraints seriously and have showed that meaningful humanitarian change is possible and can be translated into practical ethics. In the words of one activist in Geneva: They may not join the treaty, but the treaty will join them” (2015:60).
Petrova (2018), who also studies the unique value of normative securitisation, conducts a qualitative case study on the cluster munition and landmine negotiations that both led to successful ban treaties. She states that “what some take for granted today – that landmines and cluster munitions are obsolete weapons – is actually the result of NGO efforts to redefine political and military considerations of military necessity and usefulness”, in essence creating a new norm within security. Petrova’s (2018) main argument is on the emancipatory power of normative securitisation as a way to successfully shift the referent object from the state to human beings in the realm of military technology, creating the emancipatory space “where change could start through critique” (2018:pp 622-623).

As a critique to the unique emancipatory power of securitisation is the position that securitisation is just one of many possible advocacy frames that is neither unique nor required for success (Elcim 2015: 4). Elcim (2015) builds onto Carpenter’s (2011) work by arguing that “security frames function like any other frame and therefore, their connection to advocacy success is mediated by the strategic environment within which the campaigns operate” (2015:4) Elcim (2015) further criticizes the uniqueness of securitisation as a frame by arguing that “another problem that comes with treating securitization as a unique process rather than as an instance of framing is the limited ability that these studies have in explaining the advocates’ decision to use security frames in the face of the long-term implications of doing so” (2015:10). Furthermore, the instances of successful desecuritisation frames question the effectiveness of securitisation as the preferred emancipatory approach (2015:5).

I argue that securitisation has a unique potential for creating new norm regimes in certain contexts, specifically when it concerns future threats such as environmental degradation and autonomous weapons technologies. A weakness in Carpenter (2011, 2014, 2016) and Elcim’s (2015) critique is a specific objective understanding of success as a passed legislative treaty. Rather I agree with Garcia (2015) and Floyd (2011) who conceptualize a more nuanced understanding of securitization success where “securitisation is successful when it is simply brought in existence” (Floyd 2011:54).

This relates back to Floyd’s (2011) initial critique of the Copenhagen School for only focusing on successful cases of securitisation. The scholar maintains that in this manner, analysts lose sight of the intention of actors, which are key in the normative conceptualisation of the practice. I argue that securitisation, in the form of framing LAWS as an existential threat to
humanity, is an effective tactic for a non-state actor to communicate urgency to an issue and work on creating a moral stigma against the use of the future weapons technology.

### 2.5 Summary

In this literature review I combined two strands of IR literature, focusing on the relation between normative securitisation and transnational advocacy networks. I focused my research on the single case of the KRC asking how have LAWS been framed and how successful has that framing been for the period of 2013 to 2016. The aim of connecting both scholarships is to expand the epistemic understanding of advocacy success on two levels: 1) structurally, by looking at success of transnational advocacy groups (Carpenter 2011; Elcim 2015); and 2) discursively, by focusing on normative securitisation as a novel understanding of norm-creation coming from non-state actors (Floyd 2010; Garcia 2015; Petrova 2018).

This combination is an original contribution to securitisation literature; it enriches the understanding of securitisation theory in its normative intersubjective dimension through an illustrative new case, building upon Floyd’s (2011) previous research of environmental normative securitisation. I follow Floyd’s (2011) understanding of securitisation success as being focused on the intent and practices of the securitising agents, rather than a necessary extraordinary action. Following her criticism of normative understanding within the Copenhagen School, I argue that desecuritisation is not the appropriate normative conceptualization for the case of the KRC’s framing on LAWS. Since the issue gained salience due to the work of a transnational advocacy group, there is no guarantee that it will stay on national and international agendas in a politicized form if the pressure from the group subsides.

Floyd’s (2011) work serves as the main framework of the analysis with each subsection being a point in her checklist for normative securitization. The ethical and moral debates in the first part of the literature review are engaged through the data in section 4.2 Moral and Ethical Legitimacy of the Referent Object. Carpenter (2014), while Garcia (2015) and Petrova’s (2018) research is prominent in section 4.3 Redefining Success with Normative Securitisation.

### 3. Method

In this thesis I conducted a research analysis utilizing two research methods inspired by both securitisation scholars (Floyd 2010, 2011; Roe 2012) and transnational advocacy network scholars.
(Carpenter 2011; Boräng et al. 2014; Garcia 2015) namely: 1) elite semi-structured interviews; and 2) qualitative content to determine whether a normative securitisation framing occurs and how successful it has been to date. The data selection proceeded as follows: I conducted interviews with seven members of the KRC, asking open questions related to my research question; I used an inductive method of qualitative analysis of the interview material and defined four code categories. These categories were then applied to the eleven Reports on Activities of the KRC at the CCW for the period 2013 to 2018, and one official statement of the KRC following the latest CCW meeting in March 2019. The tested hypotheses are:

**H1**: The KRC had an intent to securitise LAWS in order to portray a moral imperative in urgently addressing the issue and achieving a pre-emptive ban.

**H2**: The KRC has had difficulty achieving success in a pre-emptive ban in the CCW due to the fact that LAWS are a future technology and there are no tangible examples of the consequences of their use.

The following sections will describe the two research methods and how they enabled the testing of the hypotheses by conducting an inductive qualitative content analysis of interview materials. I then apply the themes deductively within the selected material of the KRC.

### 3.1 Data Selection

Before using the desired methods, I identified the appropriate material to be studied. I chose to conduct interviews with seven members of the KRC, following Carpenter (2011, 2014, 2016) and Garcia’s (2015, 2016) research methodology in interviewing advocacy group elites. To strengthen the reliability of the information obtained from the interviews, I conducted qualitative content analysis of all reports issued by the KRC on their website since the campaign’s launch and its participation at the CCW. This is inspired by the work of Floyd (2010) and Roe (2012). For the scope of this thesis, the material is delimited to Reports on Activities only; omitting media outputs, statements and open letters produced by the advocacy group. The only exception consists in the inclusion of a statement produced by the KRC on March 27th, 2019, due to a lack of an available
report for the CCW meeting in March 2019. I argue that this is a relevant document as it provides the latest developments during of the negotiations at the CCW.

3.2 Interviews

The first method I applied was semi-structured interviews with advocacy elites and research specialists working in the KRC. Tansey (2007) argues that research focused on process-tracing theories such as securitisation can be enriched by the inclusion of elite interviews as “the goal of process tracing is to obtain information about well-defined and specific events and processes, and the most appropriate sampling procedures are thus those that identify the key political actors” (2007:765). He maintains that non-probability sampling is the best approach to that research method as the aim is not to get a representative population sample but rather “to draw a sample that includes the most important political players who have participated in the political events being studied” (2007:765).

Thus, I conducted non-random sampled interviews with seven members of the advocacy network over phone and video call, asking questions referring back to my two hypotheses. The interviewees had expertise in different fields, as well as various positions within the advocacy group: I spoke with three disarmament specialists, two IR researchers, one media and communications specialists, and one software engineer. The value of choosing interviewees with diverse specializations was to identify a thorough understanding of the nature of the threat of LAWS. I addressed the ethical responsibility of the interviewer by asking for consent at two stages of the interview process – firstly, obtaining permission to record the interview in order to transcribe the material, and secondly, in getting consent to use the selected quotes from the interviews in the context of the analysis.

This method relies heavily on the research of Carpenter (2011, 2016) and Garcia (2015, 2016) who also conduct elite interviews with advocacy elites, specifically in international arms control negotiations. Carpenter (2016) contends that interviews provide an inside look into framing intentions of advocacy group members as well as “the constraints in which the campaign operated but also the social relations among campaigners themselves” (2016:58).

A strength of interviews, compared to content analysis of policy documents, is that the latter are usually developed over a long period of time, while the fast-paced nature of interviews might provide answers that are less strategic (Boräng et al. 2014:194). On the other hand, elite
interviewers can still represent a politically correct version of the discussed topics, creating a difficulty in establishing intent, which is part of my first hypothesis. Furthermore, a weakness is that the respondents are individuals and their answers should not be presumed to speak for policy stances of organizations (2014: 194). Indeed, during the interviews respondents explicitly told me specific opinions were not meant to represent the organization as a whole.

Having conducted all the interviews, I identified four themes spanning across the conversations with each member of the organization, which lead to the creation of a five-category coding system used for the content analysis. The categories are defined as follows: 1) the relation between LAWS as an existential threat and words relating to their moral unacceptability; 2) references of morals/ethics relating to humans/human beings as the referent object; 3) references to the CCW in relation to the success of banning LAWS; and 4) references to alternative routes to attempt to ban LAWS in outside of the CCW framework. Having conducted the interviews and identified the codes I then proceeded with analyzing the eleven reports on activities and the latest statement published by the KRC, qualitatively, focusing on those four themes.

3.3 Qualitative Content Analysis

The second method I applied was qualitative content analysis, looking for the latent meaning within the selected texts from the lens of the four themes identified during the interviews. Pashakhanlou (2017) lists three factors that differentiate qualitative content analysis from other methods: 1) “content analysis is predominantly descriptive”; 2) “content analysis systemically reduces communication” into themes or codes; and 3) “content analysis settles for one interpretation, when several are possible” (2017:449). The strength of qualitative content analysis over its quantitative counterpart is higher validity due to the focus on latent meaning of the text (Pashakhanlou 2017:450). The method is used both by securitisation scholars and advocacy success scholars in single and multi-case studies. This is the reason this is used in the thesis to determine the normative security framing of LAWS by the KRC. I base this method primarily on Roe (2012), who studies the validity of normative securitisation in a single case studies of the decision of the UK Parliament to implement the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act of 2001, as well as Floyd (2011) who uses the method for a comparative case study of US environmental security policies in two presidential administrations. Both scholars used speeches and policy documents to conduct their analyses.
The weakness of using a single-case qualitative analysis is in its external validity, specifically in finding causal relations among themes (Boräng et al. 2014:190). However, this method is strengthened by the interviews which determine the intent and prioritizing of themes of the advocates themselves.

4. Analysis of Findings

In this thesis I present the question: How has the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots chosen to frame lethal autonomous weapons systems, and how successful has that framing been for the period of 2013 to 2019? After reviewing the relevant literature, gathering the data and conducting my method, I will now present my findings. The analysis will follow an overarching structure based on Floyd’s (2011) normative securitisation framework which puts a focus on: 1) having an objective existential threat; 2) having a morally legitimate referent object; and 3) the sincerity of the securitising actor in asking for a measured security response; as well as 4) the desired audience and perceived success of the KRC enriched by the transnational advocacy network theoretical lens.

I argue that the data produced by the interviews and qualitative content analysis confirms H1, since advocates did frame LAWS as an urgent threat and stressed on the moral imperative of creating a new norm on LAWS. This was found both in the reports, as well as expressed as motivations during the interviews. Secondly, regarding the success of the framing, I argue that H2 is partially correct – the KRC did lack success in the form of a passed legislative treaty at the CCW due to the preventative nature of the ban. At the same time, both the documentation and the interviews exhibit a gradual increase in support for a ban of LAWS from states, pointing to a successful normative securitisation process, in this way confirming Garcia (2015) and Petrova’s (2018) arguments for the emancipatory power of securitisation as a way to set new moral stigmas.

4.1 The Existential Threat Framing

The first step in Floyd’s (2010) normative securitisation analysis framework is the establishment of an objective existential I asked the KRC advocates for their definition of the threat. The interviewees identified a coherent idea that LAWS are the main existential threat they aim to frame, in this way confirming H1. Campaigners defined automated decision-making for lethal strikes as an existential danger to human beings during conflict using terms such as – “killer robots”, “fully autonomous systems”, “lethal autonomous weapons systems” interchangeably. The terms “human
out of the loop” and “meaningful human control” were used by all interviewees to explain the lack of human input in the decision-making process. Isabelle Jones, the campaign outreach manager for the KRC, specified:

What we are talking about here is autonomy in the critical functions of a targeting cycle – that is the selection and engagement of targets. A fully autonomous weapon in the view of the Campaign would be one that conducts those critical functions without meaningful human control, without human intervention.¹

Depending on the expertise of each interviewee – whether technical, in disarmament advocacy or IR – they highlighted different aspects of the reason LAWS are an existential threat. Three major problems were raised during interviews: 1) the complexity and speed of autonomous systems, which could lead to big accidents and flash wars; 2) the newness and unexpected nature of a future technology, which would make any regulation short of a ban inadequate; and 3) the difficulty in delimiting the presence of automation as a technology that becoming omni-used in society.

Laura Nolan, a site reliability engineer and former Google employee, was one of the first tech industry activists to join the KRC. During the interview, she said LAWS may form part of a complex system with conditions that produce “emergent vicious cycle flash crash phenomena”. Nolan further stated:

The upshot of all the complex system work that I’ve read is that there is no way of controlling this from inside the system. You just have to expect that sometimes systems with these kinds of properties, you can’t predict all the outcomes.²

The flash crashes are a key concern for Scharre (2018) as well, who uses the parallel of stock market flash crashes with the prospect of this problem being transferred in the realm of physical warfare, which the author names flash wars (2018:210). Taking a different explanatory approach, Matthew Bolton, a member of the International Committee for Robot Arms Control (ICRAC) and Political Science professor created a parallel between landmines and LAWS,

¹ Isabelle Jones, Program Coordinator for the KRC, April 2019.
² Laura Nolan, ICRAC Member, April 2019.
highlighting the difficulty of appropriately regulating the future technology due to a lack of precedents:

The mine stays still and the people move around it but what if the mine was a thing that moved and people were somehow stuck. […] Where the vector of violence is kind of moving around them. […] The early law on cars used the analogy of horses because people had not seen a car before. They could not really understand what they were regulating. In some ways, for me, my thinking moved in a similar direction where I was thinking from the analogy of a landmine being an analog autonomous weapon.³

Frank Sauer, ICRAC IT secretary and senior researcher, utilizes the same metaphor, although to highlight a problem in delimiting the growing use of automation in wider society:

It is basically everybody is going from the horse cart to the combustion engine and we are saying: “Ok, of course the military can also adopt that but we think we have to have some type of regulation about it”. It’s an omni-use technology and it is really hard to get good rules going.⁴

Similarly, Erin Hunt of Mines Action Canada points to the unpredictable danger of utilizing as new technology stating that pre-emptive action is “the best way forward to prevent a future crisis”⁵. Having identified the main themes of the existential threat according to KRC advocates, I then conducted inductive content analysis of the transcripts and applied the chosen codes deductively qualitatively analyzing the twelve chosen documents of the KRC.

The Reports on Activities published by the KRC provided me with an opportunity to take a deep dive content analysis into the details of the threat of LAWS, as well as get access to information and statements from members of the KRC that I did not have the opportunity to interview. Looking at the codes of “lethal autonomous weapons” (and all the contextual synonyms of that term) together with “human” (in combination with “control” and “out of the loop”) provided by the inductive analysis of the interviews, I focused on the surrounding context and latent meaning of the identified threat. The earliest report was an appropriate place to focus the analysis on, as it provided the most in-depth discussion of what exactly must be banned according to the KRC. Advocates and experts explained the problems of automating weapons at length, listing the same

³ Matthew Bolton, ICRAC Member, April 2019.
⁴ Frank Sauer, ICRAC IT Secretary, April 2019.
concerns are those raised during interviews, as well as further reasoning. Noel Sharkey, the founding member of the International Committee for Robot Arms Control (the earliest group on the KRC steering committee), outlined a comprehensive list summarizing the concerns raised by all advocates in six main reasons for LAWS being an existential threat, namely:

1) “robots cannot discriminate or distinguish between a soldier and a civilian”;
2) “robots cannot make the proportionality calculation as required under International Humanitarian Law, which involves the notion that civilian casualties are acceptable under certain circumstances providing it is directly proportional to the military advantage that is gained”;
3) “a human commander can be held accountable and responsible, but we cannot hold a robot accountable for its actions in the battlefield”;
4) “the idea of creating a ‘bloodless’ wars […] but we are not certain that these are going to be bloodless for civilians”;
5) “there will be a robot arms race as there is big money involved”;
6) “the battlefield is completely unpredictable. We have no idea how programs will react when they interact, and that can be destabilizing in a major way, unintentionally triggering conflict.” (KRC 2013a: pp 4-5).

Four out of the six concerns directly name humans/civilians as the referent object of the threat. Together with the term “human out of the loop” and “meaningful human control”, the notion of human beings as the potential victims of the fallout of using LAWS becomes a central theme in the securitisation process of the KRC. Floyd (2011) argues that “to determine the moral rightness of securitization should be seen as related to work in just war theory, where a list of criteria is used to determine the morality of war” (2011:pp 429-430). Both normative securitisation and just war theory requires an objective threat (or just cause), as well as an appropriate response (or proportionality). In the case of LAWS, Floyd’s (2011) comparison to just war theory is particularly apt – utilizing the weapons technology becomes morally impermissible due to the risk to humans/civilians. Specifying what a risk to human being means in the context of normative securitisation, Floyd (2011) puts human well-being at the center of the process since: “a referent object of security is legitimate only if it is conducive to human well-being. This is based on the humanistic principle [...] Note that rather than subjective levels of ‘happiness’ or ‘life satisfaction’, I am interested in objective levels of well-being” (2011:431). Since the threat of LAWS is the loss of human life and freedom of movement due to constraints or mistakes posed by the technology, I argue that the threat is indeed objective and existential.
4.2 Moral and Ethical Legitimacy of the Referent Object

Identifying the legitimacy of the referent object is the second step in Floyd’s (2010) framework for the occurrence of a normative securitisation process. This further answers the first part of the research question of how the KRC chose to frame LAWS. During interviews with KRC members, all interviewees identified human beings (“victims” and “civilians” being used as synonyms in the context of the interviews) as the main group under threat. The question of who is under threat provided visceral and emotional reactions:

I don’t think that we should let robots kill humans. I think that is just a shocking and disgusting thing to do.6

I found it really horrifying, I got quite scared by the possibility […] I was afraid, I am afraid of what this kind of technological development could do.7

I am obviously more with those people who think that we can really be throwing out the baby with the bathwater here, so it is better to err on the safe side.8

The KRC also actively seeks a framing with a focus on the unacceptability of human victims, as Clare Conboy, Media and Communications Manager for the KRC, explains:

The Campaign is mostly human focused, to the point where we have media regularly asking us for photos of weapons systems that are going to become fully autonomous in due course. That is not where the focus needs to be. […] When people empathize with the people that are going to be victimized it is more successful.9

Following these reactions, the interviewees continued with framing morality and ethics as a key aspects of the impermissibility of LAWS being delegated with the decision to kill human beings. Interviewees often put concepts of moral, ethical, legal, technical, and political together when talking about the concerns they had in regard to the referent object. This listing was also evident in the qualitative analysis of the Reports on Activities. In each of the twelve chosen documents, the theme of moral legitimacy of the referent object was tightly connected with the abovementioned concepts. Campaigners and supportive states stressed that the consideration of all

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6 Laura Nolan, ICRAC Member, April 2019.
7 Matthew Bolton, ICRAC Member, April 2019.
8 Frank Sauer, ICRAC IT Secretary, April 2019.
9 Clare Conboy, Media and Communications Manager for the KRC, May 2019.
these concerns together will be the most comprehensive manner in which to address the existential threat. Morality and international humanitarian law had the highest co-occurrence throughout the reports and, similarly with the interview results, produced the strongest language of moral stigmatization.

The UN Secretary-General first called for a ban on killer robots […] where he stated: ‘For me there is a message that is very clear – machines that have the power and the discretion to take human lives are politically unacceptable, are morally repugnant, and should be banned by international law.’ (KRC 2018b:1)

Delving deeper into the specific ethical concerns, two perspectives emerged as opposing views in the debate on the moral acceptability of using LAWS – consequentialist utilitarianism versus Kant’s human dignity argument. On the opposing side of a ban, theorists (Arkin 2005; Umbrello et al. 2019) have referred to the overall reduction of loss of human life and, specifically, the lowered need to send soldiers to war if LAWS are to be employed. However, interviewees rejected the consequentialist thinking, rather focusing on the human as an end in themselves.

Maybe it will reduce the overall harm of warfare by keeping their own soldiers out of harm’s way. That’s sort of their justification it is a very utilitarian justification. The dignity argument comes in and says – well, that is fine but you are using people as a means to an end to fight your war the way you want to fight it. […] I do think we need to worry about the complex systems barriers and the moral and dignity arguments.10

I would probably put the strongest emphasis on the ethical notions, especially the infringement on human dignity, which I think is just something that plays well with a whole variety of different audiences.11

A third and last ethical concept that emerged from the interview material was that of virtue ethics. While interviewees were critical of the military as the main developers of LAWS, they pointed to a soldier’s individual morality in being accountable for their actions:

A lot of people’s objection may be a virtue ethics thing, that we have a responsibility to make these decisions and not to delegate them, not to just wash our hands of the consequences of what we do. Or even the process of what we do.12

10 Laura Nolan, ICRAC Member, April 2019.
11 Frank Sauer, ICRAC IT Secretary, April 2019.
12 Laura Nolan, ICRAC Member, April 2019.
Who is going to be building these weapons, who is going to be potentially accountable for these weapons systems if they are developed and used?13

These ethical considerations relate again to Floyd’s (2011) understanding of normative securitisation. The scholar points to the sincerity of the actors in framing and acting to alleviate the insecurity of the referent object. She contends that “for securitisation to be ‘referent object benefiting’, two conditions need to be met: 1) that the securitising actor seriously intends to secure the referent object identified; and 2) that the securitising actor acts to alleviate the insecurity he himself identified” (2010:56). Although sincerity is a difficult variable to confirm, I maintain that interviews are an appropriate methodology to determine both intent and sincerity. This is based on Carpenter (2011), who states that interviews are suitable method to determine the intent in strategizing of campaigners, while Boräng et al. (2014) stress that the fast-paced nature of interviews produces more visceral and less strategic answers.

Complementing this to Garcia’s (2015) study on moral stigmatization and emerging humanitarian security regimes, I argue that the KRC did, indeed, have an intent to securitise LAWS, and framed this through a focus on moral and ethical concerns over the safety of the referent object. This understanding is vital for studying processes of normative securitisation, not just in terms of success as extraordinary action – as understood by the Copenhagen School, but rather in Garcia’s (2015) words “recording normative changes that bring real improvement to human lives helps to advance the discipline’s much-needed quest for ethical reasoning” (2015:60). This is exemplified by a sentiment expressed by interviewees, one stating:

We can prevent harm from happening, we don’t want victims to point to. We want to prevent any victims from ever having to share their stories.14

Furthermore, I argue that this improvement of human lives through practical ethics can relate to the concept of emancipation in securitisation, propagated by the Welsh School of Critical Security Studies (McDonald 2008). Relating back to the normative securitisation debate identified in the literature review, many scholars have come to equate emancipation with desecuritisation (Waever 1998; Hansen 2015; Aradau 2004, 2008). However, in this thesis, I argue for the

13 Isabelle Jones, Campaign Outreach Manager for KRC, April 2019.
14 Isabelle Jones, Campaign Outreach Manager for the KRC, April 2019.
emancipatory power of securitisation in pre-emptive measures against harm to human beings, in the role of the beneficiary referent object. Thus, I present my interview and qualitative content analysis findings that confirmed this argument in the case of the KRC. Upon the mention of emancipation, interviewees explained the historical relation of feminism to humanitarian disarmament.

The humanitarian disarmament perspective is essentially a feminist perspective. It doesn’t fit into most of the other theoretical world views of International Relations. Because of the focus on norms and constructivism built in there as well, but really the idea of civil society and states working together and centering the impact of people and the voices of survivors and victims of weapons.15

[…] any sort of new technology that is going to be developed within that context of a militarized view of security – and by that I mean one in which you are prioritizing nation states security and militarized security over human security. So, any weapons system, including autonomous weapons, if they are being built in that context and for the reason of propping up that kind of system then they are also going to run counter to a feminist view of security.16

Interviewees pointed to the inherent biases that automated decision-making systems reproduce and the impact they might have on human beings, as targets.

There are also risks when you are talking about programming a system based on a series of characteristics, there is inherent bias that is built into those systems, and that bias we have seen with other algorithmic programs used in different areas. Often is not accurate when it comes to accurately identifying women, people of color or members of the LGBTQ community.17

An interesting parallel to think about is […] drones in their targeting process. Drones look for identifiers in order to select the target that they will engage with or strike. One of those identifiers is “maleness”, because males of a certain age fit that profile that has been developed for a “terrorist”. In that case: how you dress and your gender puts you at risk and makes you vulnerable, just because of that reason. Similarly, it is possible that a fully autonomous weapon will operate in this way in how it makes judgements and selects targets.18

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15 Erin Hunt, Program Manager for Mines Action Canada, April 2019.
16 Allison Pytlak, Program Consultant for Reaching Critical Will, April 2019.
17 Isabelle Jones, Campaign Outreach Manager for the KRC, April 2019.
This relation of humanitarian disarmament to feminism provides venues for future IR research, specifically focusing on the unique ways in which automation could change warfare and how that relates to the effects of marginalized groups who are targeted based on identifying characteristics such as gender, race and sexuality. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I will not focus on this aspect of the material in-depth, but rather address the second part of the research question.

In the last section, I delve deeper into this definition of success where the focus is on the second part of the research question – how successful has the KRC framing been between 2013 and 2019? I address H2, arguing that, despite the difficulty of achieving a pre-emptive ban on a future weapons technology, the KRC has successfully initiated a moral stigmatization process that has influenced the positions of many states in the international negotiations framework.

4.3 Redefining success within normative securitisation

As discussed in the literature review, success is a variable that securitisation theorists have not coherently defined. I argue the debate of what constitutes successful normative securitisation can be enriched by transnational advocacy network scholarship, specifically with the concept of normative entrepreneurship (Carpenter 2011) and moral stigmatization (Garcia 2015). To determine the developed epistemological understanding of success in normative securitisation and answer H2, firstly, the focus is on the audience of the KRC during the negotiations.

4.3.1 Audiences and the Urgent Action Framing

During the interviews, members of the KRC identified policy makers and politicians as the challenging audience to achieve a success with, while stating that the general public is as concerned and informed as the advocates themselves. This relates back to Carpenter (2016), who argues that access to policy makers is the most important factor in achieving success. Interviewees expressed a concern in being taken seriously by politicians. Furthermore, they saw a difficulty with convincing them that the reduction of the cost of war is less of a priority than the threat to the referent object (i.e. human beings).

I really worry that it reduces the cost so much of meddling elsewhere that it is going to make it irresistible for politicians. It is going to have a bad outcome, you know. Overall, if we allow these weapons to be used. If you look
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199310089009

at it, the only reason the Vietnam War ended was because of pressure from people who did not want to be drafted or had seen war and had come back. If you are fighting wars with robot weapons do you have public pressure in the same way against your country going to war? You do not.19

The humanity of this, the possibility for indiscriminate harm, the frightening potential of proliferation, all of these real genuine concerns – how can you put it before a policy audience in a way that they won’t laugh at you, but take it seriously?20

We need to set a standard now and we know that pre-emptive bans can work, we have seen that most recently with blinding laser weapons. It just seems like the best way forward to prevent a future crisis.21

These worries are related to the legitimacy of asking for the undertaking of urgent action. This refers back to the H2 – that the KRC has not achieved a ban due to the difficulty of conveying an urgency of a future threat without tangible accidents and victims. Although interviewees pointed to the previous successful pre-emptive ban of blinding lasers, they acknowledged the challenge of framing an existential danger to future victims.

It is not only a moral problem; it is a political problem. You are having to essentially campaign on behalf of future victims, which is much more discursive task than an embodied victim.22

In terms of norm evolution, norm cascading processes – it is a heavy lift.23

I think it is challenging. I do not think it has to be a problem […] most other instruments are just cleaning up the mess from past actions. We have the chance to prevent any future messes from being made. That is a really really rare opportunity in disarmament and arms control, where probably 90% of it is backward looking instead of forward looking.24

Definitely something that we think about a lot is the human element. In previous campaigns there were people who could tell their stories, victims that could show the harm of those weapons systems.25

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19 Laura Nolan, ICRAC Member, April 2019.
20 Matthew Bolton, ICRAC Member, April 2019.
22 Matthew Bolton, ICRAC Member, April 2019.
23 Frank Sauer, ICRAC IT Secretary, April 2019.
25 Isabelle Jones, Campaign Outreach Manager, April 2019.
While interviewees acknowledged the difficulty of campaigning on behalf of future victims, they referred to the process as more of a change in discursive practice during negotiations; one where the appeal to the audience is in preventative, rather than retroactive urgent action. Floyd (2010) conceptualizes this discursive approach as a rethinking of the audience of the securitising act. She argues that “the audience is not an analytical concept, but rather a normative concept in analytical disguise, which is to say that it does not stem from actual empirical observation of how politics operates but rather from Ole Wæver’s view of how politics, including security policy, should be done” (2010:50). Indeed, advocates, as representatives of civil society, appeal to this idea of what ought to happen, in the words of Isabelle Jones: “We want to prevent any victims from ever having to share their stories”\(^{26}\), Allison Pytlak stating: “It is a great thing that we do not have examples of horrible accidents or attacks because we have the chance to prevent that from ever occurring”\(^ {27} \).

### 4.3.2 Success and Failure in the CCW

Despite the attempt for urgency in the framing of the threat of LAWS, campaigners expressed a disappointment with the CCW process in the 6 years since the issue was adopted on the agenda. Interviewees stated that the CCW was an appropriate choice for a forum to negotiate LAWS for two reasons: 1) the precedent of previous successful arms bans, such as the blinging lasers agreements; and 2) the venue being “a relatively open space. An NGO can get a little bit more voice”\(^ {28} \). Despite this interviewees stressed that:

> It is not necessarily a space where decisions will be made very easily in a humanitarian framework.\(^ {29} \)

> My personal view is that the CCW is not a very satisfying forum for these talks.\(^ {30} \)

I think that it has been very clear in the statements that the campaign has made recently at the CCW, and also in some publications, that we’re frustrated with the slow process of the CCW […] For us it is a little bit frustrating to hear that the CCW is the right place but for nothing to be really happening at the CCW.\(^ {31} \)

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\(^{26}\) Isabelle Jones, Campaign Outreach Manager, April 2019.

\(^{27}\) Allison Pytlak, Program Consultant for Reaching Critical Will, April 2019.

\(^{28}\) Matthew Bolton, ICRAC Member, April 2019.

\(^{29}\) Matthew Bolton, ICRAC Member, April 2019.

\(^{30}\) Allison Pytlak, Program Coordinator for Reaching Critical Will, April 2019.

\(^{31}\) Isabelle Jones, Campaign Outreach Manager for the KRC, April 2019.
While conducting the qualitative content analysis of the reports on activities, as well as the latest 2019 statement by the KRC, I observed a process of growing momentum at the beginning of the campaigning that then resulted in a stagnation and lack of progress by the latest meeting in 2019. In July 2013, campaigners expressed satisfaction with the amount of attention given to the new issue of LAWS: “For the first time-ever in a multilateral forum–governments would provide their views on the question of what to do about fully autonomous weapons or ‘killer robots.’” (KRC 2013b:4). This satisfaction was coupled with an appreciation for the access the advocacy group was allowed during negotiations:

As with the precedent set by previous CCW discussions and negotiations on other issues, the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots had a seat at the table and its first nameplate for participating in the CCW. The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots contributed actively throughout the course of the experts meeting, presenting and making statements in plenary, circulating documents, hosting side events (KRC 2014a:25).

During the sixth meeting of the CCW in April 2015, the KRC expressed the strongest language of approval, in regard to the progress within the CCW:

This strong and diverse participation resulted in the richest and most in-depth deliberations held to date on this issue, with an encouragingly high level of engagement and interest by an even larger number of states than at the first meeting (KRC, 2015a:4).

The first mention of a problem with the progress of the negotiations appeared in the seventh meeting in November 2015, when the KRC “criticized states for their lack of ambition in not dedicating more time to more substantive deliberations” (KRC 2015b:5). Despite a growth in support from states – 19 states supported a ban in 2016 (KRC 2016b:11) and 22 states in 2017 – the KRC named 2017 “a ‘lost year’ for international diplomacy on killer robots concerns” (KRC 2017:5).

I argue that this discourse was the beginning of a pivot for the KRC, in deliberating a new forum for continuing the campaigning for a ban, in case of continued stagnation at the CCW. This is exemplified in the final report published by the KRC in November 2018, that for the first time covers the Campaign’s activities at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), rather than the CCW. The KRC stated:
[...] nearly 50 states addressed killer robots concerns in their statements to the 73rd session of the UNGA this year, which is the highest number of countries to comment yet at an annual UNGA session. Several states told the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots that they saw a need to heed the UN Secretary-General’s call to action on killer robots (KRC 2018b:1).

This language directly refers to H2 and confirms that the KRC experienced difficulties in portraying the urgency of the threat in the forum of the CCW. According to the Copenhagen School’s idea of securitisation success, this failure to produce emergency action would make the securitising act unsuccessful. In such cases, Floyd (2010) does not dismiss the securitizing speech act as void but rather as “unhappy” or “infelicitous” securitisation (2010:56). Furthermore, while expressing disappointment and frustration with the lack of progress, the KRC also underlines the growing number states, who support a pre-emptive ban on LAWS. During the qualitative content analysis of the reports I observed an explicit mention of this achievement:

This strong and diverse participation resulted in the richest and most in-depth deliberations held to date on this issue, with an encouragingly high level of engagement and interest by an even larger number of states than at the first meeting. Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Poland, Sri Lanka, and Zambia provided their views on fully autonomous weapons for the first time during the meeting (KRC, 2015a:4).

[...] two-thirds of the states that spoke referred to the need for meaningful or effective or adequate human control. Countries continued to return to the notion of meaningful human control throughout the week indicating its central relevance as a “touchstone” for addressing fully autonomous weapons. Russia for the first time affirmed the “unacceptability of losing control” of weapons systems. (KRC 2015a:5).

[...] the group of nations calling for a preemptive ban on fully autonomous weapons expanded to 19 states during the week of the Review Conference with the additions of Argentina, Guatemala, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela (KRC, 2016b:19)

During the November 2017 meetings, Brazil, Iraq, and Uganda expressed support for a ban on lethal autonomous weapons systems, pushing the list of ban states to 22 (KRC 2017b:5).

The 2018 UNGA session was the first time that El Salvador, Liechtenstein, Nepal, Thailand, and Tunisia had spoken on killer robots, bringing to 90 the number of countries that have commented on this topic since 2013 (KRC 2018b:1).

The numbers provided by the KRC stress on the importance of raising the position of LAWS as a key issue on the international security agenda. Relating back to Carpenter’s (2014) concept of normative entrepreneurship, the KRC gained the access to international arms negotiations due to the support of big advocacy groups such as the HRW. The advocacy group then proceeded to apply a new discourse on LAWS that focuses on a human-centric approach to framing the issue. In this way, rather than campaigning for a ban based on technological definitions and risks to state militaries, advocates framed human beings as the center of the discussion, making meaningful human control the agreed upon key concept within the international community.

Garcia (2015) sees this as an important aspect of threat formation as “new norms, weapons stigmatization processes and taboos have an effect that goes beyond the high contracting parties of a new international treaty. Even the countries who will stand outside the treaty may be compelled to abide by the normative prescriptions and proscriptions evolving from the new norms created by the treaty” (2015:60). Petrova (2018) also sees this as a unique framing in that “[it] has marked a shift from state security and strategic disarmament to human security and humanitarian disarmament, without fundamentally challenging the laws of war” (2018:619).

While a new ban treaty is still not certain, I argue that the H2 is partially inaccurate as the KRC is successfully conducting a moral stigmatization process towards LAWS, in other words pursuing normative securitisation whereby the use of the weapons technology becomes a taboo. Both the interviews and documentation acknowledged the lack of progress at the CCW. This leads to the next section of the chapter which focuses on the potential routes forward that the KRC has strategized to date, in this way further challenging the concept of unsuccessful securitisation due to the lack of tangible emergency actions.

4.3.3 Potential Routes Forward
As mentioned earlier, by late 2017, the KRC has express disappointment with the slow process and stagnation within the CCW. However, advocates express a continued effort to keep LAWS, not only on the international agenda, but specifically as an urgent issue. In the latest statement available by the KRC, the group states:
There is not time or money to waste on inconclusive talks that lead nowhere. If the CCW cannot deliver a negotiating mandate in 2019—after six years of work—it is time to look elsewhere (KRC 2019:1).

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots will be back in August for the next CCW meeting, but our faith in this forum is rapidly dissipating. Therefore, we will be deepening and expanding our engagement in capitals around the world and also present at the United Nations General Assembly later this year. (KRC 2019:2)

During interviews, members of the KRC pointed to two potential routes forward: 1) moving the negotiations on LAWS to the UNGA; and 2) conducting the negotiations independently from the UN framework with a coalition of champion states. Both alternatives are not consensus-based (as is the CCW) and have successful examples of norm creation, in the form of passed legislative treaties and as new moral stigmas; In UNGA the treaties were the Arms Trade Treaty and Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, while in an independent forum it was the Treaty to Ban Landmines and the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

I have more confidence in the General Assembly these days, I think that is a better space than other arms control and disarmament forums, illustrated by the Arms Trade Treaty and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.32

The first thing would be to move the process from Geneva to New York and put it through the General Assembly, where you can with a simple majority put something into place as a mandate to negotiate a treaty. This is how it was done with the treaty of the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons.33

Another possible option would include working through the General Assembly. I have experience of seeing the Arms Trade Treaty was adopted through a General Assembly process; the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was also adopted through a GA process. In both cases there were pluses and minuses.34

The other two potential options that we have seen in disarmament campaigns are to move to the UN General Assembly – the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons did or to move to an outside process as we saw with landmines and cluster munitions.35

32 Matthew Bolton, ICRAC Member, April 2019.
33 Frank Sauer, ICRAC IT Secretary, April 2019.
34 Allison Pytlak, Project Coordinator for Reaching Critical Will, April 2019.
35 Isabelle Jones, Campaign Outreach Manager for the KRC, April 2019.
Both of these options present the difficulty of not having the major powers that are developing LAWS on board as signatories supporting a ban. This is evident in the previous treaties where, most prominently, the US and Russia were absent. However, as Garcia (2015) states “even the countries who will stand outside the treaty may be compelled to abide by the normative prescriptions and proscriptions evolving from the new norms created by the treaty” (2015:60). As Clare Conboy explains:

[There is] a switch in focus from just focusing on policy makers and within the CCW, recognizing that they are not acting fast enough. While the Campaign is still going to continue to focus on working at the CCW, it is now also becoming outward looking. While policy makers are the people that make the policy, they are influenced by voters and by public opinion.36

This pivot towards a new forum points to the intent of the KRC to continue framing the threat within the normative securitisation framework with a priority of not letting LAWS become desecuritised and potentially become a non-issue again. From this point on, there are many venues for future research which I will expand on in the concluding section.

5. Conclusion
This thesis provided an in-depth analysis in answering – How has the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots chosen to frame lethal autonomous weapons systems, and how successful has that framing been for the period of 2013 to 2019? The analysis was structured upon the foundations of two strands of IR scholarship – normative securitisation literature and transnational advocacy network literature. I argue that, in order to understand the framing intent and success of humanitarian disarmament groups in pre-emptive arms negotiations, scholars can benefit from combining theoretical lenses to avoid the “production of parallel literatures and the duplication of concepts, terminology” (Watson 2012:279 in Elcim 2015:6). Thus, by combining both scholarships, this thesis produced an original epistemological and methodological approach to studying humanitarian disarmament groups, wherein both scholarships are enriched in their understanding of framing and success.

36 Clare Conboy, Media and Communications Manager for the KRC, May 2019
The analysis was based on the normative securitisation framework developed by Floyd (2010, 2011). I argue that her conceptualisation of securitisation is fitting in the case of the KRC due to the understanding that the practice can be normative in certain issues – specifically when preventative action is needed. Firstly, as it provides an understanding of the manner in which non-state actors are empowered in portraying an urgent threat to an issue that might otherwise not be present on the international negotiations agenda; the case further expands the validity of the theory, that has been criticized for a lack of generalizability. Moreover, transnational advocacy network scholarship studying humanitarian disarmament puts a focus on relative network position and norm entrepreneurship in framing (Carpenter 2011, 2014), as well as the emergence of humanitarian security regimes. Garcia (2015, 2016) and Petrova’s (2018) arguments for the emancipatory potential of securitisation as a unique framing to non-state actors within arms negotiations was valuable for the understanding of success in the case of the KRC.

In addressing H1, I found that the KRC had an intent to frame LAWS as an existential threat, thus confirming the hypothesis. Both the interviews and documentation provided material that framed the future weapons technology not only as morally and ethically unacceptable but as an urgent threat. The framing strategy of campaigners was human-centric, i.e. focused on the referent object more than the existential threat. Campaigners stressed on the value of not having victims to point to as a reason to ban LAWS.

This leads to H2; the difficulty in portraying urgency to a future weapons technology was a challenge to campaigners and resulted in a slowing in momentum that led to complete stagnation at the CCW, thus failing in achieving a swift pre-emptive ban on LAWS. At the same, time both the interviewees as well as the documentation provided information showing a growing trend of states supporting the ban on LAWS – 26 by the latest count in November 2018 (KRC 2018b:1). This data further supports Garcia (2015, 2016) and Petrova’s (2018) argument for securitisation as an emancipating practice that can lead to successful moral stigmatization; a process which then is the basis for the formation of a new humanitarian security regime.

Furthermore, Floyd’s (2010,2011) argument against desecuritisation is strengthened, as campaigners expressed an urgent need to keep LAWS on the international agenda; if not at the CCW, then in other forums such as UNGA or independently through a coalition of states championing for a ban. The prioritization of remaining within the international negotiations framework shows that a continued urgency must be maintained by the advocacy group in order to
keep LAWS an issue, and not let it slide back into a non-issue category. This furthers Carpenter’s (2014) research on the continued efforts for issue salience from advocacy groups.

The results of this thesis open up opportunities for future research. One path would be in applying normative securitisation to further cases where the normative conceptualization of the theory is applicable, in this way strengthening the generalizability of the theory. Another potential path would be to further connect the Welsh and Copenhagen schools of security through a greater focus on emancipation and feminism within arms control negotiations and how those concepts contribute to the development of new humanitarian security regimes. Thus, this thesis provides an original contribution to IR by enriching normative securitisation theory with an illustrative case of preventative securitisation, to complement the existing research on environmental securitisation (Floyd 2010). Furthermore, the case of the KRC provides a contribution to transnational advocacy networks by coupling normative entrepreneurship with securitisation as a unique strategy for success in setting new moral stigmas.

6. Bibliography


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