

Identity and Foreign Policy: Turkey's Support of Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

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Abstract. The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh broke out again in 2020 and is considered the largest in history. The government there has been run by ethnic Armenians since 1994 and wants to separate from Azerbaijan. As a neighbor of the two countries, Turkey has also shown its continued attitude towards this conflict. Turkey took a firm stance by giving its support to Azerbaijan. The Turkish parliament even approved the policy of the plan to send peacekeepers to the border in Nagorno-Karabakh. This research aims to find out why Turkey is increasingly giving support to Azerbaijan in this conflict. This research is qualitative explanatory using constructivism theory based on collective identity. The argument in this research is the collective identity between the two countries in terms of religion, ethnicity, and language, influences the foreign policy taken by Turkey to support Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Even the homogeneous collective identity of Turkey and Azerbaijan is referred to as One Nation, Two States.

Keywords: Turkey, Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, collective identity, foreign policy.

1 Introduction

Turkey is a country with the majority of its territory in the Middle East and a small portion of its territory in Europe. Turkey also shares a border with some countries such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. Because of its geographical location as the meeting point of Europe and the Middle East, Turkey has a culture similar to Europe but an identity as a country with a Muslim majority similar to most Middle Eastern countries. In-state life in Turkey, religious and government issues are always separated. Turkey is also well-known for its secular life. However, this does not address the identity of Turkey itself, which is an Islamic state that emerged after the Ottoman Empire fell apart. In addition, Turkey also has an identity as a country with the majority of its people coming from the Turkic Nation.

Talking about Turkey, in recent years, Turkey is increasingly asserting its position in the international arena. As a form of foreign policy, Turkey is known to consistently provide support to Azerbaijan. It is known that in recent years until 2020, Azerbaijan, has yet again come into conflict with its neighbor, Armenia, over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. On September 27,

2020, clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh broke out again. This clash was said to be the biggest in history [1]. The Nagorno-Karabakh region is an Azerbaijani region where the majority of the population is ethnically Armenian. Since 1994, the government there had been led by ethnic Armenians who wanted to separate themselves from Azerbaijan. As a result of its conflict, Turkey took a firm stance by giving its support to Azerbaijan. In a televised speech, the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated that “We, Turkey, say that we are always on the side of Azerbaijan.” [2].

In addition, in support of Azerbaijan, the Turkish Parliament has even approved a policy plan to send peacekeepers to the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia, in Nagorno-Karabakh. In a letter to parliament seeking approval of the mandate, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that the presence of Turkish troops and, if necessary, the presence of civilian personnel from our country, would be beneficial for regional peace and prosperity [3]. The support was increasingly seen when Turkey urged the world to support Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict [1]. A senior official in Ankara said that Turkey is providing infrastructure and weapons support [4]. Turkey is known to increasingly disagree with the idea of a ceasefire in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and prefers to support Azerbaijan in winning this territorial dispute. For Turkey, permanent peace in the Nagorno-Karabakh region will only be possible if Armenia leaves the Azerbaijani lands it has been occupying [5].

Turkey's decision to continue to give full support to Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict raises a question. This article is written to find out why Turkey in its foreign policy chooses to support and provide assistance to Azerbaijan? To answer the formulation of the problem, the author analyses Turkey's foreign policy using the concept of collective identity. The author argues that the collective identity between the two countries in terms of religion and ethnicity influences the foreign policy taken by Turkey to support Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

As written in the literature entitled “Turkey-Azerbaijan, One Nation Two States?” by Bayram Balci (2014), for Turkey, Azerbaijan is not like other countries and cannot be compared with its other neighbors. There is a definite closeness in their identities as the two countries are in the same Turkish identity zone, or at least share roughly the same views on the Turkish language, which is not the case for the other Turkic-speaking countries of the former Soviet Union. Even if there is a difference between the Turkish identity in Anatolia and the Turkish identity in Azerbaijan, the closeness is recognized and emphasized on both sides. Moreover, in the last twenty years, Turkey has developed Turkish national rhetoric, and even the strongest pan-Turkish rhetoric is associated with Azerbaijan. The two countries are also geographically very close, unlike Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan which also speak Turkish. According to Balci, all these things contributed to the creation of special relations between the two countries.

In the previous literature, Balci has mentioned in detail that identity is the thing that strengthens relations between the two countries. However, the literature is only limited to explaining what causes the two countries to have close relations, not discussing whether this affects Turkey's support for Azerbaijan against Armenia in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. What distinguishes it from previous literature is that this research will focus on answering the research's question and proving the argument about the collective identity between the two countries affecting Turkey's foreign policy to support Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict.

When viewed from their collective identity, Turkey and Azerbaijan have homogeneity. Turkey has an identity as an Islamic state that comes from the Turkic Nation family. Similarly, Azerbaijan has the identity of a fellow Muslim country derived from the sovereign Turkic Nation. Even the homogeneous collective identity of Turkey and Azerbaijan is termed as One Nation, Two States. The author believes this is the cause of Turkey in its foreign policy supporting Azerbaijan to win the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. To conduct further analysis, this research will consist of 1) Introduction; 2) Methods and Theoretical Framework: Collective Identity as a Determinant of Foreign Policy; 3) Discussion: Religious Identity, Clusters of Nations, and One Nation Two States in Turkey's Policy towards Azerbaijan; and 4) Conclusion. The results of this research will be a contribution to the study of foreign policy in International Relations.

2 Methods and theoretical framework

In this paper, the author uses the concept of identity, especially collective identity. The concept of identity is one of the concepts that can be used to analyze a country's foreign policy. In other words, this concept can be used to see why a country takes the policy. The concept of identity is a derivative of Constructivism. Constructivism is a paradigm that holds that a person's ideas or characteristics determine his role and actions in international relations activities. Constructivism prioritizes three concepts that influence human action in international relations, namely identity, norms, and language [6].

In this paper, the concept of identity will be used to analyze the problem and answer the problem formulation. Identity can be interpreted as an actor's attribute that distinguishes him from other actors. Alexander Wendt defines identity as "attributes inherent in actors that drive action." [6]. As a result, identity is linked to "who I am and who they are." [7]. The formation of identity in the state can be created from interactions with other countries. However, the identity of the state can also come from within its own country [8].

According to identity-based constructivism, identity is important to define a country, even important to define their interests. So, it can be said that identity determines interests, and interests determine actions [7]. This is different from several other theories in international relations which say that a country will carry out a policy if it is based on national interests. It is the identity of the state that shapes the preferences and actions of the state. Identity influences interests and it is intersubjective not only with structure but also with other actors [6]. In addition, efforts to introduce a country's identity to the world can be a factor in causing a country to carry out its foreign policy which will later be in the interest of that country.

Talking about identity, in this paper, the author focuses more on the concept of collective identity to analyze the problem. Collective identity is the similarity of identity or homogeneity of identity that is owned by two or more countries. This identity creates awareness and shared feelings to form distinctive group behavior [7]. Collective identity is even capable of binding relations between two or more countries and being able to influence the policies they will take. Collective identity creates a feeling of 'Us' so that the behavior of these countries tends to be compact and mutually supportive of one another. According to Alexander Wendt, several factors encourage the creation of a collective identity. The first is the systemic factor or interaction factor between countries. The second factor is the structural factor or

intersubjectivity factor between countries. Collective identity is then only formed when two or more countries identify each other as friends. The last factor is the strategic factor or communication factor between countries. Countries that are friendly to other countries will certainly get a positive response and a sense of solidarity with each other [9].

Another term related to collective identity is national identity. National identity is a collective identity with the characteristics of a historical area, common myths and historical memories, a common public culture, common legal rights, obligations for all members, and a shared economy [10]. National identity can also be based on ethnicity, and therefore national identity can mean the identity of members of a community of the same descent. The collective national identity between two or more countries can be the basis of a country's foreign policy. This is because the national identity of a country can shape the country's motivation in considering a foreign policy. In addition, this is also because foreign policy as a result of the habitual construction of national identity and interests can shape social facts when linked to the country's constitutive structure and its external environmental factors [11].

This research is qualitative research with an explanatory type. This research aims to find out the causal factors (explaining) behind a phenomenon. Explanative research is research that aims to explain and test the hypothesis of the research variables. The focus of this research is the analysis of the relationships between variables. As explanatory research, this study aims to answer why Turkey supports Azerbaijan in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict by using the theory of collective identity. To collect the data, this research uses the desk research and library research method and to perform data analysis, this research uses the method of congruent data analysis. Congruent methods in research are used to find between research problems and questions, between research questions and methods, and of course, choices between methods, data, and ways of handling data [12].

By using this method and the concept of collective identity, the author can see that the factor that caused Turkey to support Azerbaijan in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh against Armenia was the common identity of the two countries, namely identity as fellow Muslim countries and fellow countries belonging to the Turkic Nation. Turkey and Azerbaijan are even compared as One Nation, Two States because of their homogeneity and closeness.

3 Discussion

Starting from the concept of collective identity as part of constructivism, the author argues that collective identity, in the form of religion and ethnicity which is homogeneous between Turkey and Azerbaijan, influences Turkey's foreign policy and decisions towards Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As mentioned in the introduction, Turkey is showing its support for Azerbaijan in the conflict with Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkish President, Recep Erdogan, even expressed full support for Azerbaijan in his campaign. He wants Azerbaijan to succeed in reclaiming land lost in the war in the early 1990s that killed 30,000 people [1]. This Turkish support is believed by the author to be caused by the similarity of the identities of the two countries.

The collective identity between the two countries can be seen from several aspects, namely the similarity of religions and ethnic groups. Turkey and Azerbaijan have a common identity,

namely as countries with a secular understanding of adherents of Islam who come from the Turkic Nation. First, the majority population of Turkey and Azerbaijan both embrace Islam. Turkey is known to be a secular country, but overall, they are included as a country with a majority Muslim population. According to the Turkish government, 99 percent of the population is Muslim, approximately 77.5 percent of which is Hanafi Sunni [13]. Therefore, Turkey has an identity as a country with a Muslim majority. So is Azerbaijan. They are also a secular country, but 93% of the population is Muslim [14]. So that they are also known and have an identity as a country with a Muslim majority. Their identity as a country with a Muslim majority has been recognized by the world community.

The same identity in terms of understanding and religion has strengthened their state relations, even being very close like brothers. Their relationship has been likened to One Religion, Two States. Murad Ismayilov and Norman Graham in their book "Turkish-Azerbaijani Relations: One Religion, Two States?" mentioned that Turkey and Azerbaijan are like one religious unit with two countries because of their very homogeneous religious identity, plus because of their very close brotherly relationship. This Muslim brotherhood encourages action to help fellow Muslims who are in trouble. Not only strengthen their relationship, but this similarity in religion also influenced the foreign policies taken, one of which was taken by Turkey. It also encourages Turkey to help Azerbaijan as a fellow Muslim in the conflict that engulfs them. This argument is also strengthened by the statement that Islam plays an important role in shaping Turkey's national identity and policies [15].

Regarding what happened in Nagorno Karabakh, Turkey also showed its solidarity as fellow Muslims through a statement issued by the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Hami Aksoy on 28 December 2020. "We wish Allah's mercy upon our Azerbaijani brothers who lost their lives in these attacks, a speedy recovery to the wounded and extend our condolences to the people of Azerbaijan." [16]. This statement shows the support and solidarity of brotherhood with the same Muslim identity, marked by prayers offered to Allah SWT for their Azerbaijani brothers. Therefore, this similarity in religion encouraged Turkey, which swiftly supported Azerbaijan when it was experiencing conflict, especially in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Second, Turkey and Azerbaijan have the same identity as countries originating from the Turkic Nation in terms of nationality or ethnicity. These two countries have very close solidarity and relations because of their common ancestry and origins. Turkey and Azerbaijan are likened to One Nation, Two States or "One Nation, Two Countries". One nation is both a Turkic Nation and two countries namely Turkey and Azerbaijan. The Turks have now gathered to form several sovereign states. Two of them are Turkey and Azerbaijan. Having come from the same ethnic group, after independence in 1990, Azerbaijan even changed its alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin to be closer to Turkey, both culturally and politically [17].

The homogeneity of identity as a Muslim-majority country originating from the Turkic peoples influenced Turkey's foreign policy towards Azerbaijan, especially in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict against Armenia. Following the concept of collective identity, the sense of 'we-ness' from the existence of ethnic and national homogeneity among them influences Turkey's behavior to remain united with Azerbaijan and support each other, especially when Azerbaijan is in the midst of conflict. The author's argument is supported by the statement of the Chairman of the Defense Commission of the Turkish Parliament, Ismet Yilmaz, who said "Turkey and

Azerbaijan are allied nations and will continue to fight for independence and the future. This is a responsibility related to history and we will ensure to carry out the task of monitoring the ceasefire together.” [1]. In addition, this argument is also strengthened by the statement of the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, which reads “Turkey stands together and will continue to stand with friends and brother Azerbaijan by all means and with all our hearts.” [3].

Azerbaijan holds a unique place in Turkish foreign policy, not only in the Caucasus and in the Turkic-speaking region in general, but also outside of it [18]. This closeness exists because of the similarity of national or ethnic groups, religions, and even languages. In addition, Turkey is also trying to re-create the solidarity that connects Turkish-speaking countries. The most enthusiastic Azerbaijanis listened to this call. Based on this, it is possible that Turkey's foreign policy in supporting Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh is based on the collective identity of religion and national or ethnic groups between the two countries.

4 Conclusion

It can be concluded that the concept of collective identity can answer questions regarding the background of Turkey supporting and assisting Azerbaijan in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Based on the author's analysis, Turkey and Azerbaijan have a collective identity, both in terms of 'secularity', religious similarities, and even similarities in national origins. Turkey and Azerbaijan are both Muslim countries that come from the Turkic Nation family. By using the concept of collective identity in constructivism, the author concludes that the existence of a collective identity between Turkey and Azerbaijan has become a factor that drives Turkey's foreign policy to support Azerbaijan. The existence of One Religion, Two-State relations between them due to the similarity of religious identity has encouraged Turkey to support Azerbaijan in the conflict.

The existence of a collective identity in the form of a common national family, namely the Turks, has also become a driving force for Turkey's foreign policy to help Azerbaijan. Even the relationship and the closeness of their identity are likened to One Nation, Two States. Relations between the state and their lives are like brothers. This is reinforced by several statements, one of which is a statement from the Chairman of the Turkish Parliamentary Defense Commission, Ismet Yilmaz, who said "Turkey and Azerbaijan are allied nations and will continue to fight for independence and the future. This is a responsibility related to history and we will make sure to carry out the task of supervising the ceasefire together.” So, once again, it can be concluded firmly that collective identity, in the form of religious equality and ethnicity, is the background or driving factor for Turkey to support and assist Azerbaijan in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In addition, as a suggestion for further research, the authors hope that further research will not only look for sources from literature studies but can also be direct with interviews and observations so that the sources obtained can be more credible and there is no bias. The thing that needs to be anticipated in the next research is the lack of data that can strengthen the author's argument if in the future it is still limited to library sources. Therefore, direct research by conducting interviews is very necessary. The author also hopes that further research related to this topic can examine further and in more detail the process of forming state policy through collective identity analysis. Furthermore, to achieve a balance of knowledge, the researcher also

hopes that there will be research that is contrary to this research so that there will be the development of knowledge and the emergence of criticism.

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