Turkey’s Open-Door Policy for Syrian Refugees: Humanity Motive and Political Motive

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Abstract. This article aims to analyse The Turkey Open-Door Policy for Syrian Refugees on two motives namely humanity and political. This policy has been done since the conflict in Syria escalated and that ‘forces’ Turkey to do the Open-Doors Policy. Many stated that the motive of this policy is driven by religion motive, which is Islam, and geographical factor between both countries. But in practice it seems not enough to explain a whole Turkey’s action on implementing the Open-Door Policy. Probably there are other motives that have driven Turkey to receive the Syrian Refugees but we can say that if Turkey has implemented the Open-Door Policy, it means Turkey is ready to take care of Syrian Refugees with its economic resource and land space. This article analyses three problem formulations: what is turkey’s humanity and political motive in Open-door policy, how Turkey treat Syrian Refugees considering that Turkey is also at war with the Syrian Kurds? what the advantage and disadvantage faced by Turkey in doing the Open-Door policy? This article used qualitative & descriptive methods and it used secondary data obtained from several journals and books. The conclusion stated Turkey has a limit to received Syrian Refugees even the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had admitted it. And there is a political motive besides humanity motive behind the policy. The condition of refugees not very well in the refugee shelter. If every side wants to end the flow of refugee, therefore every sides should help Syria end its terrible conflict.

Keywords: Syrian Refugees, Turkey, Open-Door Policy, humanity motive, political motive.


Kata Kunci: Pengungsi Suriah, Turki, Kebijakan Pintu-Terbuka, motif kemanusiaan, motif politik.
INTRODUCTION

Syrian conflict is one of the severe conflicts occur in the Middle East besides the Yemen and Palestine conflicts. This conflict, is a part of The Arab Spring, when the people of Syria demonstrate to President Bashar Al-Assad’s dictatorial action when arrested and kill civilians.

The country remains divided into three zones, each in the hands of a different group and supported by foreign forces. The first, under government control with backing from Iran and Russia, encompasses much of the country, and all of its major cities. The second, in the east, is in the hands of a Kurdish-Arab force backed by the U.S. The third, in the northwest, is under Turkish control, with a mix of opposition forces dominated by Islamic extremists. The Syrian government will not accept partition and is ultimately likely to reassert its control in the eastern and north-western zones (Ford 2019, summary).

Turkey as one of the countries well known as the highest number in accepting the refugees especially, they are come from Syria. Because Turkey is close by Syria many of the Syrian refugees decided enter to Turkey it is also support by the policy which implemented by Ankara administration by the name “Open-door policy” which by this policy a million of refugees are live in Turkey especially also in the capital city of Turkey. The reason behind why Turkey implementing this policy is because of several reasons such as the humanitarian case, as the requirement to entering the EU and to ratifying the convention in 1951 which talking about the refugee’s issues. Beside of that Turkey also got a lot of conflict from inside and outside the Turkey because of this policy but Turkey still stick with this commitment in order to help the refugees from Syria because if Turkey not willing to do this action the condition of the refugees in Middle East especially will do not know how to determine their life (Rizqullah et al. 2020: 122).

About 80% of the Syrians who fled to Turkey are from the northern provinces of Syria, mainly from Idlib, Latakia, Azaz and northern Aleppo even though there are smaller numbers of Syrians who fled from Damascus. Initially it was mostly political activist youth who fled to Turkey. Most of them live outside of the camps and stated that they had to flee because they were actively involved in the revolution and that their names were on the “black list” of the Syrian regime. They escaped from torture, imprisonment and persecution (Özden 2013: 3).

By early 2013, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee that over a million refugees had fled war-torn Syria to seek asylum in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and other neighbouring countries. Unable to provide immediate resettlement for the growing refugee population, a few of these countries (Mariwala 2017: 9). 21 refugee camps have been established in the area Turkey under the authority of Prime Ministry Disaster & Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD). In general, the conditions of refugee camps in Turkey relatively stable, but some camps also had time staged protests due to the lack of water clean and poor sanitary conditions (Fahham and Kartaatmaja 2016: 47-48).

METHOD

This article used qualitative approach to analyse the topic and its problem. According to Moleong in Kuntojo (2009: 14), Qualitative research is research that intends to understand phenomena about what is experienced by the research subject, for example behaviour, perception, motivation, action, etc. holistically, and by means of description in terms of words and language, in a particular context natural and by utilizing various natural methods. Based on that statement, this article elaborated the research by used descriptive qualitative approach.

The data of this article was also use qualitative data to describe the statements and arguments. Qualitative data is raw data from the empirical realm. Qualitative data takes the form of descriptions details, direct quotes and case documentation. This data is collected as a open-ended narrative, without trying to match a symptom with predefined standard categories, as well as answers questions in the questionnaire (Agusta 2003: 1)

This article collected data from various secondary data sources such as books, journal’s articles, and essays. Library research is a series of activities relating to the methods of collecting library data, reading and taking notes and processing research materials (Zed 2008, 3).

The objects of this article is Turkey’s humanity and political motives on Open-Door Policy & the Syrian refugees along with their condition and how they were treated. According to Supranto in Fitrah & Luthfiyah (2017: 156).

This article focused on realism national security as the theory to elaborate and analyse how and why Turkey do the Open-Door Policy and how the refugees impacted Turkey’s national security. According to Sardar in Siyoto and Sodik (2015), theory is a system of abstract concepts indicates that there is a relationship between these concepts to help us understand a phenomenon. Theory is one basic concepts of social research. In particular, theory is a set concepts/constructs, definitions and propositions that attempt to explain systematic
relationship of a phenomenon, by detailing the relationship cause-and-effect happened.

DISCUSSION

Turkey’s humanity motive on Open-Door Policy

The first frame addressed accentuates Turkey's role in alleviating the refugee crisis. Especially dominant in President Erdoğan's speeches, the country sees the main topic of interest as how the country's benevolent nature encourages its commitment to humanitarian aid. In his opening speech for the World Humanitarian Summit, an international event Turkey co-hosted in Istanbul in 2016, he said “Turkey is a major actor in humanitarian aid by actively delivering aid to over 140 countries, with 6.4. billion dollars in aid and hosting over 3 million Syrian refugees... Our humanitarian aid has reached $6.4 billion in 2014". Similarly, at the NATO 62nd Assembly Meeting President Erdoğan highlighted Turkey's assistance to Syrian refugees: “we have been on the forefront of the Syrian crisis trying to find a solution. Similarly, we have self-sacrificed and hosted over 3 million refugees fleeing from the civil war" (Cevik & Sevin 2017).

In October 2011, Turkey's Minister of Interior announced during a UNHCR-hosted conference in Geneva that Turkey was implementing a “temporary protection” regime to refugees from Syria loosely inspired by the EU Temporary Protection Directive. This policy was based on three core principles (Olejárová 2018: 121).

1. Turkey's borders shall remain open to persons seeking safety in Turkey;
2. No persons from Syria shall be sent back to Syria against their will;
3. Basic humanitarian needs of the persons arriving from the conflict in Syria shall be met.

Turkey as one of the countries bordering Syria implementing different policies compared to regional countries as well as other Syrian neighbors. This is indicated by willingness Turkey has accepted Syrian refugees to enter the country since the wave first the arrival of refugees through the Open-Door Policy. This related to a statement delivered by the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu in Viona (2017: 7).

"Therefore, since beginning the conflict, we maintained an "open door" policy for Syrians fleeing from the violence in their country. Turkey strictly complies with the principle of non-rejection at the border and in accordance with international refugee law, provides Syrians with temporary protection without any discrimination".

The statement above shows that Turkey accepts Syrian refugees and applying the principle of non-forced repatriation of Syrian refugees and a commitment to provide humanitarian assistance against Syrian refugees residing in Turkey.

Since March 2011, over four millions of people have fled civil war in Syria and sought refuge mainly in neighbouring countries, such as Turkey, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon. Since the early stages of the war, Turkey has followed an "open door" policy and become the leading country in accepting refugees from Syria. This policy ensures “respect for the principle of non-refoulement" and commitment of the government to "providing the best possible living conditions and humanitarian assistance for the refugees" (Koca 2015: 209). Turkey's humanitarian role has increased since 2014/15 as it has provided unconditional hospitality and welcomed innocent civilians who have been forced to leave their homes as the subjects of forced displacement. Home to almost 3.5 million refugees, Turkey is a significant humanitarian actor dealing effectively with the refugee crisis (Keyman 2017: 66). Turkey is also hold an agreement about cooperation to overcoming the refugees crisis. The EU signed an agreement with Turkey to entrust it with the care of the Syrian refugees and provide them with humanitarian relief in the camps with a European international grant amounting to $ 60 billion. A dangerous journey that has turned the Mediterranean into the largest maritime graveyard in human history because of the sinking of dozens of Syrians fleeing the war, not to mention the involvement of the human trafficking mafia in smuggling Syrians with flagrant violations of their rights (Al-Rawashdeh 2018: 73).

Yet it is difficult to argue that the Turkish authorities are doing their utmost to provide even the fundamental legal framework regulating the status of those Syrians who are registered refugees. Due to the geographical limitation clause Turkey still maintains to the 1951 UN Convention and its 1967 Protocol, those who come from outside Europe to seek refuge in Turkey are considered as "guests" and not granted the refugee status that would entitle them to a series of rights and benefits defined under the Convention, including the right to work, housing, education, freedom of movement within the territory, public relief and assistance (Gürhanlı 2014: 2).

As the number of Syrian refugees has risen, Turkish authorities have developed informal approaches to limit new arrivals for both political and practical reasons. For example, the government has provided support to NGOs that manage camps for internally displaced Syrians within Syria, near the Turkish border, where they provide humanitarian assistance such as clean water,
sanitation, education, and emergency kits to tens of thousands of Syrians in need. Border authorities, meanwhile, utilize a policy of “passage with careful control” intended to restrict the number of entries, prevent unlawful and “dangerous” entries, and according to some reports, to control the arrival of members of particular ethnic, national, religious, and ideological groups (İçduygu 2015: 7).

Moreover, we can say that the implementation of Turkey’s Open-Door in humanity motives are based on Turkey and Syria Identity which are geography and religion. Due to those factors, Turkey implicitly has a responsibility to do humanitarian policy towards Syrian Refugees.

**Turkey political motive on Open-Door Policy**

Apart from humanity motive, the Turkey Open-Door Policy, there are political motives of it. It related to Syrian regime and geopolitical security purpose. According Global Fire Power, Turkey is occupying the 1st rank in military power in Western Asia and 2nd rank in Middle East (after Egypt). it means Turkey has an opportunity on take a role for Syrian problem including it refugees both humanity and political motives drove Open-Door policy.

The motivation for Turkey to accept Syrian refugees and accommodate the FSA is because Turkey wants a regime change in Syria. The reason is the Syrian conflict is a real threat to the stability and security of Turkey. Syrian conflict causing Turkey to suffer the repercussions of a cross-border attack, revived the conflict between Turkey and The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and cause Turkey to potentially face sectarian conflict in domestic. Furthermore, Turkey’s desire to become an emerging power in Middle East that deals with Turkey’s deep capabilities to resolve conflicts in regional areas (Delfira 2019: 10). Another reason why Turkey supports the Syrian opposition group, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) is related to the national interest in terms of welfare economy, Turkey has long borne the brunt of it coming Syrian refugees. It can be seen that it is in Turkey’s national interest as a state The big area that is growing between the Middle East and Europe, of course, has a main focus, namely the welfare of its people by optimizing it management of state finances. Many people in Turkey feel disagree with the arrival of so many Syrian refugees because cause many negative effects (Rahmasari 2019: 54-55).

Politically, Among the less openly discussed strategic priorities guiding Turkish policy towards Syrian immigration are: 1) restrict and / or control better the flow of migrants arriving from Syria (as opposed to a rhetorical commitment to an ‘open border’ policy) and 2) handle the increasingly dangerous and messy foreign-policy fallout from the Syria quagmire. While an analysis of Turkey’s foreign policy priorities goes beyond the scope, in summary, the key points are a) the Turkish government is opposed to Asad, b) always seeks to control/repress Kurdish autonomy, and c) has seen its earlier Middle East policy of ‘zero problems’ with neighboring countries catastrophically fail. These two ‘veiled’ strategic priorities are, of course, connected. They are visible in particular from the increasingly well-documented border closures as well as from the support that Turkish agencies are providing to camps built just across the border inside Syria, which may be considered a way to ‘contain’ displaced Syrians outside of Turkey (Hoffman 2016: 10). Turkey uses Syrian refugees to pressure the Assad regime to let it go follow the solutions that have been made. The solution in question includes a decision Arab League for the Syrian government to carry out an open dialogue with its opposition culminating in the suspension of membership in Syria, the Annan Plan, and the Action Group for Syria Final Communiqué which the solutions implicitly require Assad to step down. In addition, apart from accommodating the FSA there is also a section of anti-Assad regime in Syrian civilian refugees in Turkey which is where their name comes in into the Syrian government blacklist.

In conclusion, the policy towards the country of origin is a factor that has an impact on Turkey’s treatment of Syrian refugees (Putri 2015: 7).

The other political motive and purpose of Turkey Open-Door policy is related to Turkey’s membership in the European Union. In the efforts made by Turkey to accommodate Syrian refugees against the conflict that occurred, Turkey hopes that in this effort the European Union can consider Turkey a membership in the European Union. Because in the efforts made by Turkey in accepting refugees from Syria, there can be an opportunity to become a member of the European Union (Saeefurohman 2018). This motive is also related to an agreement between Turkey and European Union to overcoming Syrian Refugees crisis. This was done by Turkey to reduce the Syrian refugees flow who came to the European territory. Meanwhile, the European Union give 3 things in return, namely (1) Funding Assistance; (2) Liberalization Visa for Turkish citizens; (3) Opening a new chapter for Turkish accessions to become European Union member countries (Noermanita 2017: 53).

Related to the Turkey-EU agreement towards refugees’ crisis that also made a policy, Del Sarto in Cristiani (2015: 17-18) stated that:

“There is one thing sure: whether or not Turkey prevents refugees from reaching Europe, the massive arrival of people in Europe benefits the Turkish position and it has increased its
negotiation leverage over the EU and its member states in at least two dimensions.

First, the Syrian refugee crisis has drawn all the international attention to the Syrian conflict. This attention coincides with Turkish interests, since Erdogan for a long time has been asking the US and NATO members to take action to overthrow the Al-Assad regime. However, the current massive arrivals have directly transferred the problems and consequences of the Middle East instability to the heart of Europe. In other words, the massive arrivals have shifted some of the pressure to Europe, and in turn, NATO and EU members will have more pressure to act in Syria. This might explain why Prime Minister Davutoglu has repeatedly stated that the only way to prevent new waves of refugees is to stop atrocities committed by the Syrian regime and the Islamic State group.

Second, by engaging more intensively in the Syrian conflict (joining the US bombing of Islamic State targets), and by unilaterally assuming the cost of the arrival of more than two million refugees (Turkey has spent more than 7.6 billion dollars providing assistance to refugees), Turkey has not only gained international clout but also the leverage to negotiate, and refuse to increase its cooperation on migration control."

Turkish accession to the European Union has actually been going on for quite a long time. Turkey’s prospects joining the European Union can be seen since 1963 when Turkey and the European Economic Community (EEC) signed a cooperation trade between Turkey and the European Union. Then in 1987, Turkey had submitted some of the requirements that are required to become a member remains EEC. However, unfortunately in 1989, the demand to become EEC members were rejected by the European Commission because at that time Turkey was not implement democracy in the political system of his country (Rizqullah 2020: 24-25). However, with the Open-Door policy implementation, Turkey has been practiced a democratic action by reason of helping the human right problem.

Outline, there are at least two political motives on Turkey’s Open-Door Policy. First, an attempt to step down Bashar Al-Assad regime, it’s related to regional security. Second, Turkey’s attempt to entering the European Union.

Syrian refugees flow and Open-Door policy on Turkey national side

We surely know that if a country opens their border to receive refugees, it means country must be ready to take care the refugees. Such as share their land space, set up the national cost, etc. But sometimes, refugees is also could be give a negative impact to the country in social, economic, or maybe logistic. Turkey as a country who doing the Open-Door policy is also affected with this policy and also massive Syrian refugees’ flow. These impacts have been occured in various variables on Turkey’ national condition circumstance, those are economy, social, politic, and even demography.

The financial burden that must be incurred by Turkey in accepting Syrian refugees has increased every time the year. In 2011 Turkey has $15 million spent building refugee camps. In 2012, Turkish Ministry of Finance state when the government has spent a total of 533 million Lira or $200 million (Syafitri 2017: 9-10). Beyond the roughly eight billion dollars Turkey has spent providing a home for these refugees, the economic impact has been noteworthy. The influx of refugees has caused an increase in demand in all cities that has led to increases in rental prices and in the cost of living. Finding affordable accommodation has become increasingly difficult for renters. In some instances, landlords forced Turkish tenants to leave so they could rent to Syrians at higher prices. Another sensitive issue linked to the influx from Syria is the illegal use of Syrian workers as cheap labor in industry, agriculture, and small business sectors. The general perception in Turkish border cities is that Syrians are stealing jobs from local people. Moreover, the financial cost of the upkeep of the refugee camps has had a strong, negative impact on the public’s perception, triggering social tension or disturbances against the refugees in several local communities (Donelli 2018: 5).

This fact shows that Turkey’s policy of opening its borders has have a negative impact. On the one hand, it is economically beneficial for some Turks (for example, get high rents and cheap labor) and provide protection to refugees, but at the same time, conflicts arise because some local residents feel disadvantaged. With However, the opening of borders does not create a hybridization of identity. Dynamics and economic interactions that occurred only benefit some parties. For those who are less fortunate will face the consequences of physical or mentally discrimination (Alatas 2020: 96).

Socially, Turkey provided free access to health care to all registered refugees and built camps that have been internationally portrayed as —model for the perfect refugee camp, which jeopardized the country’s fiscal sustainability. More than 500,000 people have been sent to hospitals from the refugee camps and, according to the Ministry of Health, nearly 35,000 Syrians have given birth in Turkey. The citizens have expressed their disappointment as they believe these privileges are undermining their access to the amenities and are funded by their taxes. Moreover, the camps have also witnessed increase in polygamy specially
women and children being at a higher risk. Also, child marriage is a common phenomenon which is affecting the social atmosphere (Chopra 2015: 155).

In addition, the increase in refugees has also increased the crime rate in Turkey, especially in the southern dotted shelter provinces. Data shows that in several southern provinces such as Mardin, Hatay and Sanliurfa have seen an increase in the crime rate by the end of 2012 from 1.5% to 15% and even in Kilis it reached 40% from 2010. The increase in the crime rate mostly comes from refugees, with one of the contributing factors, namely economic factors, considering that there are many of refugees when they leave Syrian territory without their possessions. In addition, the rate of smuggling from Syria has also increased, a commodity being smuggled in, among others, sugar, tea, fuel oil, copper, and tobacco. Tobacco and its preparations such as cigarettes, is the largest smuggled commodity, until the end of 2012 99,100,000 cigarette cases were confiscated by the Turkish police the loss was 496,500,000 Turkish Lira or 235,855,870 US Dollars (Putra 2014: 61).

Syrian refugees flow would ethnically affected Turkey's demography either. There will be a shift in the ethnic balance especially on the Turkey's border provinces. According to Cagaptay & Menekse (2014: 16-17), Hatay and Kilis have seen even more dramatic changes. In the former, the Arab population has swelled from 34 percent to about 38 percent—and possibly much higher with the inclusion of unregistered refugees. In Kilis, which once had an Arab community of less than 1 percent, the demographic makeup has changed far more starkly due to the refugee flow; ethnic Arabs now equal 37 percent of the population. Similarly, ethnic Arabs once represented less than 1 percent in Gaziantep, but unlike Kilis, Gaziantep has a large existing population. Although the province has absorbed more registered refugees than any other, ethnic Arabs now constitute a relatively modest 9 percent of its population. These demographic changes (Cagaptay, etc 2016) could soon translate to political shifts. Turkish naturalization law allows foreign nationals who have lived in the country for five years to apply for citizenship. The first wave of refugees arrived in April 2011, so some migrants have already fulfilled the time requirement for beginning the naturalization process. As many as 2.5 million Syrians could therefore obtain citizenship in the next five years if the government demonstrates the political will to naturalize them. And given their likely gratitude for President Erdogan’s role in providing them with refuge, social aid, and a pathway to citizenship, most of these potential new citizens can be expected to vote for his Justice and Development Party (AKP) in future elections. It will a double effect both political and social and if this motive is a fact, we can probably interpret it as political motive.

In the other hand, at least there is a positive impact on economic side if we see it with the capitalism perspective. According to TRT World authored by Yasar (2019), The Turkish economy is benefiting from the presence of Syrian refugees, according to a report by the Turkish Institute of Statistics (TUİK). Migrant flows into Turkey have come coupled with money. According to the report, Syrian deposits in Turkish banks amounted to 311 million Turkish liras in 2012 and had reached 1.5 billion liras by 2015. The money was just one thing the refugees brought.

CONCLUSION

Turkey’s Open-Door Policy towards Syrian refugees can be seen on two motives, humanity motive and political motive. First, humanity motive. Consider that Turkey is the highest military power holder in Middle East. Indirectly, that position put Turkey as a country who must protect the regional stability and assist human right problem in the Middle East Regional. With the implementation of Open-Door Policy, one can say that Turkey had assisted and did the responsibility for human right problem solving. In fact, Turkey is the first country where Syrian refugees live within it. Syrian refugees might be didn’t received a perfect treatment, but at least they can live safely in their shelters. This motive matched with the cosmopolitan dimension of English School.

Second, political motive. Every country could be and should be protect the humanitarian matter, maybe in the same way. But, one can say every country have different political interest/motive. In this article, at least there are two political motives behind Turkey’s Open-Door policy. 1) Turkey’s attempt to overthrow Bashar Al-Assad regime and establish regional stability and security. 2) Turkey’s attempt to enter and be a member of European Union. First political motive is intended for regional ‘togetherness’ or regional cosmopolitanism, related to justice concept based on English School perspective. Second political motive is for own national interest of Turkey. In addition, maybe there is an interest for President Erdogan and his regime. still a possibility, but if Syrian refugees get and become Turkish nationality. There is a hope that the Refugees will do ‘return a favor’ towards Erdogan by supporting the AKP at the election.

Implementation of Open-Door policy certainly has an impact of Turkey national condition. Mostly of these impacts are negative. In economy matter, Turkey carried enormous burden of cost for taking care of Syrian refugees. There is
also a sentimental response from several group of society who thought that the taxes they paid were used by government for refugees needs. Syrian refugees who are jobless, maybe can be used by Turkish capitalist to get low-cost labor, yet it's detrimental for society. Moreover, many of these Syrian illegal labors aren’t have Turkish identity card.

Socially, Syrian refugees have an impact of ethnic’s instability. If the refugees become official people of Turkey, maybe it will be population explosion. Massive flow of refugees also increased the criminal rate duo to refugees jobless factor and this must be disrupt the society stability.

Turkey as a one of great power countries have to balance the humanity motive, political motive, and also its impact on the implementation of Open-Door policy for it national and regional stability and security.

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