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## FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS OF OPERATION PEACE SPRING BY TURKEY IN 2019 AS A FORM OF SECURITIZATION OF THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

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**Abstract;** The outbreak of civil war in Syria since 2011 has resulted in 3.8 million Syrian refugees having to move to neighboring countries. Turkey is one of them, with the total number of refugees as of December 2020 reaching 3.6 million refugees who fled to Turkey. This led to the emergence of a refugee crisis in Turkey which caused various problems at home. One of the problems with the refugee crisis is that it causes high unemployment in Turkey and is one of the factors inhibiting the economy. As a form of securitization of the refugee crisis by the Turkish state, it has been responded to in various ways and one of them is the Operation Peace Spring's foreign policy launched in 2019. This policy is in the form of military operations to occupy territories by Turkey in the northern part of Syria, with the aim of providing a "safe zone" for Syrian refugees to return to their homeland. Through the concept of securitization, the writer finds that as a sovereign country, Turkey must provide security to its citizens from threats, especially from abroad. This type of research used in this research is to use a qualitative descriptive method. This method is used to obtain a more detailed explanation regarding developing issues. With this process, it will be explained comprehensively and also pay attention to the structure of how the securitization carried out by Turkey in Operation Peace Spring's foreign policy can provide security for the threats it receives.

**Keywords:** foreign policy, military operations, refugee crisis, securitization, operation peace spring.

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Submission	:	Feb, 11 <sup>th</sup> 2021
Revision	:	June 18 <sup>th</sup> 2021
Publication	:	August 28 <sup>th</sup> 2021

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### INTRODUCTION

Turkey has long been a country of asylum, primarily for refugee flows since its founding in 1923. However, since the 1980s, the country has faced irregular inflows of refugees and migration and also transit, mainly from the Middle East as well as from Africa and Asia (Aras & Mencutek, 2015). In 2011, Syria experienced armed conflict with protests against the authoritarian government and finally a vacuum of power occurred in northern Syria. This was followed by

the emergence of ISIS in the region in 2013. Until 2015, Kurdish Militia and non-Kurdish Militia united to establish the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in eradicating ISIS in Syria until the Autonomous Authority of North and East Syria was formed. Erdogan has also launched an attacks against the Kurds that began in 2015 and forced millions of Syrians move away from their homes. A total of 3.6 million fled to Turkey. At the same time, Turkey's economic downturn and high levels of layoffs made things getting worse, public confidence in Erdogan also declined, leading to an attempted coup in 2016 (Solace Global, 2019). Accommodating many refugees whose return dates are uncertain will not only burden the host country's public finances, but also affect the local economy (Akgündüz, Berg, & Hassink, 2015). Then why are there so many refugees who stop or seek asylum in Turkey, it is none other than because political events and decisions in Syria's neighboring countries have caused a funnel effect, cornered and concentrated a large number of Syrian refugees in Turkey (Cristiani, 2015). The problems with the Kurds have had a direct impact on relations between Turkey and Syria over the past three decades. Turkey considers that this issue has a special meaning, impact and a real threat to Turkey's national security, this issue has caused an increase in tensions in Turkey-Syria relations and has reached the stage of armed conflict, Turkey believes that Syria supports the Kurdish groups for armed confrontation against them (Abdel & Altrawneh, 2020). Starting in 2019, an initiation of the Turkish state's military operation carried out an invasion right on the border between Turkey and Syria. The military operation is known as Operation Peace Spring, which has the main objective of realizing a 480km safe zone along the Turkey-Syria border and as deep as 30km into Syria. The area will be reserved for Syrian refugees who fled to Turkey. Of course, in the realization of these policies, it is necessary to have support both from within the country or from abroad, especially to the United Nations (UN). Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as the President of Turkey has been promoting this foreign policy since 2015 both at home and abroad to gain his support (Nyadera & Islam, 2020). As such, providing security for refugees is a challenge both inside and outside the refugee camps. Refugee camps can pose a significant security threat, this is evident by the growing ground for organized criminal groups and for the recruitment of these groups. At the same time, providing security to a widely dispersed refugee population often living in informal settlements is a different task but poses a similar threat (Berti, 2015). As the country that hosts the most Syrian refugees in the world, Turkey has provided temporary shelter to cope with the large influx of Syrian refugees now in the country. Turkey sees the refugee crisis as a problem resulting from the inefficiency of the international community and forces Turkey to use its country

as a good and true example to overcome this inefficiency (Cevik & Sevin, 2017). To address the humanitarian needs of Syrians, the Turkish government has provided temporary housing in 21 camps (tent cities as they are called in Turkish) located in 10 Turkish provinces (Dimitrova, Aksak, & Ahern, 2018). Every Syrian refugee clearly needs guaranteed protection and also at least can continue to live well. Instead of accepting state-recognized and verified status as refugees, Syrians in Turkey are only given temporary protection, a precarious status that makes them more vulnerable to their own security, threats of poverty, and massive exploitation. Such temporary protection status places Syrian refugees in a situation that is arguably insecure, especially in terms of limited access to legal work and unstable living conditions given their inability to access full citizenship to the point of not having access to long-term housing. This temporary protection status symbolizes the failure of policies to address the Syrian refugee crisis at home (Rygiel, Baban, & Ilcan, 2016). In short, various problems arise in the country which are very detrimental to Syrian refugees.

The problem of the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey is of course handled by the government in various ways, both domestically and abroad. The author sees that on the foreign side, the Turkish government applies a concept of securitization to the security of its own country. This can be seen from how Erdogan as President of Turkey said that the main reason in the policy of military operations abroad was to return Syrian refugees to their country. In addition, the area he calls a "safe zone" is also used as a Turkish security wall to deal with armed conflict with the Kurds on the border. In the book *Security: A New Framework For Analysis* by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde (1998) also provides an explanation of securitization theory as "... *beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue as either a special kind of politics or as above politics*" (Buzan, Waever, & Wilde, *Security: A New Framework of Analysis*, 1998). Thus, in a simple way, the perspective applied is nothing but a method or process that is carried out when a certain issue is classified and/or understood as a form of security problem, whether the issue is included in politics or not at all. This securitization can also be seen as a view to understand and also place an issue as something that poses a threat as well as an unstable condition from it in addition to other issues that are natural and not dangerous.

This securitization theory is also the answer to the traditional security theory which is quite limited with only state actors being the perpetrators of the threat. This also provides another answer from the understanding of "*security is what actors make of it*" (Buzan & Waever, *Regions and Powers; The Structure of International Security*, 2003), so that the actor in this case is the state should be

able to determine and provide understanding related to the securitization of an issue that is considered a threat. If a policy implements a securitization view on an issue, it certainly does not constitute an extraordinary threat, with such a view the state does not need to respond with militaristic actions because the issue is classified as ordinary and does not pose a very dangerous threat.

Thus, this study will focus on how Turkey's securitization attitude is in responding to the Syrian refugee crisis in their country with a descriptive explanation. The use of the concept of securitization is considered to be more subtle than traditional security, because the issues faced may not pose as much security threats. But the Turkish government chose to provide security against the issue it is currently facing, namely an issue of the refugee crisis that can pose new threats and problems from it. That is why, this securitization discussion needs to be studied further based on concepts or theories that are relevant to the issue, considering that the military operation policy is relatively new under 5 years. There are various other Turkish military operations against Syria, but this Operation Peace Spring policy is the largest and also as a form of state securitization. Therefore, this research will focus on answering the foreign policy of Operation Peace Spring by Turkey in 2019 as a form of state securitization.

## **METHOD**

The type of research used in this research is using qualitative methods. This method is used to obtain a more detailed explanation of the issues that develop. This process will be explained in a comprehensive manner and will also pay attention to the structure of how Turkey responds to a refugee crisis with foreign policy as a form of state securitization. In line with what was explained by Lamont regarding qualitative research which led to the collection of data that was not related to quantitative (Lamont, 2015). Based on the type of research that has been determined, the data collection technique is qualitative. With a focus on secondary data collection, researchers were not able to participate directly in the field. This causes future research to focus on literature studies from scientific journals, internet networks such as official websites to media channels.

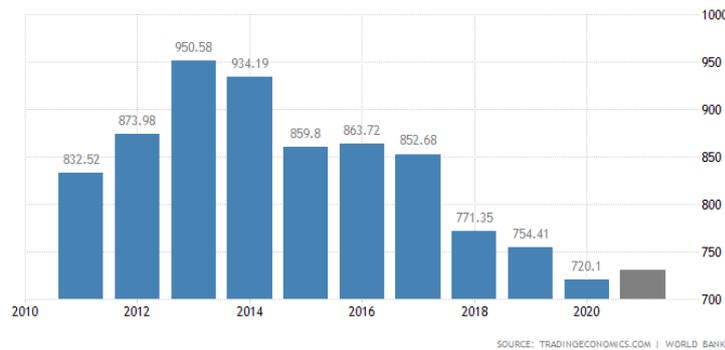
## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Turkey**

In fact Turkey is the only neighbor of Syria who is materially and politically willing to assume part of the responsibility for reconstructing post-war Syria. This is necessary because it is the minimum necessary condition to allow the

return of Syrian refugees back to their lands. The magnitude of the effort to reconstruct and return Syrian refugees to their homeland could be much greater with the help of the European Union and the United States. Otherwise, the reconstruction and repatriation of such refugees will most likely remain limited and only Turkey has access to in Northern Syria. Why only Turkey, because political events and decisions in Syria's neighboring countries have caused a funnel effect to corner and concentrate a large number of Syrian refugees in Turkey (Cristiani, 2015). Turkey wrongly assumed that the Bashar Al-Assad regime would soon collapse and refugees would return to Syria. In this view, Turkey shifted from a security-centered approach to an early moral-oriented approach. It is widely suspected that the reason for the Turkish government's initial generosity towards Syrians and the non-registration of Syrian refugees is related to Turkey's support for the Syrian opposition (Donelli, 2018).

The development of the issue of securitization will certainly focus on how a country responds to an issue it faces. This securitization approach provides a new perspective on traditional security concepts. Of course, state actors with great power are considered too big when dealing with small activities such as directly touching the community. Meanwhile, the threats given are not as big as those given by other state actors which require great protection power to deal with them. In response to this, Turkey views that there is a security threat to its country which is considered to have originated from the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey. Turkey has had many problems since it became a country of asylum for refugees. This has indirectly poses a threat to the state. The problems that are slowly having an impact start from the number of refugees who want to survive and need permanent jobs and food to survive. This causes a decrease in the purchasing power of the people in Turkey which indirectly affects the country's economy. The threat of poverty is increasing and as a country, Turkey must be able to provide safeguards against these threats. The eight billion dollars Turkey spends providing homes for refugees has a noteworthy economic impact. The influx of refugees has led to rising rents and costs of living and finding affordable accommodation has become increasingly difficult. In some cases, landowners forced tenants especially Turks to leave so they could rent them out to Syrians at higher prices (Donelli, 2018).



**Figure 1.** Turkey's GDP 2011-2020 (<https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/gdp>)

In 2015, the Turkish economy experienced a significant decline. The statistics in *Figure 1* show that in 2014 Turkey's GDP stood at 934.19 billion US dollars and fell to 859.8 billion US dollars in 2015 and continued to decline in subsequent years. This decline can have a variety of causes, and the Erdogan regime is aware of this. Exactly in the same year in 2015, Erdoan also promoted his foreign policy, namely Operation Peace Spring, to the public to international forums. Threats in the issue of the refugee crisis are clearly not based on state actors, recalling that from a rational perspective, external or external threats are often linked to state actors. Considering this, of course, the actor with the most authority and capacity is the state itself in the process of securing it from threats. So with such a view, it can form an understanding if the threat made by non-state actors is not a threat that is quite serious and dangerous compared to state actors. If the threat from non-state actors can be considered a very dangerous threat to the state, of course there are efforts to prevent and safeguard the issue. The process of trying to classify non-state actors who were not originally a state threat into a state threat is the basic view of the securitization approach. Waever also adds that in the current context, politics and the responsibility of the power holder can involve prevention as well as limitation and with that, this securitization tool or approach will tend to be needed (Waever, 1995).

In addition to the economic impact, there are also social problems that also arise from the refugee crisis in Turkey. One of them is the problem of sexual harassment and underage marriage. Women and girls who have fled Syria alone or with their children are vulnerable to sexual and verbal abuse. A common practice in Turkey's border provinces is marriage between Turkish men and young Syrian women. These are often forced marriages and many of the brides are minors (Donelli, 2018). On the other hand, the threat also arises from the large number of refugees that can lead to an increase in criminal cases in Turkey. Refugee camps can pose a security threat, this is evident by the existence of a breeding ground for organized criminal groups as well as for the recruitment of these groups. It is also supported by the Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK) or

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Kurdistan Workers Party which is considered by the Turkish government as a terrorist group with affiliated to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria. It becomes very vulnerable for these groups to spread understandings and give birth to new fighters who will later pose a threat to the Turkish state. This rapid influx of refugees has caused feelings of insecurity among local communities. Demographic changes are also driven by the high birth rate among the refugees, indicating that there will be a second generation of Syrian refugees in Turkey which will further shift the ethnic balance in Turkey. In addition, the long-term negative impact of increasing social tensions will encourage future vulnerability (Donelli, 2018).

#### Turkey's Securitization Through Operation Peace Spring

From these various threats, there is a feeling of insecurity for the Turkish state itself, especially for its citizens. Given that some of these issues are problems caused by non-state actors, the government must provide security in the form of securitization of these issues. So that the Turkish government has the choice to apply securitization to issues that pose a threat and the choice is to overcome it, namely eliminating the source of the problem by returning Syrian refugees back to their land. According to the Turkish government, this must be done by liberating Syrian territory from the SDF, which in fact has control over northern Syria. The implementation of the Turkish military operation in northern Syria is the means chosen by the Turkish government to liberate the territory designated for Syrian refugees. Thus, in the concept of securitization that successfully constructs the definition that an object or issue needs to be protected from existing threats, it also determines what values and attitudes are acceptable and also what cannot be accepted. Rita Abrahamsen (2005) explains that security politics and risk management usually do not involve extraordinary actions but instead turn to a series of risks such as increased law enforcement and the emergence of restrictive policies rather than "spectacular emergency politics" such as war (Abrahamsen, 2005).

If safe zones are deemed so flawed and if we want to lighten the burden on neighboring countries and the world in general, the bolder option is to end the refugee flow by ending the conflict itself. As well as the refugees finally returning home, resolving the conflict would end the world's bloodiest civil war and resolve the source of tremendous regional instability. Of course, to solve this problem, it is necessary to have the participation of the great powers in it. It is not Turkey itself that is tasked with solving problems (Byman & Speakman, 2016). Turkey is only able to provide security to its own country, with that the

concept of securitization can be implemented. Human security in general is actually prioritized and the Turkish government sees developing issues as having an impact on its own country. Of course, the foreign policy actions taken by Turkey are for the good of their own country first. Military victories do look more attractive in theory, but only as long as the right Syrians have to win. For now, that seems unlikely. Since Russia's military intervention began in autumn 2015, the Bashar Al-Assad regime and its allies have regained control and some of their strongest opponents are jihadist groups such as ISIL and other radical groups (Byman & Speakman, 2016).

From Abrahamsen's explanation, Turkey's action itself can be said to be a form of spectacular emergency politics because it involves military operations and war in it. This shows that issues that do not actually pose an extraordinary threat can escalate to the point where extraordinary actions must be taken. The author argues that the Turkish government should be able to overcome the problem of the refugee crisis, not necessarily with a foreign policy in the form of military operations. However, this foreign policy is still a form of Turkey's securitization of threatened issues. Of course, each country has its own level of flexibility which influences a range of policy choices. These include sanctions, strict law enforcement, enforcement through militarization and up to eradication (Abrahamsen, 2005). So the military policy is still not an extraordinary act.

## **CONCLUSION**

The concept of securitization can be adapted depending on the issue at hand, based on a series of data analysis and findings. Turkey's foreign policy, especially Operation Peace Spring, is a form of securitization of Syrian refugees. In the process of securitization, the Turkish government tends to assume that every threat that exists in certain issues has a source of problems that need to be eliminated and the source of the problem is refugees from Syria. What the Turkish government has done is to provide territory in northern Syria and to achieve it, it is necessary to enforce it through militarization in the Operation Peace Spring military operation in 2019. To secure the territory, their borders must be protected and the population is well guarded and this requires militaristic strength. in the process (Byman & Speakman, 2016). Indeed, the Turkish government should be able to overcome it with other policies without involving militarization, but whether these other options can eliminate the main source of the problem, namely the overflow of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Because basically, the Turkish government has the notion that these refugees are the source of the problem that must be solved.

Before the threats that Turkey received could actually be tackled earlier. The state as the main actor, must have more awareness of the potential threats that can be accepted by a state. The assumption that these refugees are not a problem and that the state security protocols are flexing has actually backfired on the Turkish government itself. Any policy to respond to the threats received does not have to be followed by a militarization process, as long as the issues at hand do not pose an extraordinary threat. In this case, Turkey must learn that non-state actors from outside will certainly exert influence, both large and small, and this must be overcome with proper securitization. In the end, doing nothing is the worst option, both from a moral and strategic point of view. It is also a strategic failure, risking more conflict and instability in the region and the world. The lack of priority for the Syrian refugee crisis has made it difficult for Turkey to deal with it politically and financially. As this article has slightly pointed out, the refugee situation in Turkey has become a security issue with economic and social effects. Handling these issues can certainly be faced earlier and better, so there is no need for bloodshed.

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