The Reasons of Israel's Agresivity on Palestinians in Gaza Strip: 2008 -2014

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Abstract

In the conflict between Israel and Palestine, Israel had been overreacted by carrying out intensive military attacks that caused more Palestinian civilian casualties than Israelis. During the period 2008-2014 Israel carried out several aggressive military attacks which resulted in an increase in Palestinian civilian casualties, especially in the Gaza Strip. Using a constructivist perspective, this thesis will explain the reasons for Israel's aggressiveness towards Palestine, especially in the Gaza Strip, in the period 2008-2014. The main idea is identity. Israel's collective identity was formed because of the bad historical experience of the Jewish people that grew up amid conflictual conditions. This formed a siege mentality and hatred in the lives of the Jews so that they assumed that groups outside them had evil intentions. It is important to understand how Israel's perception of self-image to trace the construction of thought of the leaders over that time span. Meanwhile, Palestinian identity changes from time to time due to certain social and historical factors. This difference causes both of them not to share the same identity (shared identity), which also influences Israel's perception that Palestine is a threat. The inherent aggressive mentality, lack of shared identity, Israel's perception of self-image and perceived threat from Israel are the causes of Israel's aggressiveness towards Palestinians, especially in the Gaza Strip.

I. Introduction

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is still ongoing and there is no peace. Since this conflict began, many Palestinians have become victims of Israeli atrocities. When Britain got a mandate over the land of Palestine, through the Balfour Declaration gave the promise of a homeland for the Jews. In November 1947, the United Nations (UN) passed Resolution No. 181 through the UN Partition Plan, deciding to divide the land of Palestine into two parts: Jews and Arabs. Israel then proclaimed its independence on May 14, 1948.

On December 27, 2008 Israel carried out a military operation, namely Operation Cast Lead, in which Israel attacked the Gaza Strip for 22 days and had a wide impact on the lives of Palestinian civilians. After the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict declined, Israel again carried out Operation Pillar of Defense which lasted for eight days and ended on November 21, 2012, where both parties agreed to a ceasefire. The next military operation was Operation Protective Edge in July-August 2014. Hamas rocket attacks were the reason Israel attacked the Gaza Strip and this military operation lasted for 50 days. The attacks carried out by Israel were not comparable to the Palestinian resistance which caused many casualties, many houses were uninhabitable, and the destruction of infrastructure. The dead were scattered in almost all Palestinian territories,

including Rafah, Khan Yunis, Deir Al-Balah, the Gaza Strip, and northern Gaza. There was also a significant increase in the number of civilian casualties in 2014.

II. Review of Literature

Analysis of Israel's aggressive behavior is generally studied based on material aspects. The topics discussed are generally about power, security, and national interests. In addition to the study of material aspects, there are also studies of non-material aspects that discuss the identity of the state of Israel. Analysis of the material aspect sees Israel's behavior cannot be separated from the principles of national security as outlined in each of its policies. Israel does not hesitate to involve military forces in carrying out operations, even though this is very risky in causing many victims.

Israel's victory in the 1967 war resulted in occupied territories including Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. Since then Israel has made military occupation one of the main policies because it reflects the supremacy of Israel's national interests. For Israel, one way to fulfill its national interest is to occupy Palestinian land by using military force. This policy is carried out by Israel to protect the country's security both economically and militarily. The economic condition of the population is a condition that describes human life that has economic score (Shah et al, 2020). This attitude cannot be separated from the basic goal of Israel's policy, namely to prevent the development of Israeli national security threats in the occupied territories. Quoting Wagih Ibrahim's statement, one of the causes of Israel's aggressive attitude towards Palestine is to show Israel's strategy to gain as much power as possible with the aim of becoming a hegemon in Arab lands replacing Egypt. Coupled with Israel's expansionist policies supported by the United States so that Israel can continue the process of colonizing Palestinian land.

On the other hand, the non-material aspect of seeing the bad experiences of the Holocaust forms a feeling called exceptionalism and siege mentality in Israeli society. These two concepts illustrate not only how the Israeli people view the concept of security, but also shape their attitudes in interpreting peace and war. Israel's aggressiveness is also seen from the concept of *ontological dissonance* that in the face of threats, actors will protect their identities. Israel took unilateral steps in response to the threat of Israel's identity as a state actively seeking security. Israel's aggressiveness is also associated with post-traumatic behavior that occurs due to collective memory where Israel has a dark history so that it is sensitive to the risks of the lives of their soldiers which has an impact on government support for the decision to war. The non-material aspect also sees the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a *cross-ethnic phenomenon* implies a difference of purpose between the Jews and the Arabs.

The study of non-material aspects is something that can explain how Israel interprets a phenomenon and identifies a threat. Studies that discuss Israeli identity inform that the inherent identity influences Israel's decision to behave in a certain way. From the findings above, the discussion of nonmaterial aspects is interesting to study. The author will try to examine the reasons for Israel's aggressiveness towards Palestine, through the construction of Israeli identity which influences Israel's perspective on Palestine to form the perception of a threat.

III. Research Method

This study aims to provide an explanation of why something happened, for that qualitative explanatory method is considered appropriate in the research process of this thesis. In collecting research data, the authors collect data and information relying on literature studies through books, journal articles, online news, previous research results, and official publications from both government and international organizations. The unit of analysis in this study is aggressive state behavior, with the author's belief that identity, interaction and perception of other actors have a major role in influencing aggressive behavior. Constructivism is the right theory to help answer research questions, because constructivism explains the reflection of human ideas, there is a process of reproducing ideas, knowledge, language, and norms. Constructivists interpret this world as contextual, so that each actor gives a different meaning to a phenomenon; The resulting behavior depends on how the actor interprets the phenomenon. An important concept in constructivism to explain the reasons for state behavior is identity. Identity is defined as an attribute attached to an actor that describes the actor's motivation to behave in a certain way. In looking at the identity of the actor, in this study, we first explore how the identity is formed through its history. After the identity construction is formed, it is necessary to see how each actor's perception is through statements made in official speeches, both oral and written, and media interviews.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Construction of Israeli and Palestinian Identity

In constructivism, identity is an important concept to explain state behavior. Identity is defined as an attribute attached to an actor that describes the actor's motivation to behave in a certain way. Identity is formed by certain historical processes, also influenced by norms, ideas, and the influence of discourse in spoken and written forms. The collective identity of the Israeli Jews was forged in the midst of long-standing and conflicting conditions. Israel as a country with a majority population of Jews identifies itself as a Jewish state. Jews scattered all over the world migrated to the same places, believed in the same ancestors, followed the same religion, and shared the same views on the history of their homeland.

Israel's identity is influenced by institutionalized discourse through domestic politics, especially seeing the government in power at that time by looking at policies or decisions to carry out war. When *Operation Cast Lead* in 2008 was launched, Israel was under the leadership of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. The year 2006 was the beginning of the formation of a new Israeli identity where a military solution policy was increasingly possible and considered legitimate. Moreover, in 2006 Israel also received continuous attacks by the Hamas and Hezbollah groups. Ehud Olmert's leadership as Prime Minister ended in 2009, followed by Benjamin Netanyahu who served until now. Benjamin Netanyahu comes from the Likud Party which was formed by the Zionist Menachem Begin. Unlike Ehud Olmert, who is more moderate and continues to seek negotiations with the Palestinians, most of the peace process has stalled since Netanyahu was elected prime minister. Although he initially stated that he would not rule out a two-state solution, in practice Netanyahu's actions never showed any indication in that direction. Israel's attitudes under Netanyahu's leadership have indeed become very aggressive. Netanyahu is even known for his ambition to create an independent state of Israel, besides that he is also

an actor who always tries to overcome the fear of the Jewish people by representing himself as if he is the protector of the Jewish heritage.

On the other hand, the collective identity of Palestine has changed from one period to another due to certain social and historical factors. However, in general people who identify as Palestinian share the same historical experiences and struggle for independence. When Palestine was still in an effort to strengthen its identity, under the PA authority, Palestinian identity faded a little and was replaced with another identity, namely religious (Muslim) identity. This is due to the increasing Islamic movement pioneered by *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* (Hamas), especially after the first Intifada. The emergence and acceptance of political Islam in the Palestinian territories is the result of the Palestinian people's dissatisfaction with the PA and the lack of hope for social progress which has led to growing frustration in society and the ease with which Hamas ideology is accepted.

4.2 Differences in Israel's Identity and Perception of Threats to Palestine

The differences in the identities of Israel and Palestine reflect the different interests between the two while increasing the perception of threats. Palestine is perceived as a threat because Palestine as a Muslim identity refuses to recognize the right of the Jewish people to establish a state in the land of Israel. On the contrary, Israel itself identifies itself as a Jewish state that will continue to seek security to defend a homeland for the Jewish people. This perception indicates that the two countries do not share a common identity, where there is no common value and understanding so that there is no positive identification of Israel labeling Palestine as "friend," but as "enemy." Constructivists also add that international actors, namely the state, will act altruistically when they are bound by a common identity, so that there will be a common interest, which in the end will have the same action.

Israel's perspective on threats is influenced by repeated bad experiences that form a feeling of *siege mentality,* namely a feeling of insecurity that is embedded in a group of individuals where there is a belief that the outside group has hostile intentions. Therefore they could not expect any help from anyone. "*Thus, the siege mentality should be viewed as reflecting the described core belief accompanied by such beliefs as "No-one will help us in time of need.*" Israel's perception of Hamas was actually already formed when Hamas started its armed action in 1993, which raised the issue of *insecurity* for Israel. Even Israel feels threatened by Hamas's thoughts which are full of hatred towards Hamas and want the destruction of Israel using terrorism.

4.3 Perception of Israel's Self-Image (2008-2014)

This self-perception influences Israel's conception to act based on what is considered good or appropriate, or what in constructivism is called the logic *of appropriateness.* Dore Gold, an adviser to the Prime Minister, said the terrorist attack had not happened once but had happened for eight years. Therefore Israel sees his country as a victim who has the right to defend himself against a major crime. In 2006 when Israel began to get terror from terrorist groups, Ehud Olmert as Prime Minister who described whether Israel will continue to live in the *axis of evil* or will fight back by mobilizing domestic forces in every military operation. This perception then underlies how Israel behaves towards those who want to destroy Israel. Olmert also implies that Israel will not compromise with terrorism. The 2006 terror incident also affected how Israel should behave towards terror groups including Hamas. For Israel, this is appropriate because the Israelis consider themselves to be *defensive warriors*, they are fighters for life and a form of defense. Israel sees themselves as not *evil* and their actions are considered non-aggressive.Netanyahu, who

comes from the Likud Party, is more ambitious in creating Israel's security stability. Even Netanyahu does not support the realization of two countries as a solution to the conflict, according to him this kind of solution will only be a disaster for Israel so that political steps are needed to eliminate this threat.

4.4 Israel's Aggressiveness towards Palestinians

Israel has been in a position called by Susan Opotow with the term *moral exclusion*, namely when individuals or groups are considered to be outside the limits of applicable moral values, rules, and considerations of justice. Those who are morally excluded are regarded as *nonentities*, outcasts or unworthy. Therefore, for the Jewish nation the goal of survival became very important and all kinds of means were allowed to ensure the safety of the group, even though most of the actions were considered extreme and unacceptable to the international community. The presence of threats, acts of aggression, perception of danger and other disturbances can lead to anger, desire for retaliation and harmful actions. Aggressiveness is a way to fulfill this motivation. In addition, it can also generate motivation to do *self-defense.* Aggression is considered *self-defense* because it helps rebuild self-confidence, strength, and self-esteem. Finally, perceptions that are considered a threat to values, beliefs, and *way of life* can lead to motivation to protect psychological self such as self-conception, identity, and self-esteem. This need for psychological self-defense can be incredibly strong.

Basically, every actor has the potential to act both altruistically and aggressively. However, often actors who have their *insecurity* and have experienced suffering can turn against others and that's when the destructive process escalates. For actors who feel *insecurity* in the face of threats, what is pictured in their minds is only hatred. In asymmetrical conflicts such as Israel-Palestine, one party with much greater power often responds by increasing support from within the country to carry out aggression in retaliation against the other party who is weaker and vulnerable. In addition, because of the perception of collective threat, aggressive action is seen as a punishment for another identity that threatens. Therefore, an aggressive mentality has grown in the life of the Jewish community along with the experiences they have gone through. Coupled with the different Palestinian Muslim identities formed from Islamic movements such as Hamas, Israel and Palestine do not share the same values and understanding so that there has never been a positive label for Hamas. The absence of a *shared identity* increases Israel's threat perception and suspicion of Hamas, which is determined to get rid of the Jews. Therefore, aggressiveness, even though it is considered excessive, is considered by Israel as appropriate to punish Hamas in order to protect Israel's identity from Hamas threats.

V. Conclusion

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is a conflict that is still ongoing today. Since Israel was founded in 1948 and started military attacks, especially on the Gaza Strip, many Palestinian civilians have been victims. In the 2008-2014 period, Israel carried out military operations against Palestine, such as *Operation Cast Lead, Operation Pillar of Defense*, and the largest of which was *Operation Protective Edge*. An important concept in constructivism to explain the reasons for state behavior is identity. Identity is defined as an attribute attached to an actor that describes the actor's motivation to behave in a certain way.

The collective identity of the Israeli Jews is influenced by the history of the Jews, namely the *Holocaust*, so that the Jews consider *the Holocaust* as a "*cultural trauma*". "Because of this experience, Israel's perception of threats forms a feeling of *siege mentality*. The hatred and suffering that grows in the lives of the Jews and is implemented in their national ethos, theoretically creates mental aggressiveness because there is a desire to protect that identity. Meanwhile, the Palestinian identity had undergone changes due to certain social and historical factors. But Hamas emerged as a representation of the struggle of Muslims. Hamas's ideology which tends to be harsh is very easy to accept in Palestinian society, especially the Gaza area which is its biggest base. Israel's perception of Palestine is influenced by the absence of shared identity which results in feelings of suspicion so that there is no positive identification of Israel in viewing Palestine.

Israel's perception of self-image also affects Israel who acts according to the logic of appropriateness. In the period 2008-2014 Israel was led by two Prime Ministers namely Ehud Olmert and Benjamin Netanyahu. Israel sees their country as a defensive warrior who struggles to lead a normal life away from fear. The terrorist attacks that have attacked Israel since 2000 created the perception of Israel as a victim who has the right to defend himself against a major crime. Israel showed a more ambitious way when under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu who came from the Likud party. Politically, the Likud party wants to make Israel an independent state, and rejects the status of a Palestinian state. In asymmetric conflicts, the party with much greater power often responds by engaging in aggression that is perceived as retaliation and as a punishment for other identities that are perceived as threatening. The inherent aggressive mentality, the absence of *shared identity*, Israel's perception of self-image and the perception of Israel's threat to Palestine are the causes of Israel's aggressiveness towards Palestine.

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