

Analysis of Russia's Status as an Observer in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

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Abstract: The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is the second largest intergovernmental organization in the world after the United Nations (UN) which claim themselves as the collective voice of the Muslim world. Having 57 member states, the OIC members are spread over in four different continents. The Republic of Albania is the only European state in the OIC membership, whereas the largest Muslim population in Europe is located in Russia. Since 2005 Russia has obtained an observer status in the OIC, along with other states and international organizations. It is important to know that not all of the OIC member states should have large Muslim population or become as a Muslim majority country, some of the member states from Africa and South America has much less Muslim population than Russia. This paper is trying to find out why up until now Russia only hold a status as an observer in the OIC membership. This research use a qualitative method, framed by the Theory of Identity and National Interest from Alexander Wendt in the Constructivist Paradigm. This research finds that there are two factors regarding to Russia's stance. The first one is Russia's double-identities and the second one is Russia's geopolitical interest.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is the second largest intergovernmental organization in the world after the United Nations (UN). The OIC has 57 member states and claims themselves as the collective voice of the Muslim world, which has an objective to safeguard and protect all of the Islamic world interest in the spirit of the world peace (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2018).

The OIC establishment history was started from the criminal activities of the Al-Aqsa Mosque arson in Jerusalem, which triggered some of the Muslim states to gather in Rabat, Morocco on September 25th, 1969 to solve the problem. A year after, the Foreign Ministerial level meeting was held for the first time in Jeddah, which resulting a decision to erect the organization secretariat at the same city which headed by a Secretary General (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2018).

The OIC member states are mostly comes from Asia and Africa, but some of them are also comes from Europe and even South America. For the European continent itself, there is only Republic of Albania which became the OIC member state since 1992 (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2018). It should be noted that the largest Muslim population

in Europe is not coming from Albania, but from the Russian Federation (Pew Research Center, 2011).

Based on the data in 2010, from 142.9 million people of Russia, as many as 14.29 million people (10%) are Muslim adherents, at the same time 104.7 million people (73.3%) of Russian citizens are mostly Christian (Pew Research Center, 2010). As the largest Muslim population country in Europe, by 2030 Russia is estimated will have 18.6 million Muslim or growth around 0.6% each year (Pew Research Center, 2011).

Despite their title as Europe's largest Muslim population country, up until now, Russia is just holding an observer status in the OIC since 2005. There are also some other states and international organizations which gained status as an observer in the OIC membership (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2018).

This paper found an interesting fact that not all of the OIC member states should have a large Muslim population or become a Muslim majority country, here are the list of them:

Table 1: Comparison of the muslim population from some of the oic member states with russia

States (Region)	Population	Muslim % (Population)	Status
Russia (Europe)	142,900,000	10% (14,290,000)	Observer
Ivory Coast (Africa)	19,706,666	37.5% (7,390,000)	Member
Mozambique (Africa)	23,333,333	18% (4,200,000)	Member
Uganda (Africa)	33,391,304	11.5% (3,840,000)	Member
Cameroon (Africa)	19,617,486	18.3% (3,590,000)	Member
Benin (Africa)	8,865,546	23.8% (2,110,000)	Member
Togo (Africa)	6,000,000	14% (840,000)	Member
Gabon (Africa)	1,545,454	11.2% (170,000)	Member
Suriname (Americas)	526,315	15.2% (80,000)	Member
Guyana (Americas)	781,250	6.4% (50,000)	Member

(Pew Research Center, 2010)

Based on table I, this paper would like to show a unique puzzle to discuss about how Russia which the largest Muslim population country in Europe only gained a status as an observer state in the OIC. Whereas, there are also some other OIC member states which in actual number has relatively less Muslim population than Russia and even not a Muslim majority country, just like Russia.

Based on such issue, this paper proposes a research question as follows: Why up to now Russia only hold the status as an observer state in the OIC membership? This paper will use a qualitative method as the main 'engine' and using theory to reveal the Russian stance which only holds the status as an observer state in the OIC membership.

This paper uses the Theory of Identity and Theory of National Interest from Alexander Wendt in the framework of the Constructivist Paradigm. It is one of the perspectives in the International Relations which does not believe on the objective of truth and social reality. It is agreed that the knowledge regarding the social world can never be accumulated since the social world is socially constructed by human and not given (comes from out there). The social world is more like an intersubjective area which created on the particular time and place and meaningful for the whole society within (Jackson & Sorensen, 1999).

The Constructivist Paradigm in the last couple of decade has been considered as the best three paradigms in the International Politics, along with Realism and Liberalism. As the middle ground theory, the Constructivist never give the privileges

to the certain agents, actors or unit analysis. They could become a state or non-state actors such as individual, corporation, social movement groups or other international organizations (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012).

Sometime the Constructivist seems like a double-edge knife. On the one side it often seems very positivist, since put forward the material-based images which frequently used by the Realism or Liberalism Theory, which based on the natural science characteristic. It also often use the Interest Theory and Rational Choice to evaluate every consequences happened as a form of objectivity. On the other side almost all scholars agree that Constructivist still believe on the normative and ideational factors which considered more important than material structure. Things such as hard power, economic production, total of population and geographical position are often considered not important enough (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012).

The understanding of norms, rules, and identities has been a key concept for Constructivist since it considered has institutionalized and intersubjectively shared the actors. Specifically the Constructivist see that the identities are the understanding about the role of self which gained by interaction with others. The term of others, in this case, is a structure which consists of a social relation series, shared meanings, rules, norms, and practices (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012).

Identities could change as time goes by since it surpasses the context. Hence none identities could be immortal. Identities are something created and not given. Even it sometimes considered more important than just an interest of a state. Identities could be influenced by endogenous sources (such as cultural aspect, military doctrine, race, gender, nationalism, religion or ideology from a community group) and also the exogenous sources (the international norms or multilateralism). Those factors also contribute to affecting the identities and role of the state toward other states (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012).

According to Alexander Wendt (2003), the state is an entity which could have several identities or interest inside it. Identities in the philosophical understanding are whatever makes a thing what it is. It means that identities are located by personal or unit level quality that rooted in the understanding of self from an actor. Two types of idea could be merged into one of those ideas are equally believed or adhere by self and others (Wendt, 2003).

Wendt classified four types of identities namely: Personal or Corporate, Type, Role and Collective Identities. The first classification is the Personal or Corporate Identities which based on the self-organizing homeostatic structure which made the international political actors become a distinct entity.

Each actors has only one specific identity which constituted on the material-based. The characteristic of Personal or Corporate Identities is the presence of consciousness and memory of self as a separate place from the thinking and activity. The state is a group of self which capable or conscious toward its own group-level. The perspective regarding to the ideas of self conception, has an auto-genetic quality inside it. It can be concluded that basically the Personal or Corporate Identities is exogenous toward others (Wendt, 2003).

The second classification is the Type Identities, which refers to the social category or label which given to the people that shares some of their characteristic, starting from the appearance thing, behavioral traits, attitude, skills (especially language), knowledge, argument, experience, historical similarity (place of birth), and so on. An actor could has several Type Identities, on this case not just a common characteristic but also has a content or social meaning. The content is provided by a membership rules which usually not or less formal, then it is determine what considered as Type Identities and tend to direct the behaviour of others toward it. These rules sometime could be various forms, depend on the historical and cultural contents (Wendt, 2003).

Coming up next is the Role Identities which has a tendency depend on the culture, so the others are one step ahead. The characteristic of Role Identities are not based on the intrinsic properties factor, however more to the relation only with the others. Someone could has this identity only with occupying a position in the social structure and follows the behavioral norms toward others which has a relevant counter identities. Someone could not validate their own Role Identities, since it depend on the existence of sharing expectation. It is happen because of there are several number of roles which institutionalized in a social structure which more prioritized certain interactions (Wendt, 2003).

The last Wendt classification for the type of identities is the Collective Identities which see the relation between self and others until at the logical conclusion part, which is the identification. The meaning of identification itself is the process that make self-others conception become blurred and even on certain limits could surpass it. For Alexander Wendt the meaning of self on this case could be categorized as others. The process of identification usually always discuss about the specific issue such as love and patriotism, even it often surpassing the limits of self and others itself. In short the Collective Identities is the combination between Role Identities and Type Identities, which able to has the causal power to encourage the actors align the self and others into altruistic. The altruistic

actors are indeed still considered as rational, however they more often set the basics of their interest on certain group or team (Wendt, 2003).

All of those classifications of identities are indeed implies, but cannot be reduced as an interest. Identities refer more to what and who is the actor (social condition or states of being), while interest refers to what desired by the actor (a motivation which explain behavior). Interest requires identities because an actor is seen unable to know what they want until they know who is their true identity (Wendt, 2003).

The state is an actor whose behavior is motivated by several kinds of interest which rooted in Personal Identities, Type Identities, Role Identities, and Collective Identities. According to Wendt, the state has shared its virtues inside the Personal and Corporate Identities, which in the end will create a general national interest. Wendt sees that the state is not Realist by nature, the national interest concept is referred to as the condition of state-society complexes reproduction which is the definition of objective interest. Most of the International Relations scholars are more concerned with the personal interest which is the origin of the formation of scientific state interest (Wendt, 2003).

Based on the above exposure, this paper formulates diagram of the operationalization of theories as follows:

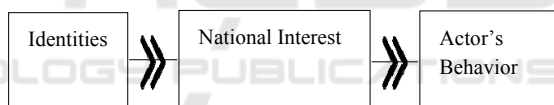


Figure 1: Diagram of operationalization of theories

The Identities on this case is acts as a roots from the actor's national interest, and the national interest that appears will become an actor's main motivation to act or behave in the international structure.

From the above operationalization of theories, this research will use a model of analysis as follows:



Figure 2: Diagram of the model of analysis

Referring to the above diagram, at least two important things will be discussed on this paper. The first one is Russia's double-identities, and the second one is Russia's geopolitical interest. Through both sub-problems, it is expected that will rise a sharp answer from this research.

2 RUSSIA'S DOUBLE-IDENTITIES

From the previous explanation it is already discussed that identities has two main structures, namely which comes from the endogenous sources and exogenous sources. Several things that affect the identities of an actor which comes from the endogenous sources are namely the cultural aspect, military doctrine, race, gender, nationalism, religion or ideology from the group of society. Besides there is also the influence from exogenous sources, which is the international norms such as multilateralism (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012). This paper is trying to discuss both sources through Russia's perspective as one of the European countries.

One of the factors that affect Russia to participate in the OIC membership is because of a religious similarity background, which is Islam. This religious identity has been the regulator for the social, economic, cultural and moral issues for many families in Central Asia (including in the region of Turkmenistan, Volga, Ural, and the Caucasus) for more than 1,400 years of Islamic history and before the arrival of the Communist regime. Since the entry of Soviet administration, the freedom of Muslim rights was seized. The Soviet Union administration was trying to 'eradicate' Islam and replace it with Communist ideology. Islam and the Muslim organization were forced to bear the burden of persecution for 70 years (Kerimov, 1996).

During the 1917 - 1985 period was marked as the era of struggle, oppression, and persecution on the religion and religious organization. However, from time to time many parties and states in the Soviet were slowly started to soften themselves toward the religious oppression case and start to change the tactics. It was mainly happened in the era of the Great Patriotic War and after the death of Stalin (Kerimov, 1996).

After the fall of the Soviet regime there were some of the sovereign states that were born with a traditionally Islamic background such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and also Uzbekistan. Those countries are indeed not explicitly stated that Islam becomes their state religion since there was a Secularism influence from the Soviet era. Currently, all of those states have already joined the OIC as a full member state (Kerimov, 1996).

The fall of Soviet regime at least has separate around 65 million Muslims in Central Asia with Russia. However, it does not make Russia then losing their Muslims citizen. Many Russian federal subjects still become a Muslim majority area such as Republic of Tatarstan, Republic of Bashkortostan,

Republic of Dagestan, Republic of Adygea, the Chechen Republic, Republic of Ingushetia, Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, the Kabardino-Balkar Republic and the Karachay-Cherkessia Republic. Those federal subjects are estimated has 20 million Muslims (Kerimov, 1996).

The rapid growth of Muslim population in Russia has become one of the important factors from the evolution of political dynamics of the country especially in the Northern Caucasus region, South Russia region, the Ural mountains, Siberia and even in the Moscow Metropolitan region. The most populated Muslim area in Russia is the Volga region (including Bashkortostan and Republic of Tatarstan) that has become an 'Islamic Island' in the middle of vast 'Orthodox Christianity Ocean'. The radical Islamic movement is often rated as one of the main issues for the domestic political movement in Russia. Many Islamic radical groups are often create some trouble in the Russia's sovereign area, especially in the Republic of Tatarstan. The rampant of terrorism act in the City of Kazan (capital of the Republic of Tatarstan) is the impact of rapid magnitude of Muslim migration flows from outside Russia especially in the Northern Caucasus region, Azerbaijan and Central Asia (Malashenko, 2013).

The situation in the Volga region, Ural mountains, and Western Siberia is getting change after the increasing of magnitude from the Muslim immigrant flows which comes from outside Russia. The exact amount of those immigrants are still unknown since most of them are entering through the illegal channels. It estimated that there are some 700,000 until 1,200,000 of Uzbeks; 800,000 until 2,000,000 of Tajiks; 400,000 until 800,000 of Kyrgyz; and 600,000 until 1,000,000 of Azerbaijani which become an immigrants in Russia's soil (Malashenko, 2013).

The Russian President, Vladimir Putin has stated that the Muslim population in Russia is already reach 20 million people. The Kremlin (Russian administration) seen the Russian Muslim community as a single entity without separating them as a foreign immigrant or a citizen of Russia. Those views are justifying the existence of Muslim identities in Russia as a cohesive thing and can not be separated from the social, cultural and political lives in Russia (Malashenko, 2013).



Figure 3: Deployment map of muslim majority area in russia - (Laqueur, 2009).

It can not be denied that Russia indeed has an internal political problem which way more important with their own Muslim communities than its relation with other Muslim states counter parts. The Russian government stance toward its Muslim minorities are filled with a number of contradiction which hard to avoid. Moscow are insist to always keep its loyalty to the Muslim minorities, however sometimes they hard to or does not want to fulfill the requests and demands from many Muslim elements. Meanwhile there are two area in the Volga region (the Republic of Tatarstan and Republic of Bashkortostan) which are one of the most important petroleum producing area in Russia. Both area has received a number of special autonomy policy, even they sparked an idea to require every Deputy of Russian Prime Minister or Russian President must be a Muslim from Volga region (Laqueur, 2009).

Islam as one of the most influencing spiritual identities group in Russia, unfortunately not having much attention from the majority group of Russian Orthodox Church. Some of the Russian religious philosophers and scholars in the 19th century such as Chaadaev, Slavophiles Khomyakov and Soloviev has ever mentioning a little bit about Islam on their works. Many of those scripts are literally not quite much understand about the subject and most of them are form of the speculation (Laqueur, 2009).

The less understanding of Islam is indeed a reasonable thing for Russia since the majority of Russian citizens are the adherents of Orthodox Christianity (71%). Russia is the largest Orthodox Christianity states in the world with the total adherents reach 101.45 million people. There are many Russian citizens agree that their country has a special duty to protect the whole of interest from the Christian Orthodox adherents all around the world. Moreover, currently Russia is the primary key player in the field of cultural and geopolitical issues (Pew Research Center, 2017).

If referring to the classification of identities from Alexander Wendt, Russia on this case is seen to has two different identities. The first one is Russia as the largest Muslim population country in Europe and the second one is Russia as the largest Orthodox Christianity state in the world. Both religious identities cannot be denied as an integral part of Russia, either Muslim or Orthodox Christianity. This paper found that both reasons has giving a big impact to the Russian status in the OIC membership as an observer state.



Figure 4: Deployment map of religious majorities in central and eastern europe - (Pew Research Center, 2017).

3 RUSSIA’S GEOPOLITICAL INTEREST

Currently, Russia is trying to leave the ‘old scar’ from the tragedy of the civil war in the Chechen Republic and ensure there still some place left for the Muslim citizens in the country. The amount of Muslim community in Russia added with the pro-Russian group in some post-Soviet Muslim states has made a natural interest for Russia to joining the OIC (Geopolitika, 2013).

The life of the Muslim community in the Republic of Tatarstan is one of the good examples for the Muslim world in seeing the Russian religious tolerance toward Islam. President Mintimer Shaimiev of Tatarstan along with the Deputy of Foreign Affairs Department of the Russian Orthodox Church, Vsevolod Chaplin was joined at the Religious Conference in Jeddah in 2008. President Shaimev delivered the opening remarks from the Russian President at that time, Dmitry Medvedev that Russia still sticks with its path to expand the active interaction with the Islamic world. Chaplin also added that Russia would never be separated from the Islamic world, vice versa. There are many adherents of the Orthodox Christianity who lives in the Muslim majority states, and also there are many

Muslims who lives in the Orthodox Christianity majority states, such as Russia (Geopolitika, 2013).

The approaching ways that taken by Russia and the US toward the OIC was really different. On a reception held in Washington DC, former US Secretary of State Madam Condoleezza Rice was introducing the first US special envoy to the OIC, Sada Cumber in 2008. Madam Rice stated that the idea regarding to the US which 'in war' against the Islamic world was totally wrong, she was more emphasizing that those ideas actually was spread by the brutal extremist group that want to divide the Muslim community. Meanwhile Sada Cumber admitted that he could not do so much to convince the people at the OIC Conference regarding to the truth of Madam Rice statement (Geopolitika, 2013).

The different approach precisely shown by Russia regarding to its proximity with the Islamic world. Russia wants to join the OIC, considering its Muslim population which way bigger than some other Muslim states in Asia and Africa. According to the Russian Ambassador to the OIC, Veniamin Popov that Russia's interest to join the OIC membership is to enhance the cooperation with the Islamic world and continuing their work in the framework of international agency and observe the international law (Geopolitika, 2013)

According to the former OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, stated that currently the 'outside world' is more giving much attention to the 'Islamic world' than 35 years ago. The cultural and religious identities on Muslim minority communities start getting more visible, even there more and more that showing its interest to join the OIC as member states or as an observer states. According to Ihsanoğlu, the Russian Federation has succeeded in showing their interest (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2004).

The Russian Federation was introduced as a non-Muslim observer state of the OIC at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2005. At that time the OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu stated that the OIC is the only Islamic-based intergovernmental organization in the world which has 57 member states which spread over four different continents (Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America). The Russian Federation was mentioned as a non-Muslim observer state which newly joined the organization on June 2005 in Sana'a, Yemen. He also said it proudly that the OIC is the second largest intergovernmental organization in the world after the United Nations (UN), which represent almost 1.3 billion Muslim around the world or equal as 1/5 of the world population (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2005).

Based on the OIC Charter (Chapter II), that any member state of the United Nations, having Muslim

majority and abiding by the Charter, which submits an application for the membership may join the Organisation if approved by consensus only by the Council of Foreign Ministers on the basis of the agreed criteria adopted by the Council of Foreign Ministers. On the other hand decision on granting Observer status to a member of the United Nations, will be taken by the Council of Foreign Ministers by consensus only and from the agreed criteria by the Council of Foreign Ministers (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2008).

Russia is not the only parties which have an interest in this case, the OIC also really need Russia which has a permanent membership status at the UN Security Council. The OIC needs to consult with Russia to overcome many issues experienced by the Muslim at the international stage. The OIC wants the Muslim minorities in Russia could act as a bridge between Russia and the OIC, even also expect Russian observer status could create an intercultural and inter-civilizational dialogue between the OIC and the western world (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2007).

Besides through the central government, Russia has often held a discussion forum regarding their relationship with the Islamic world through the Russia Muftis Council (RMC). Moscow is also ever be a host city in a forum titled Russia and the Islamic World: the Vectors of Modernization in the CIS space, which gathered many Muslim figures from the post-Soviet states in Eurasian Continent. According to the head of the RMC, Ravil Gainutdinov said that the idea of CIS Council of Mufti's establishment would soon could be realized considering the amount of Muslim population in the Central Asia region, which has the same problem with Russia. Gainutdinov hopes that there will be a standardized rule about the erection of some new mosques throughout Russia (Russia Mufties Council, 2016).

The Russian President Vladimir Putin said on his remarks at the inauguration of Moscow Cathedral Mosque, that Islam in the Russian constitution is one of the parts of traditional Russian belief with millions of its adherents. According to President Putin that the reconstruction of the largest Mosque in Europe, has marked the Russian Federation as a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state (Russia Mufties Council, 2015).

It could be concluded that Russia currently is playing an outstanding game with other global significant powers. Their interaction with the Islamic world through the OIC is an exceptional way. They could 'win the heart' of 1.3 billion Muslim around the world because joining the OIC. Although they are not yet become a full member state of the OIC,

however, Russia's geopolitical interest is already fulfilled smoothly.

4 CONCLUSION

Prior approaching to the conclusion part, this paper would like to rewind the research question proposed: Why up until now Russia only hold the status as an observer state in the OIC membership? Based on the OIC Charter (Chapter II), Russia already 'in half' fulfill the criteria to upgrade their status as a member state of the OIC. They are a member state of the UN but not a Muslim majority country. However, it is not a big deal. The fact found by this paper on the introduction part, said that not all of the OIC member states should have a large Muslim population or become a Muslim majority country. Some other OIC member states have less Muslim population than Russia and not Muslim majority countries. Moreover, they have the largest amount of the Muslim population in Europe.

The only thing that has not done yet by Russia is just submitting an application for its membership status in the OIC. All of the requirements and data that exist will not effect if there are no direct efforts from the government to apply for registration. Even a Muslim majority state will not automatically be registered as a member state of the OIC if they do not register themselves. The next big question that might be rise will be: Why they do that?

There is a 'domestic clash' between identities and interest in Russia regarding their stance just to become an observer state in the OIC membership. The first one is the clash of identities. This paper prefers to call it the double-identities factor. The role of 'self and others' in this case is still strong. On one side Russia is the largest Muslim population state in Europe, however, on the other side, Russia is also the largest Orthodox Christianity state in the world. Although religion is one of the endogenous sources of the Russian identities, the majority group will always label themselves as a 'self' while the minority one will be the 'others.' It is quite impossible for Russia to join the Islamic-based intergovernmental organization, while in fact, the majority religious group in Russia is the Orthodox Christianity.

Alexander Wendt statement has been mentioned earlier on this paper, that a state could have several identities and interest. The state is not a realist by nature because there is a personal interest and the most important thing is that interest requires identities. The second domestic clash owned by Russia is also because of their interest. Even though it is quite impossible to become as a member state, however, Russia still needs to maintain a close

relationship with the Islamic world which represented by the OIC as the collective voice of the Muslim world. Russia's geopolitical interest to enhance its proximity and cooperation with the Islamic world is also important. Moreover, it is a mutual interest between Russia and the OIC. Russia is already one step further to 'win the heart' of the states from the Islamic world rather than US, NATO or even the EU in the field of a global political stage.

The closing statement that could be taken from this paper is that Russia is now 'playing on two-legs' in the global politics constellation. It is enough for Russia to 'just simply' act as an observer state in the OIC membership. On one side Russia could still maintain the good relationship with the Islamic world following their geopolitical interest, and on the other side, they still have their own identity as the largest Orthodox Christian country in the world.

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