

An Analysis of the Impact of the Syrian Crisis on Turkey's Politic-Military, Social and Economic Security

Türkiye'nin Politik, Askeri, Sosyal ve Ekonomik Güvenliği Açısından Suriye Krizinin İncelenmesi

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Abstract

This study analyzes how the ongoing Syrian Crisis has affected Turkey's security. It starts with an overview of recent developments in the Middle East in general and in Syria specifically. It then examines the political, military, social, and economic effects of the Syrian Crisis for Turkey's security. It concludes that the Syrian Crisis represents Turkey's most challenging security problem since the end of the Second World War as it has had many profound impacts on the country.

Key Words: *The Syrian Crisis, Turkey, security, refugees, economic security.*

Öz

Bu çalışma, devam eden Suriye krizinin Türkiye'nin güvenliğini nasıl etkilediğini analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, özellikle Arap Baharı kapsamında genel olarak Orta Doğu, spesifik olarak ise Suriye ile başlamaktadır. Ardından Suriye'de yaşanan krizin Türkiye'ye yönelik güvenlik etkileri politik, askeri, sosyal ve ekonomik bağlamda ayrıntılı bir biçimde irdelenmektedir. Çalışma, Türkiye üzerindeki ağır etkilerinden dolayı, Suriye krizinin İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın sona ermesinden bu yana Türkiye'nin güvenliğini etkileyen en ciddi sorun olduğu sonucuna ulaşmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Suriye Krizi, Türkiye, güvenlik, göçmenler, ekonomik güvenlik*

Introduction

One of the greatest recent challenges in the Muslim world has been a series of protests across the Middle East and North Africa, known as the "Arab Spring". The successful protests in Tunisia sparked by the "burning man" in late December 2010 spurred a wave of unrest that struck Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, and Yemen, before spreading to other countries.

Of these countries, Syria has experienced the most violent clashes between the government and rebel forces. After almost ten years of turmoil, Syria

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has become the venue for an ethnic, religious, and sectarian war, with the involvement of neighboring countries and global powers. The war has been described as both a “hybrid war” involving various traditional and modern warfare tools and a “civil war” in which about half a million people have lost their lives and five million have left the country.

As a neighbor of Syria, Turkey is one of the countries most affected by the crisis. In addition to the direct security threat because of its shared 911-kilometer land border, Turkey currently hosts 3.2 million Syrian refugees in camps. This study therefore analyzes how Turkey’s security has harmed by the crisis. Following a theoretical overview regarding the concept of security, the study considers recent developments in the Middle East in general and in Syria specifically. It then examines in detail the current and probable future political, military, social, and economic implications of the crisis for Turkey’s security.

The Concept of Security: Contending Views

The concept of security has different meanings for different scholars, which frequently reflect each scholar’s own scientific background or preferences.

The realist school, for example, defines security as freedom from any objective military threat to the state’s survival in an anarchic international system. Realism provides a state-centric, power-political understanding of security, based on the assumption that conflict is as a permanent condition of world politics.¹ Liberalism, on the other hand, frames international security by emphasizing intergovernmental and transnational institutions, cooperation, and joint gains. This offers possible exits from the supposedly “permanent” conflicts and security dilemmas of the realist world.² Since the 1990s, constructivists have brought their distinctive approach to social processes through ontology and epistemology, emphasizing ideas, culture, norms, and identities as a counterpoint to the materialist analyses of neo-realism and neo-liberalism.³ Poststructuralists consider security as a discursive construct, which is necessary for the identity of the state. Feminists argue that gender is a key factor in understanding the dynamics of security practices. Post-colonialists suggest that the main context for thinking about international security should be the structural inequalities of the core-periphery system while some Marxists explain war in terms of uneven development. Finally, critical theorists focus on humans and emancipatory values rather than the state and *raison d’etat* as the referent objects for discussing international security.⁴ After the

1 Barry Buzan, “The English School: A Neglected Approach to International Security Studies”, *Security Dialogue*, 46(2), 2015.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

end of the Cold war, security underwent profound conceptual changes in its definition and scope, and in relation to newly emerging challenges, risks, and threats. Therefore, the traditional security understanding was replaced with new concepts that enlarged and deepened the meaning of security.

More specifically, the Copenhagen School of Security Studies has provided a new meaning and concept by demonstrating that security can no longer be reduced to the military domain. Instead, it has highlighted securitization (the social processes by which groups of people construct something as a threat), thereby offering a constructivism-all-the-way-down counterpoint to the materialist threat analyses of traditional strategic studies. The Copenhagen School was also active in opening the scope of security analysis to deal not just with military issues but, when relevant, with a wider range of sectors, such as economic, political, societal, and environmental.⁵ For security, this means that it no longer has any given (pre-existing) meaning; rather, it is a social and inter-subjective construction.⁶

Barry Buzan, one of the best-known representatives of the Copenhagen School, starts by questioning the traditional view that security concerns survival. He, instead, looks at security from all angles, from micro to macro, while addressing the social aspects of security and how people or societies construct or “securitize” threats.⁷ Buzan changes the course towards a broader understanding of security based on levels and sectors. The three levels involve individuals, states, and international systems. The sectors, on the other hand, are political, military, economic, societal, and environmental. These concepts cannot adequately address the issue of security separately; rather, each one is intricately integrated with the others.⁸

Three principal theoretical perspectives have tried to explain the post-Cold War international security structure: neorealist, globalist, and regionalist.⁹ Since decolonization, the regional level of security has become both more autonomous and more prominent in international politics, and this process was when the Cold War ended.¹⁰ In parallel to this approach, Buzan contributed the regional security concept (RSC) as another dimension. For him, “se-

5 Ibid.

6 R. Taureck. Securitisation Theory and Securitisation Studies. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 9, 2006, pp. 53-61.

7 Buzan, Barry. *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*. 1st edition 1981, 2nd Edition. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991 and 2008, p. 8 quoted in Marianne Stone, “Security According to Buzan: A Comprehensive Security Analysis”, *Security Discussion Papers Series I*, 2009, Columbia University, p. 2.

8 Stone, op. cit., p. 2.

9 Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers, The Structure of International Security*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 6.

10 Ibid, p. 3.

curity is a relational phenomenon” whereby amity and enmity cannot be attributed solely to the balance of power. Instead, these issues may range from ideology, territory, and ethnic lines to historical precedent. This is important to understand as the concepts of amity and enmity lead to the idea of what Buzan refers to as the “security complex”, which is a group of states whose primary security concerns link together.¹¹ Buzan presents the Middle East as an example where a regional security complex is exercised.¹²

Global and Regional Developments in the Middle East and Syria

Since the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the Middle East has been an arena of destabilization for regional and global security. Whereas both the Soviet Union and the US were effective regional actors until the 1990s, the US has since then become almost the only hegemon to manage Middle East politics, following the Soviet Union’s collapse. The region attracted outside powers because it possessed most of the world’s energy resources and energy transportation routes. Although the US tried to reshape the Middle East through the Iraqi crises, events did not proceed as expected. Iran emerged as a new regional political power after Iraq was unofficially divided into Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish regions. Furthermore, the lengthy Second Iraq War and the heavy casualties the US suffered decreased American willingness to act directly in the Middle East. The lack of central authority in Iraq after 2003 enabled Al Qaida to emerge as a radical religious group that offered sustained military resistance to the American occupation. It also started to export radicalism to neighboring countries. Another destabilizing factor was the longstanding Palestine-Israel conflict, which had already led to the emergence of Hezbollah and Hamas as non-state actors to be considered in any final regional decisions. Finally, Kurdish groups in Iraq have achieved undeclared independence with help of Western powers and Israel.

Meanwhile, Turkey’s Middle East policy was being shaped by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party). AK Party took power following the 2002 elections before strengthening its power through the democratic system, which made it a model for Islamic parties in other countries to take power. Its multi-dimensional approach to foreign policy was based on several basic tenets, namely soft power, “zero problems with neighbors”, and rhythmic diplomacy.¹³ Turkey’s foreign policy has been more assertive and dynamic since

11 Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for Security Analysis in the Post-Cold War Era*, Brighton, Weatsheaf, 1991, p. 190; cited in Vladimir Šulovic, “Meaning of Security and Theory of Securitization”, *Belgrade Centre for Security Policy*, 05. October 2010, p. 3.

12 Buzan, *People, States and Fear...*, p. 190;

13 See Turkish Foreign Policy in Ziya Öniş & Şuhnaz Yılmaz, “Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era”, *Turkish Studies*, 10(1), 2009, 7-24 Carmen-Cristina Cîrlig, “Turkey’s regional power aspirations Library Briefing”, *Library of the European Parliament*, 2013; Muharrem Ekşi & Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, “The Rise and

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2007 as its hopes for European Union membership have faded. AK Party has therefore aimed at strengthening relations with the Islamic world, notably with Middle East countries. AK Party's core leaders have profoundly favored improving relations with the Arab world as part of prioritizing Turkey's religious and cultural links with the wider Islamic world. This has been the most notable axis shift since the Turkish Republic's foundation. Davutoglu's active foreign policy focused on widening Turkey's sphere of influence in former Ottoman territories, although this has led to criticisms that Turkey is reestablishing its sphere of influence across old Ottoman territories using new methods and foreign policy tools. Since Davutoğlu's era, Turkey has intervened in the Middle East in response to threats to its national interests. Thus, Turkey, Russia, and Iran are currently collaborating to find a solution to the Syrian Crisis.

The power game politics and growing rivalries between major regional players has pushed the Syrian Crisis high on the international diplomatic agenda. Syria also plays an integral role in the broader competition over future leadership of the region. Consequently, the future shape of the country will have a dramatic impact on the Middle East's strategic geometry and have serious consequences for the global political scene.¹⁴

The Arab Spring demonstrations erupted to shatter dictatorial regimes in the Middle East in 2010 and 2011. After the regime changes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, Islamic movements and parties gained huge power in these countries. Their common Islamic faith was based on the Moslem Brotherhood's radical approach to Islam. AK Party was happy as dictatorial regimes were being replaced by Islamic-rooted parties or movements. Although Turkey aspired to lead the Sunni Islamic states, this caused frictions with Shia Iran and some Sunni states like Saudi Arabia. Additionally, Turkey saw the Arab Spring as an opportunity to reshape the Middle East, where it had lost its hegemony almost a century ago. Its assertive, proactive, and multi-lateral foreign policy was criticized as an "axis shift" towards the Islamic world and Asia from its previous Western-oriented foreign priorities.

When the Arab Spring erupted in Syria, Turkey had anticipated a similar easy power change that would force president Assad to resign. However, Syria's domestic politics was quite different to the other countries as Assad had established a political system that controlled every cell in society through the secret police and intelligence system while the military structure remained loyal due to shared kinship and sectarianism.

Fall of Turkish Soft Power and Public Diplomacy", *Cazi Akademik Bakış*, 11(23), 2018, s. 18-20.
İlter Türkmen, "An Evaluation of the Last Decade of Turkish Foreign Policy", *Bilge Strateji*, 5(8), 2013, 1-6.

14 Sertif Demir and Carmen Rijnoveanu, "The Impact of the Syria Crisis on the Global and Regional Political Dynamics", *Journal of Turkish World Studies*, 18(1), 2013.

Syria also differed from the other countries from a foreign policy perspective. First, Russia had lost the most of its regional allies, leaving Syria as its last Middle East stronghold. Since Kaddafi had been overthrown by a NATO operation based on a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution authorizing a no-fly-zone to protect Libyan civilians,¹⁵ therefore, Russia vetoed all UNSC resolutions that could be used to justify foreign military intervention in Syria. China also acted with Russia to resist American supremacy in the Middle East. Finally, Iran, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Lebanon, and Jordan also involved themselves in the crisis. Seeing that Bashar Assad's regime was at risk of collapse due to a lack of military power, Russia began active participation to save the regime in September 2015 by employing its air power. This reinforcement was the turning point of the civil war, which enabled Syrian regime forces to defeat the opposition's attacks.

The USA tried to unite all opposition groups in Syria but failed. Moderate opposition forces were fighting both the Syrian regime forces and ISIS. As the US considered ISIS more dangerous than the regime, American focus shifted from the regime to ISIS. Later, the US established a semi-militia Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) composed of mostly from Syrian Kurdish PYD (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, Democratic Union Party*). This caused friction between Turkey and the US as Turkey sees the PYD as a terrorist group connected to the Kurdistan Worker Party (PKK) terror organization in Turkey. Moreover, the US created security concerns for Turkey by arming the SDF.

As a result, Turkey currently supports the Free Syrian Army while the US and other Western powers support the SDF; Russia supports the Syrian regime's forces and the PYD while Iran supports the regime and Hezbollah in Syria. Although all states and opposition groups oppose ISIS, their focus can be shifted very easily depending the moment, events, and expectations.

The Effects of the Syrian Crisis for Turkey's Political and Military Security

Part of the research question concerns how Turkey's political/military security has been shaped during these developments since the worsening political and military situation in the Middle East has affected Turkey's military and political security.

For Buzan, military threats form the traditional heart of national security concerns. Military action can, and usually does, threaten all components of the state as it not only strikes at the essence of the state's basic protec-

15 Adopting resolution 1973 (2011) by a vote of 10 to 0 with 5 abstentions (Brazil, China, Germany, India, and the Russian Federation), the Security Council authorized Member States, acting nationally or through regional organizations or arrangements, to take all necessary measures to protect civilians under threat of attack in the country, including Benghazi, while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory, while requesting them to immediately inform the Secretary-General of such measures.

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tive functions but also threatens damage deep down through the layers of social and individual interests.¹⁶ Political security concerns the organizational stability of states, systems of government, and the ideologies that give them legitimacy.¹⁷ Political threats stem from the great battle of ideas, information, and traditions that justify international anarchy.¹⁸ This implies the Cold War ideological separation. Political security can also be analyzed at lower levels of intensity. For example, even the interplay of ideas and communication can produce politically significant social and cultural threats. Language, religion, and local cultural tradition all play their part in the idea of the state, and may need to be defended or protected against or overbearing cultural.¹⁹ Military and political security are interlocked. If a country is militarily threatened by another country, the political security of the threatened country can also be affected.

Applying Buzan's concept to Turkey's situation, Turkey's military and political security appears threatened to some degree. First, a destabilized Syria has become a hub for radical elements like Pakistan, exporting radicalism to neighboring states. Turkey has become very vulnerable to radical and ethnic terrorism in Syria. Without central authority in the country, radicalism grew to weaken Turkey's security. Syria's central government has also become a source of threat to Turkey since a Syrian anti-aircraft missile hit a Turkish reconnaissance F-4 jet in June 2012. Their hostile actions were continued verbally and included support for radical groups against Turkey. Second, a fragmented Syria has become a threat by causing floods of refugees to migrate, allowing the emergence of Iraq and Syrian Islamic State (*ISIS-DAESH*), leading to the infiltration of radical and terrorist groups into Turkey or vice versa, threatening the security of Turkish people living near Syria's border through bombardments and missile attacks intentionally or mistakenly, and finally enabling Syrian Kurdish groups to exploit the political situation to gain autonomy or stronger political status. These are the topics of discussion in this article.

The Syrian crisis has also become a political and military threat in destabilizing the regional security complex as Buzan expressed. This crisis has damaged Turkey's foreign relations with major powers and regional actors. American-Turkish relations, for instance, are at their worst since they were established in 1926 due to diverging Turkish and American policies over Syria. Washington was shocked by a radical attack on its Benghazi Embassy in 2011, which killed its ambassador. This was the turning point for America to shift its policy regarding the Arab Spring, which can be summarized as supporting only

16 Buzan, *People, States, and Fear...*, p. 75.

17 Barry Buzan, "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century", *International Affairs*, 67(3), 1991, p. 431.

18 Buzan, *People, States, and Fear*, p. 77.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

moderate Islamic groups struggling with dictatorial regimes. Thus, Ankara and Washington were unable to agree on which group or groups should be supported, armed, and equipped. Neither could they agree on prioritizing targets in that Turkey prioritized toppling Assad while the US wished to eliminate ISIS first, or on establishing a buffer, no-fly, or security zone. At the outset, America opposed all such safe zones in Syria whereas Turkey was in favor. However, after deciding to leave Syria, America now wants a buffer zone as a haven for Syrian Kurds, which is very upsetting for Turkey. Turkey is absolutely against America's policy to utilize YPG (People's Protection Units)/PYD as a military force in fighting ISIS. Considering all the above, Turkey and America have acted as if they were not allies but foes in the Syrian crisis.

As to Russia, both countries were careful in their relations although Turkey is a NATO member. For example, Turkey has not joined any embargo against Russia imposed by the European Union since 2014. However, these carefully thought out relations were shattered during the Syrian crisis, notably after a Russian jet was shot down by a Turkish jet fighter in November 2015 over Turkey's southern border with Syria. Since then, Russia has taken very aggressive economic measures against Turkey. Indeed, they were almost ready to fight with each other but, thanks to NATO, Russia hesitated to take further action. Finally, in return for an official apology and an indemnity paid by Turkey, Russia eased some measures, although their bilateral relations are still poorer than the level before the crisis. However, both countries are now cooperating with each other to end the civil war in Syria after a long disputable period as their policies regarding Syrian crisis have converged. Turkey purchased S-400 air defense missile system from Russia although facing heavy pressure from America and other primary NATO members. Turkey is under of heavy pressure of America not to employ and connect NATO air defense system. Actually, after the air assault to Turkish forces deployed to Iblid rea by an agreement reached by Turkey, Russia and Iran though trilateral talks, Syrian regime and Russian forces in Feb 2020, the relations between two countries have worsened. Turkey has started to reconsider the relations with Russia. The future of S-400 purchased by Turkey is still unclear.

Syrian Kurds have attained an unprecedented political gain against Turkey's integrity and its internal and external security. The Popular Protection Units (YPG), the armed wing of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Unity Party (PYD), have exploited the chaotic situation to increase their autonomy. This created further disagreement with the US. Fearing casualties itself, the US helped form the SDG to fight ISIS as a ground force.²⁰ Turkey steadfastly criticized the US for collaborating with YPG/PYD, which Turkey saw as a terrorist

20 The US hesitates to use its forces as any American casualties could cause problems in American elections.

organization with direct ties with the PKK.²¹ Furthermore, Syrian Kurds are trying to form a Kurdish zone in northern Syria called the Northern Corridor, next to Turkey's Mediterranean Sea border. This was considered a destabilizing factor in the region and an enormous threat to Turkey's national interests. After Turkey's warnings to Syrian Kurds not to cross the Euphrates towards the west were not taken seriously, Turkey launched the Euphrates Shield (Fırat Kalkanı) operation in August 2016 aiming at controlling El-Bab and preventing unification of Kurdish groups in northern Syria. Later, Turkey initiated Operation Olive Branch Zeytin Dalı towards Afrin in 2018, which prevented YPG/PYD's further gains in Syria. Turkey also initiated "Peace Spring" operation across its border in northeast Syria on 09 October 2020, securing control of a large swathe of territory in the region. This operation aimed at eliminating YPG/PYD groups connected with PKK terrorist and establishing a "safe zone" to resettle some of the refugees in the country.²²

Turkey also complained about arming these groups with American weapons. Turkey now faces the threat of another ethnic group whose political gains would harm Turkey. The Syrian crisis shows that Kurdish groups have gained advantage from every crisis in the region. Barzani, the leader of Northern Iraq Kurdish Administration, has been struggling for independence for years. Seeing the global appreciation for Kurdish support in fighting ISIS, he thought it was the best time to conduct a referendum for an independent Kurdish State, which was held in 2017. However, Barzani suspended further actions following negative international reaction. Without the Syrian crisis, Barzani could hardly have dared to launch such initiative. Hence, the crisis has damaged Turkish security by allowing the possibility of forming a new state that could threaten its internal security in the future.

In connection with the Syrian Kurdish Groups, PKK has also exploited the political situation and tried to acquire political legitimacy by sending its terrorists to fight against ISIS on the American side in Syria.

Turkey's relations with the Syrian government have also deteriorated deeply, which resulted in friction and small conflicts. Friendship between Turkey and Syria had been established through the Adana memorandum, signed in 1998. However, after Turkey started to support opposition groups against the central government, Syria conducted hostile acts against Turkey. For example, in June 2012, a Syrian anti-aircraft-missile downed a Turkish war plane.

21 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol & Kadir Ertaç Çelik, "ABD'nin Suriye Politikasında Vekil Aktör Olarak Terör Örgütleri: YPG Örneği" (Terrorist Organizations as Proxy Actors at the Syrian Policy of the US Government: The Case of YPG), *Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 2(2), 2018, p. 32-34.

22 Umut Uras, "Turkey's Operation Peace Spring in northern Syria: One month on", <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/turkey-operation-peace-spring-northern-syria-month-191106083300140.html>, (Accessed September 15, 2017).

Turkey considered this a hostile act and reacted similarly. Turkey abandoned contact with the Assad regime as it struggled to depose Assad by any means.

Finally, ISIS-DAESH, which has ties with El Kaida terrorist group emerged from the chaotic situation in Syria to control nearly one-third of the country and some parts of Iraq. It also occupied several Syrian border crossing points and, as a non-state actor, became Turkey's new neighbor, and fired rockets into Turkey's border towns and cities. Radical elements from worldwide called on foreign fighters to provide support for ISIS. These jihadists connected to radical networks that were active in the war are suspected of penetrating Turkey by taking advantage of the open border policy. This perception was strengthened when an ISIS-linked suicide bomber registered as a refugee killed ten German tourists in Istanbul's historic center in January in 2016.²³ Turkey then started to erect a wall along its Syrian border to prevent illegal border crossings.

The ISIS not only destabilized Syria but also Turkey and global security. ISIS has conducted many deadly terrorist attacks in Turkey since 2014, which killed more than 211 innocent Turks and other nationalities. ISIS conducted its most deadly terrorist attack on 10 October 2015. It targeted tourists as well.²⁴ In June 2014, ISIS also occupied the Turkish Consulate in Mosul, Iraq. After Iraqi forces recaptured Mosul in summer 2017, the consulate was rescued. The rise of ISIS stemmed from the Syrian crisis to affect Turkey's internal and external security through suicide terror attacks and firing rockets. It distracted the international focus from Assad's regime towards radical terror and made the Turkish-Syrian border less secure through illegal crossings. America, Russia, Iran, England, and France have militarily intervened in the Syrian crisis, While ISIS has now been defeated and dispersed so that it is no longer a serious threat to Turkey, YPG/PYD have now replaced it to become a new threat to Turkey. This is now more serious as the West does not define YPG/PYD as a terror organization and have used them as ground forces in Syria.

Considering all the above, Turkish political and military security were heavily affected by the Syrian crisis as Turkey experienced almost the second most challenging period in its foreign relations since the foundation of the Republic. The crisis has disrupted the Middle East Security Complex, shaped after the First World War. The crisis has also deeply affected regional security, as it became the center of conflicts stemming from many diverse faiths, factors, and enmities.

23 International Crisis Group, "Turkey's Refugee Crisis: The Politics of Permanence Europe", Report No. 241, 30 November 2016, p. 14.

24 The biggest terrorist attacks and killings were conducted by ISIS. <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1264903-teror-orgutu-isinin-turkiyeye-yonelik-gerceklestirdigi-saldirilar> (Accessed September 15, 2017).

The Issue of Social Security

Social security is another aspect of Buzan's security definition. He defines societal security as threats and vulnerabilities that affect patterns of communal identity and culture. Migrations and the clash of rival civilizational identities are key factors.²⁵ Considering the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey and increasing Islamophobia in the Western world, Turkey has two major security challenges. Syrian refugees represent both a humanitarian and security issue. Sociological and physiological scholars can analyze the humanitarian dimension of the refugee question whereas this paper focuses on how the refugee issue has become a security concern and how Turkey has coped with this problem.

After civil war erupted in Syria, Turkey followed an open-door policy for Syrian refugees, making the country the world's largest host. The Turkish government expected the conflict to end quickly and the refugees to return to their homes. Turkey defined the refugees as "brothers" and treated them with friendship. Turkey has also used its immigration and asylum policy to demonstrate its soft power capabilities, to achieve the foreign policy goal of "acting as a powerful regional country" and an "order establishing actor" in the Middle East.²⁶ Therefore, it did not accept foreign assistance. Despite some criticisms, most international actors praised Turkey for bearing the cost of hosting Syrian refugees. Turkey also addressed this issue in international arena to prove that it is a strong growing power and a model country in the Middle East.²⁷ This was the result of Prime Minister Davutoglu's self-assured foreign policy. In return, Turkey expected Western countries, notably the US, to intervene in the Syrian crisis to end the tragedy, as they had done in Libya.

In 2012, Turkey asked for financial support with a softer tone, avoiding the perception of Syrian refugees as a threat in domestic and international domains, but insistently calling them guests and brothers who would eventually return.²⁸ However, the continuing civil war created a huge refugee problem that weakened Turkey's security, and economic and sociological structure. The effort to host huge numbers of refugees created a heavy financial and administrative burden.

Due to the continued refugee flow from Syria to Turkey, and EU directives on asylum and migration since the early 2000s, the Turkish government adopted the Law on Foreigners and International Protection in 2014. This law specifies procedures for foreigners, refugees, and people in need of interna-

25 Buzan, "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century", pp. 431-451.

26 N. Ela Gokalp Aras and Zeynep Sahin Mencutek, "The international migration and foreign policy nexus: the case of Syrian refugee crisis and Turkey", *Migration Letters*, 12(3), 2005, p. 194.

27 Ibid, p. 202.

28 Ibid, p. 202.

tional protection.²⁹ In January 2016, the Turkish government started to issue work permits for Syrian refugees who had been in Turkey for more than six months.³⁰ These legal changes indicate that Turkey is moving from a humanitarian-emergency response to a strategy of long-term integration.³¹ Finally, although Turkey has not granted official refugee status to Syrians, President Erdoğan stated in July 2016 that Syrian refugees living in Turkey could eventually be granted citizenship. This decision is likely to have far-reaching implications for refugee issues.³² According to the latest figures in end of 2019, the number of Syrians receiving Turkish nationality is 110 thousand.³³

According to official statements, Turkey currently hosts around 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees.³⁴ Syrians make up nearly one-third of all refugees globally, and Turkey hosts 63.4% of them. The influx of Syrian refugees between 2011 and 2017 is Turkey's most significant demographic shift since the 1923-4 population exchange with Greece.³⁵ The vast majority of refugees are now mixed with the Turkish population, while a minority of them are sheltered in camps.³⁶

Syrian refugees have had three effects on Turkey's security: increasing xenophobia in Turkey, feeding internal threats, and affecting Turkey's relations with the EU. Regarding xenophobia, rising refugee numbers have raised concerns that Syrians disturb law and order in Turkey. Particularly after the 2014-2015 influx and the realization of the problem's long-term nature, the broad-based, positive "guests" sentiment gradually faded.³⁷ Syrians have taken part in criminal activities in several cities, such as robbery and theft. According to a 2014 study, 62 percent of respondents also believe that Syrians in Turkey distort social order and moral values by criminal activity (such as violence, theft, smuggling, and prostitution).³⁸ However, the major issue is growing concern among Turkish people against Syrian population in general. The general perception is that Syrian refugees threaten their identity and culture, take their

29 Ahmet İcduygu & Doğu Şimşek, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Towards Integration Policies", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 15(3), 2016, p. 61.

30 Ibid, p. 61.

31 Sophia Hoffmann and Sahizer Samuk, "Turkish Immigration Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis", March 2016, SWP-Berlin, p. 12.

32 Ahmet İcduygu and Evin Millet, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Insecure Lives in an Environment of Pseudo-Integration", *Global Turkey in Europe, Working Paper*, August 2016, p. 2.

33 <https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/> (Accessed April 19, 2020).

34 According to President Erdoğan's Speech at UN Nation Annual Opening Session, 19 Sep 2018. According UNHCR figures the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey is 3,642,738. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/113>, (Accessed 20 March 2019).

35 Soner Cagaptay and Maya Yalkin, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey", Policywatch 3007, August 22, 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/syrian-refugees-in-turkey>

36 Ibid.

37 International Crisis Group, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

38 Ibid, p. 14.

jobs, and deplete their economic resources. With approximately 3.98 million Turkish citizens unemployed,³⁹ resentment is high about Syrians competing for jobs, mostly in the informal sector, where they are willing to work for lower pay.⁴⁰

After Turkey's Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch Operations, the adverse perceptions of the Syrian refugees increased. People complained that while Turkish soldiers were fighting against ISIS or YPG in Syria, the Syrian youth are on vacation in Turkey instead of defending their country. Additionally, the growing economic burden of the refugees increased adverse perceptions of refugees due to the economic resources allocated to them. As in many other refugee situations worldwide, hostility towards Syrian refugees has increased, with some claiming that Syrians are stealing their jobs, causing economic hardship, and creating political instability in Turkey.⁴¹ Furthermore, granting citizenship to Syrian refugees has increased dissatisfaction among ordinary Turkish people⁴² who are unemployed or under-paid. Turkish opposition political parties are also against this decision as they fear that Syrian refugees granted Turkish citizenship can become an electoral asset for AK Party.

Most Syrian refugees live in separate locations similar to ghettos, where they have established their own community and created their own internal trade system. However, this challenges the integration process and may cause security problems in the future.⁴³

According to a 2016 survey, over 80 per cent of respondents opposed giving citizenship to Syrians; roughly 70 per cent wanted more restrictive policies, even sending Syrians home.⁴⁴ Therefore, the most serious security threat is a risk of violent mass reaction caused by the provocations and capitalizing on anger towards Syrian refugees.⁴⁵ Despite some small mass reaction in some cities, common sense has prevailed so far and Turkey has not experienced such unfortunate events. The mass media and Turkish government have struggled to subdue and mitigate these concerns. Turkish people have behaved very rationally and have not taken any actions that could damage Turkey's international image.

39 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-unemployment-rate-rises-to-12-3-pct-in-november-2018-141249>, (Accessed March 23, 2019).

40 Ibid, p. 12

41 Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Gender Analysis, Centre for Transnational Development and Collaboration, 2015. London

42 İçduygu, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

43 Effects of The Syrian Refugees on Turkey, ORSAM, Report No: 195, January 2015, p. 7.

44 Transatlantic Trends: Topline Data, 2013. GMF, Murat Erdoğan, "Syrians in Turkey: Social Acceptance and Integration Research", Hacettepe University Migration and Politics Research Centre (HUGO), November 2014 quoted by International Crisis Group, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

45 ORSAM, p. 7.

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Another security concern has been the rise in terrorist acts in Turkey since the Syrian crisis erupted. ISIS members have infiltrated Turkey by exploiting the open door policy. The biggest concern among people living close to the border is their perceived vulnerability to terrorist attacks. Radical terrorists have conducted many dreadful attacks in Antakya, Gaziantep, Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir, which caused the deaths of many innocent Turkish citizens and foreigners. Seeing this risk, Turkey started to register refugees and took strict measures to prevent infiltration by ISIS or other radicals.

The demographic structure in some border cities is also under changing as the number of Arab-speaking residents increases. While ethnic Arabs (defined as those whose mother tongue is Arabic) constitute only 1.25% of Turkey's total population, three southern provinces report much large proportions: Hatay (34%), Mardin (21%), and Sanliurfa (13%). Arabic-speaking refugees and citizens constitute 56% of Hatay's population, making it Turkey's first Arab-majority province.⁴⁶

The final effect of Syrian refugees is Turkey-EU relations as the majority of Syrian refugees want to migrate to Western countries. There are many reasons why refugees are leaving Turkey, such as family ties in Europe, fear of violence, and xenophobia in Turkey, and a belief that better opportunities exist in Western and Northern European states.⁴⁷ During 2015, refugee migration to Europe from Turkey increased to reach 500,000. Fearing a global migration threat, Europe tried to implement stricter border controls and searched for ways to prevent their entry into Europe.⁴⁸ One of the solutions was to make an agreement with Turkey to keep Syrian refugees in Turkey while the EU would share the economic cost. The EU and Turkey agreed on a Joint Action Plan on 29 November 2015. In return for hosting Syrian refugees, the EU committed to re-energize Turkey's accession process by opening new negotiation chapters, accelerate the lifting of visa requirements for Turkish citizens by October 2016, and provide an initial three billion Euros to improve the situation of Syrians in Turkey.⁴⁹

This agreement has imposed a huge burden on Turkey as the EU has not fulfilled its commitments. First, Turkey initially only received €800 million euros of the €3-billion aid promised by the EU,⁵⁰ although after Turkish complaints, the amount was raised. According to the latest EU figures, €1.4 billion

46 Cagaptay and Yalkin, op.cit.

47 Zümray Kutlu-Tona, "Endless Escape: From Syria to Turkey, Then to Europe", *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 16(1), 2016, p. 122.

48 Ibid, p. 122.

49 Ahmet İçduygu & Doğu Şimşek, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Towards Integration Policies", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 15(3), 2016, p. 61.

50 These figures were explained by President Erdogan in Speech at UN Nation Annual Opening Session, 19 Sep 2019.

was supplied for 2016-2017, and a further €690 million allocated so far under the second tranche of the facility for 2018-2019, for a total of €2.09 billion.⁵¹

Turkey has also not acquired visa-free travel to Europe as the EU demands that Turkey first amends its anti-terror laws. Besides, the EU has not opened any new accession chapters, and accuses Turkey of moving away from EU values. It thus seems that Turkey-EU relations are almost frozen. Moreover, Turkey's EU membership has become a topic of discussion and criticized in every national election in EU countries. Considering all of the above issues, EU-Turkey relations have never been worse since Turkey signed an agreement with EU members in the early 1960s.⁵²

Additionally, in February 2016, at the request of Germany, Greece, and Turkey, NATO decided to join international efforts in dealing with refugee issues in the Aegean Sea. NATO conducts intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance to prevent illegal trafficking and illegal migration through and at the Turkish-Syrian border. NATO is also cooperating with the European Union's border management agency Frontex,⁵³ which conducts its mission according to Greece's territorial waters and air space claims in the Aegean Sea. The refugee issue has forced Turkey to accept NATO support in preventing illegal migration and trafficking in the Aegean Sea.

Turkey's acceptance of NATO's new task force to operate in the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas to prevent illegal migration and refugee movement is problematic in several ways. First, it implies that Turkey is unable to prevent migration. Second, Frontex does not comply with Turkey's air and sea rights in the Aegean Sea, which means that NATO's mission could be utilized to augment Greece's claims in the Aegean Sea in the future, too. Meanwhile, Turkey faces international criticism for instrumentalizing refugees in both its domestic politics and its relations with the EU.⁵⁴

Currently, as Europe hesitated to take side of Turkey in conflict between Turkey and Syrian Regime and Russian forces in Iblid, in February 2020, Turkey shifted its position and suspended its agreement with EU about refugees. Syrian refugees tried to cross Greek borders. However, because of coronavirus pandemic, the refugee issue has remained in silent. It seems both sides have intention to solve issues, considering Turkey's concerns.

51 https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/turkey_en (Accessed March 23, 2019).

52 See Fetulahist Coup attempt in Sertif Demir & Oktay Bingöl (2018) From military tutelage to civilian control: an analysis of the evolution of Turkish civil-military relations, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2018.1491291.

53 http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_128746.htm, (Accessed Sep. 21, 2017).

54 International Crisis Group, op. cit., p. 1.

The Issue of Economic Security

According to Buzan, economic security can stem from an inability to sustain the basic human needs of the population, through the disruption of fluctuating and uncertain earnings from exports of primary products.⁵⁵ Among a variety of economic threats, a few can reasonably be construed as threats to national security. Export practices, import restrictions, price manipulations, debt defaults, and currency controls may have serious effects on the economies of other states.⁵⁶ For example, the inability to supply key strategic materials can be classified as a national security concern.⁵⁷

Considering the Syrian Crisis, Turkey has faced several economic threats. One the collapse of trade with Syria. Foreign trade volumes with Syria had reached 2.5 billion dollars in 2011 just before the crisis started.⁵⁸ Some companies dealing with Syrian trade incurred debts or went bankrupt as trade fell.

Turkey's tourism sector also faced a major economic recession while the state treasury had to bear the heavy burden of hosting more than 3 million refugees in Turkey. When a Turkish F-16 fighter shot down a Russian Su-24 bomber on the Syria-Turkey border in November 2015, Russia banned imports of Turkish fruit and vegetables, poultry and salt, the sale of charter holidays for Russians to Turkey, and construction projects with Turkish firms in Russia unless a special exemption was granted. Turkey is the second most popular holiday destination for Russians, attracting about 4.5 million visitors in 2014. According to TURSAB data, the number of Russian tourists coming to Turkey dropped from 4.47 million in 2014 to 886,000 in 2016.⁵⁹ Thus, Turkey lost almost 3.5 million Russian tourists and almost 3 billion dollars in the tourism sector between 2016 and 2014.⁶⁰ Turkey lost another \$4.5bn annually through the cancellation of construction projects.⁶¹ These huge economic losses have seriously damaged these economic sectors. Following these losses, Turkey repaired relations and Russia lifted most restrictions. Turkey also acted with Russia in the Syrian political crisis to find a solution, and implemented new measures to dissipate the economic losses caused by the Syrian crisis. Nevertheless, the Syrian crisis has subjected Turkey to economic security concerns due to falling tourism income.

55 Buzan, "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century", p. 446.

56 Buzan, *People, States, and Fear*, p. 79-80.

57 Ibid, p. 80.

58 www.ekonomi.gov.tr

59 <https://www.tursab.org.tr/tr/turizm-verileri/istatistikler/milliyetlerine-gore-gelen-yabanci-ziyaretci>, (Accessed Sep 22, 2016).

60 https://www.tursab.org.tr/tr/turizm-verileri/istatistikler/turist-sayisi-ve-turizm-geliri/2003-gelirsayi-ve-ortalama-harcama_68.html, (Accessed Sep 22, 2016).

61 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35209987>, (Accessed Sep 22, 2016).

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Hosting more than 3.6 million⁶² Syrian refugees is another economic burden for Turkey that can be considered a threat to its economic security.⁶³ According to President Erdogan's declaration at the G-20 Summit in July 2017, Turkey has spent more than 30 billion dollars for hosting the refugees.⁶⁴ This is an enormous burden for the Turkish economy. Building a wall to prevent border infiltration, conducting the Euphrates Shield Operation, and arming FSA have all required economic resources. However, these are essential to deter the military and political threats that destabilize Turkey.

In sum, the Syrian refugee issue has become an economic security concern for Turkey. Having allocated its limited funds to providing Syrian refugees with a better life, Turkey requires international aid.

Conclusion

The Syrian crisis has been a destabilizing factor in the Middle East by reshaping the security complex of the region. Syria has also become a venue for a proxy war among major global powers. Turkey is one of the countries greatly affected by this crisis. The paper examines how Turkey's political, military, social and economic security have been affected by the Syrian crisis. To sum up, the risk of Syria's disintegration and probable spillover effects caused by this disintegration, increased radicalism due to the lack of central authority, the infiltration of radical elements into Turkey, the increased power of Syrian Kurds, the US arming of SDF, the risk of Syrian Kurds forming a Northern Corridor to access the Mediterranean Sea, and increasing refugee numbers are the major problems Turkey faces. Given all these, it would perhaps be reasonable to argue that Turkey has been experiencing its most challenging situation since the Second World War.

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62 <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>, (Accessed Sep 22, 2017).

63 International Crisis Group, Turkey's Refugee Crisis, The Politics of Permanence Europe Report No.241, 30 November 2016, p. 2.

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