

Violent Non-State Actors in the Age of GlobalizationÇiğdem GÖRGÜN AKGÜL* Musa AKGÜL** **Özet**

This study analyses the impact of globalization on the rise of violent non-state actors (VNSAs) and their role in current conflicts. It argues that globalization has fundamentally altered the nature of wars by facilitating VNSAs and reshaping the international security landscape. While the globalization process provides VNSAs with access to transnational networks, financing and influence, the immediate factors, particularly in the Middle East, such as state failure, territorial claims and regional rivalry contribute to this phenomenon. Thereby, VNSAs increase transnational security threats and challenge traditional state authority. On the other hand, globalization has transformed conflict dynamics and VNSAs have taken part in new forms of alliances. In this way, the relations between states and VNSAs have become more prevalent and more complicated in the post-Cold War era. To support its arguments, this study primarily relies on academic literature, empirical case examples, reports, and statistical data from conflict databases. It provides insights into the growing effect of VNSAs on global security and their engagement with state actors and makes a contribution to contemporary international relations and security studies.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Globalization, Transnational Threats, Violent Non-State Actors, New Wars, Alliances.

Küreselleşme Çağında Şiddet İçeren Devlet Dışı Aktörler**Abstract**

Bu çalışma, küreselleşmenin devlet dışı silahlı aktörlerin (DDSA) yükselişine ve onların mevcut çatışmalardaki rolüne etkisini analiz etmektedir. Küreselleşme, bu aktörlerin yükselişine zemin hazırlayarak uluslararası güvenlik ortamını yeniden şekillendirmekte ve savaşların doğasını değiştirmektedir. Bu süreç ayrıca DDSA'ların ulusötesi ağlara, finansmana ve nüfuza erişimine fırsat sağlamaktadır. Ortadoğu'daki devletlerin başarısızlığı, toprak talepleri ve bölgesel rekabet gibi faktörler de bu olguya katkıda bulunmaktadır. Böylece DDSA'lar, ulusötesi güvenlik tehditlerini arttırmakta ve geleneksel devlet otoritesine meydan okumaktadır. Öte yandan küreselleşme, çatışma dinamiklerini dönüştürmüştür ve DDSA'lar yeni ittifak biçimlerinde yer almıştır. Bu sebeple Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde devletler ve DDSA'lar arasındaki ilişkiler daha yaygın ve karmaşık hale gelmiştir. Bu çalışma, argümanlarını desteklemek için akademik literatürden, ampirik vaka örneklerinden, raporlardan ve çatışma veri tabanlarından elde edilen istatistiksel verilerden yararlanmaktadır. DDSA'ların küresel güvenlik üzerindeki artan etkisine ve onların devletlerle olan ilişkilerine dair bir kavrayış, güncel uluslararası ilişkiler ve güvenlik çalışmalarına katkıda bulunacaktır.

Keywords: Küreselleşme, Ulusötesi Tehditler, Devlet Dışı Silahlı Aktörler, Yeni Savaşlar, İttifaklar.

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Introduction

Globalization creates an atmosphere suitable for peoples of distinct cultures to co-exist, but it also increases the likelihood of conflict due to the interaction bound to happen among those peoples, thus making the elements of war more and more transnational. This “new” concept of war, which has become transnational as a result of globalization, makes room for new players in the game: violent non-state actors (VNSAs). This fact has changed the structure of alliances formed against the new/transnational threats. Accordingly, with the emergence of VNSAs, states are no longer the only actors able to possess and utilize power in global politics.

It is thus the aim of this study to explore in detail the role of globalization in changing the actors and the nature of conflicts. In this regard, it will look into where globalization stands in the processes by which VNSAs have emerged; the global and regional contexts which have enabled the emergence and rise of VNSAs; what kind of power VNSAs can hold in global and regional politics; how VNSAs have changed the characteristics of war; and where VNSAs are positioned in the traditional International Relations (IR) theories.

As understood, this study examines the effect of globalization on the proliferation of VNSAs and their function in current conflicts. It shows that VNSAs are not only transnational threats in the post-Cold War era but also they are part of new forms of alliances. Globalization has fundamentally altered the nature of war and conflict by facilitating the rise of VNSAs, thereby challenging traditional state authority, reshaping international alliances, and increasing transnational security threats. Through its economic, technological, and political dimensions, it provides VNSAs with access to transnational networks, financing, arms, recruits, and influence. Meanwhile, the state failure, territorial claims and regional rivalry in the Middle East contribute to the proliferation of VNSAs. Therefore, this study considers both global and regional factors, which allows for a

more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Combining structural and immediate factors ensures a holistic perspective.

Moreover, this study integrates Kaldor’s “new wars” theory to demonstrate how globalization reshaped conflict dynamics. Since new wars involve states and non-state actors, current conflicts are no longer purely “interstate” but include transnational networks. The relations between states and VNSAs are becoming more common and more complex. Accordingly, VNSAs can both challenge states and cooperate with them depending on the evolving conditions and geopolitical interests.

This study addresses one of the most significant issues in international relations today: the growing role of VNSAs in global security. So, it aims to contribute to the body of academic literature in international relations, globalization and security studies with conceptual and theoretical perspectives. This discussion is highly relevant to scholarly debates on state sovereignty, transnational threats and non-state actor agency, particularly in the context of globalization.

Methodologically, this study relies on the existing academic literature and policy reports on globalization and VNSAs, and empirical case examples from conflict zones, particularly in the Middle East. It also refers to reliable data sources such as the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) to provide statistical evidence on the general trends in world politics regarding conflict and security dimensions.

The first part of this study will try to present the phenomenon of globalization and explain its role in transnational threats. Additionally, the first part will explore possible definitions of VNSAs and how they have changed certain aspects of war, such as its purposes, methods and financing, benefitting from various empirical and statistical data. The second part will clarify the reasons for the rise of VNSAs, including global factors such as the ending of the bipolar world order and the rise of globalization along with the massive developments in technology; and regional factors

in the Middle East such as state failure, territorial conflicts, and regional competition. The final part will discuss transnational alliances and the place of VNSAs in traditional IR theories as well as how to incorporate VNSAs in terms of new alliance formations, considering their changed nature and complexities.

1. Globalization and Transnational Threats

It is not an easy task to make a precise definition of globalization because it is not an ever-lasting condition but a process with unsteady sources. Bearing this in mind, globalization can be defined as “the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual” (Held et al., 1999: 2). Put differently, it is “a central driving force behind the rapid social, political and economic changes that are reshaping modern societies and world order” (Held et al., 1999: 7). By this way, communities in one region of the world are connected to another, even those far away. Yet, this interconnectedness does not necessarily harmonize diverse societies and cultures but may precipitate new tensions and conflicts.

Globalization is the result of a new page in history where a new global economy has rendered nation-states unnatural or even impossible business units (Ohmae, 1995). Such an approach towards globalization brings economic logic to the foreground in general terms. Accordingly, economic globalization brings about the “denationalization of national economics” through transnational financial networks. This explanation views the rise of the global economy, the development of global governance institutions, and the global transition and diffusion of culture as sign of a new radical world order (Ohmae, 1995). According to this view, since the national economy is becoming an area of ever-increasing transnational socioeconomic activities, the authority of the nation-state is being questioned in the age of globalization. In this approach, globalization is thought of merely in terms of economic trends. However, it is a process

of multiple dimensions. In other words, culture, education, social life, politics, economics and crime are all among the related aspects within which globalization functions (McGrew, 2008).

Moreover, in the process of globalization, the power of national governments in terms of the sustainability of the power they have in regulating international economic activities should not be underestimated. States still hold considerable power in regulating economies and their regulatory power shapes the economic liberalization process. In addition, they will not give up on their position easily (Krasner, 1995). Besides, the geographical dominion area of the international economy is much less global compared to the age of world empires (Held et al., 1999: 5).

On the other hand, rooted inequality and hierarchy patterns have not changed much structurally in the last century. This inequality leads to the advancement of fundamentalism as well as aggressive nationalism and division of the world into civilization blocks, and cultural and ethnic enclaves rather than the emergence of a global civilization (Huntington, 1996).

Globalization dynamics are not completely new; but, contemporary globalization, unlike former periods in history, “is a thick form of globalization or globalism” (McGrew, 2008). Put differently, globalization is a historical process which harbors complexities in it and can take shape depending on the conjunctural factors. It is because of these dualistic features of globalization that renovative terms like “framegration” (fragmentation and integration) (Rosenau, 1997), “glocalization” (globalization and localization) (Robertson, 1995), or “chaord” (chaos and order) (Hock, 1995) have been coined within the studies related to globalization and security. These dualistic forces express the transformative dynamics in global politics (McGrew, 2008: 84-90). Therefore, globalization is not a singular process (economic or cultural) or a linear movement to a known destiny. Retreats and reversals could be part of globalization dynamics, and these dynamics are to be observed

in quite distinct ways in all major areas of life, such as politics, military or environment (McGrew, 2008).

Meanwhile, globalization rebuilds and restructures the nature and configurations of sovereign states by adapting to contemporary conditions/globalized international order (Clark, 2008: 1089-1090). As global politics came about, the distinction between domestic and international politics has become blurred. However, this does not mean that geographical borders are of no political or military importance. It rather means that globalization has challenged such concepts on an ever-increasing level. So, the world is not merely state-centric any longer. States are not the only possessors of authority as authority becomes diffused among public and private agencies at the local, national, regional and global levels (Rosenau, 1997). However, all projects for international order are not coming to an end through globalization. What is happening is the recalibration of the tenets of international order to correspond the new realities (Clark, 2008: 1090).

The fact that the absolute authority of the state is challenged by globalization makes world politics much more complicated by shifting it from “international” to “transnational” through the introduction of non-state actors into the world of politics. While the former refers to states and international interaction taking place between those states, the latter refers to sub-national or non-state actors and their activities without a direct state control (Aydınlı, 2010: 1). Contrary to the international arena in which actors, namely states, are similar to each other, the transnational arena provides an asymmetrical environment for actors. In the former, actors know their opponents and their capabilities; threats are symmetrical and from nation to nation. In the latter, however, actors are quite distinct; the capabilities, desires and even the names of others may not be known to them.

Ultimately, in light of this information, one can say that globalization’s modifying effect prepares grounds for new types of threats and conflicts. It

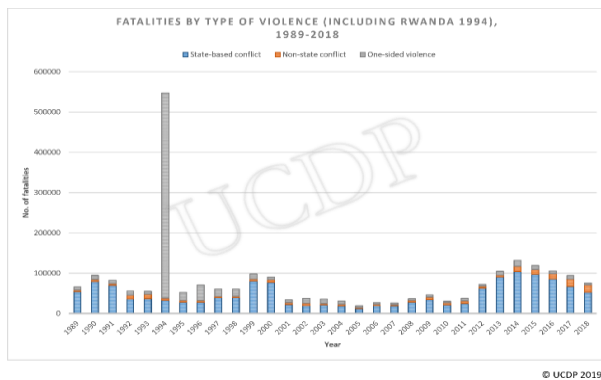
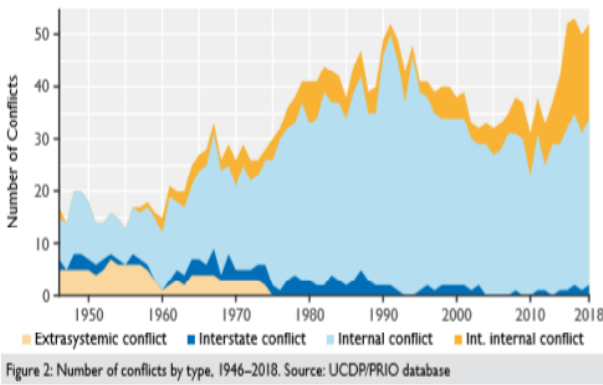
brings different worlds and people together, and differences can become problems. Thenceforth more interaction stems from globalization, and more interaction means more conflict (Aydınlı, 2012: 234). As is understood, not only does globalization harmonize the world by itself, but it also creates an atmosphere, which results in uncertainty, instability and insecurity. With the rise of globalization, matters and adversities regarding security have become more and more transnational and multilevel because globalization increases, widens, and deepens security threats (Munck, 2009: 34).

1. 2. Rise of Violent Non-State Actors

One of the main security threats in today’s world is the rise, rather than the appearance, of VNSAs in addition to global warming, global financial crises, migration, cyber warfare and the like. The striking feature of the existing literature in terms of the conceptualization of VNSAs is the existence of a huge number of VNSAs and their different characteristics. According to the Geneva Call’s Report (2011: 9), VNSAs are “armed entities that are primarily motivated by political goals and operate outside effective state control. They include armed groups, de facto authorities, and non or partially internationally recognized states.” In the view of such information, they can be regarded to be one particular form of non-state actors and described as armed organizations which have the capability of carrying out a systematic (not random) act of violence outside of the control of the state (Vinci, 2008: 299; Krause and Miliken, 2009: 202; Berti, 2016). Yet, it should be emphasized that they use violence instrumentally to realize their targets and political aims.

It is safe to say that there is a general ascending importance of non-state threats in the field of global relations during the post-Cold War era. The rise of non-state threats in the 21st century has been empirically and statistically verified by the

UCDP¹ and the PRIO. Fewer people were killed by organized violence for the fourth successive year in 2018, and 2012 is marked as the year with the lowest level of death. It is seen in Figure (Fatalities in organized violence by type, 1989–2018) that, according to UCDP, there occurred 76,000 fatalities in 2018: “a decrease of 20% compared to 2017, and 43% compared to the latest peak in 2014” (Pettersson et. al. 2019: 589). State-based armed conflict has a role in driving this decreasing trend in organized violence, and the ease of tensions in Syria and Iraq has had a dominant role in bringing about this change. The number of civilian fatalities in one-sided violence appears smaller as well in 2018, with the lowest level since 2012.



¹ UCDP gathers data regarding state-based armed conflict, non-state conflict, and one-sided violence. The categories are distinct from each other and it is possible to name them under the term “organized violence”. One component of *state-based armed conflict* is a situation where the government of a state constitutes at least one of the conflicting parties, which is another way to say that state-based armed conflict is the use of violence between two states or between a government and a rebel group. Yet, when neither of the parties in the conflict are states but

Meanwhile, the non-state conflict level did not go into decline. The fact that there has been an overall decline in terms of fatalities caused by organized violence is not necessarily in compliance with how many active conflicts exist. Actually, a new peak has been reached, following 2014, regarding the number of conflicts, equal solely to the number of conflicts seen during the first years of the 1990s. 2018 was a year when non-state conflict numbers were high; there were more conflicts and more people got killed because of these conflicts that can get out of control. Since 1989, UCDP has recorded 721 non-state conflicts, the annual average of which is 39 active conflicts. 76 non-state conflicts were recorded by UCDP in 2018. Even though this number is below 83 at the peak year of 2017, active non-state conflicts still appear to be at a high level.

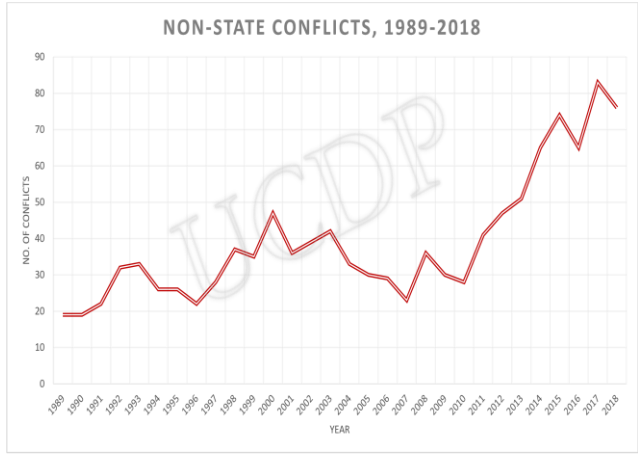
Since 1989, there has never been a year when the amount of recorded non-state violence has been more intense than the last six years. Numerous conflicts among VNSAs in Syria, conflicts among cartels in Mexico, and conflicts between different communities in Nigeria are the main causes of this rise in non-state violence. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) kept being the deadliest VNSA by killing almost 1,800 civilians as per 2018 records. Similar to the years before, violence of this nature affected Syria and Mexico in the worst way, both of which accounted for 30% of the non-state conflicts and 67% of the fatalities (Pettersson et. al. 2019: 591-592).

Until 2014, the general levels of bloody political conflict had been on the decline for decades; the interstate wars do not happen often anymore.² Intrastate conflict has shown a decrease in

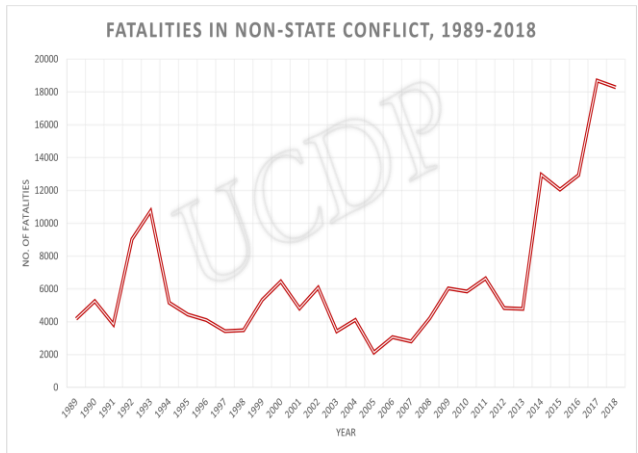
organized groups like rebels or ethnic groups, then the use of armed forces in such conflicts is called *non-state conflict*. When the government of a state, or a formally organized group aiming for civilians who do not possess weapons, uses violence, it is called *one-sided violence*.

² As seen in Figure Number of Conflicts by Type, 1946–2018, interstate conflicts do not happen so frequently; out of 52 conflicts in 2018, merely 2 took place between states. Even though both India and Pakistan declared in May 2018

frequency and magnitude³ (Szayna et. al. 2017: 1). Yet, getting in the way of violence remains a challenging task given the existence of internationalized conflicts and non-state conflicts (Strand et. al. 2019). For instance, in 2018, only 18% of deaths were due to conflicts which states were part of, signifying a continuation of the trend which started during the post-Cold War period when non-state actors targeted civilians more often than states.



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Conflicts taking place in Syria made 2014 one of the deadliest time periods since the Cold War came to an end. However, the wars in Korea,

that they would reactivate the ceasefire agreement signed in 2003, the conflict between the two countries was still active on the borderline at a high level.

³ The decline can be seen more obvious in intrastate wars since the end of the 1960s (disputes where the number of

Vietnam and between Iran and Iraq in the Cold War era were much more violent. One may think, considering the low numbers of battle casualties, that the world we live in is becoming more and more amicable (Goldstein, 2011). So much so that, a few other conflicts witnessed major halts in 2018. Iraq can serve as a good example of this as the number of people who got killed declined by more than 9,000 there, or 92%; the new number was slightly over 800 in December 2017 thanks to the victory won against ISIS in Iraq, and the conflict did not turn into a war in 2018. This phenomenon was observed only one time in 2012 ever since the 2003 US-led coalition started an invasion.

On the other hand, it cannot be said that the drop in violence levels was felt all over the globe. In Yemen, the number of people who were killed nearly doubled since the conflict intensified and came to a state of increasing perplexity due to the involvement of external actors. Afghanistan is another example where historic negotiations to end the increasing violence did not succeed. There, in the last ten years, especially since 2013, violence has been showing an increasing trend. 2018 witnessed a new high in the number of people who lost their lives due to state-based conflict, nearly 26,000, and Afghanistan got ahead of Syria in terms of being affected by this kind of violence in the worst way (Pettersson et. al. 2019: 591).

1.3. New Wars and Violent Non-State Actors

As Clausewitz famously says, war is “an act of force intended to compel our opponents to fulfil our will”, and “a continuation of political intercourse with a mixture of other means” (Sheehan, 2008: 400). It is a brutal form of politics. To think of “war” as happening between states is the result of taking the “Westphalian”

fatalities exceeds 1,000 per year) compared to lower-intensity intrastate conflicts since the mid-1990s (the number of fatalities does not exceed 1,000). Before the wars in Syria, Ukraine and other places happened and changed the situation, intrastate armed conflict had been showing a declining trend for two decades.

state system as the norm (Sheehan, 2008). However, as can be understood from the above statistical information, in contrast to conventional wars or old wars,⁴ one of the parties of the conflict in “new wars” is non-state actors which could act at transnational level, such as diasporas, international companies, mercenaries, terrorist organizations, pirates or international criminal organizations and the like (Kaldor, 2012).

Kaldor asserts that globalization is the primary cause of new wars and defines it as “a contradictory process involving both integration and fragmentation, homogenization and diversification, globalization and localization” (Kaldor, 1999: 3). The swift progress of globalization has become an important factor for the rise of VNSAs in terms of both structure and capacity. The widening, broadening and deepening of security threats because of globalization, as Munck puts it, shook the Weberian sense of the state as the only legitimate perpetrator of violence.

The appeal and capacity of VNSAs has reached a new scale, following the end of the Cold War. Due to the presence of VNSAs into the game, there is a differentiation in terms of the actors of war in new wars. Old wars were fought among the regular armed forces of states, states have lost the monopoly of using power. Yet, with VNSAs becoming international players in the game, the actors of war have changed (Crevelde, 1991; Kaldor, 2013; Mello, 2010). According to Crevelde (1991), traditional states will come to an end and will be replaced by new war organizations. On the contrary, Kaldor (2013: 2) thinks that states will not completely disappear; combinations of states and non-state actor networks (military units, mercenaries, jihadists,

warlords, paramilitaries etc. in addition to regular armies) will characterize new wars.

Moreover, new wars are characterized by the fact that there is little or no difference between combatants and non-combatants and that there is a blurring of war and crime in the context of globalization (Kaldor, 2013). Similarly, the beginning and end of new wars have become vague, and it has been understood that the concepts of armistice and victory are not indispensable. This is why the structure of new wars comes off as challenging to international law.

As for the purposes of old and new wars; Kaldor (2013: 2) thinks that while old wars are fought within geopolitical and ideological interests, identity politics (or ethnic, sectarian, or religious identity crisis) plays a significant role in new wars. Two main factors, in relation to globalization, contribute to the making of identity politics. As Kaldor puts it, one factor is the harsh reaction to the established political classes’ increasing ineffectiveness and waning legitimacy. The other one is the emergence of insecurity stemming from globalization, which has left many people without jobs, and caused the depletion of resources and disparities in income (Kaldor, 2001: 81-86). Kaldor consequently argues that the only way to understand new wars is through thinking of it within the framework of globalization. She also contends that the intensification of interconnectedness “has meant that ideological and/or territorial cleavages of an earlier era have increasingly been supplanted by an emerging political cleavage between...cosmopolitanism, based on inclusive, multicultural values and the politics of particularist identities” (Kaldor, 1999: 6).

⁴ According to Kaldor, old wars are a modern phenomenon which has taken place in parallel with the historical progress of the formation of modern state structure, which goes back to Westphalia. Between the 17th and late 20th century, the type of war polity changed in the order of absolutist state, nation-state, coalition of states, and blocs, respectively. Meanwhile, standing armies at peaceful times were introduced; soldiers became the agents of rational-legal

authority and were distinguished from civilians with their uniforms. The evolution of the modern state rendered a number of distinctions visible. These distinctions are: public-private, internal-external, economic-political, civil-military, and legitimate bearer of arms and the non-combatant or criminal.

Another change that has happened due to the transition from old wars to new wars is regarding the perception of the enemy and the method of fighting this enemy. Rather than destroying the military units of the enemy as in old war, killing the enthusiasm and willpower of the people of the target country for combat has become the main purpose. Among methods to achieve this purpose are information operations or collaborations over proxy groups or with VNSAs. Considering the cost and destructiveness of war weapons, it can be said that the economic consequences of the war will be more severe if the purpose is to destroy the enemy. On the other hand, killing the willpower of the target country for combat will mean being able to get the desired policies accepted by the other side. All of these factors will also make armed non-state actors more appealing and will pave the way for them to play a part in the international arena.

Likewise, Kaldor (2013: 2-3) states that the main determinant in old wars is combat, and the main method is to capture regions via military means. She establishes, however, that in new wars there will not be as much combat, and regions will be captured through political means by controlling local people. The typical way to do this, in her opinion, is to replace the local population by force with a community of different identities and to use violence directly against civilians. Mello (2010: 5-8), on the other hand, asserts that *asymmetrical* war strategies have gained importance instead of two symmetrical regular military units confronting each other, as a consequence of which terrorism and armed non-state actors have become a main component of new wars.

Comparing old wars and new wars in terms of financing models, Kaldor claims that the financing of old wars is mainly provided in an autarkical manner (being self-sufficient without external support) through central taxation and pressing people into service (Kaldor, 2013: 3). She also states that the financing of new wars depends on a globalized and decentralized economy as well as developing technological facilities. While globalization provides

information flow and new technology to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights movements on the one hand, it has also eased the development of terrorist networks and transnational crimes (smuggling, fundraising, individual sponsorship and diaspora support for criminal and terrorist activities) on the other.

As Zhidkova puts it, “Internet in particular has allowed NGOs such as Greenpeace or Doctors Without Borders to raise money for their activities and recruit new volunteers, but the same is also true for the terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda or Hezbollah” (2015:3). Further, it may not be possible to track the money transferring activities of certain people who utilize legal companies with the purpose of funding illegal operations, just like Osama bin Laden who legally founded oil companies which provided funding to the Jihadist network. The forged documentation sector of human trafficking is another example of this phenomenon (Aydınlı, 2016: 10). In contrast to the old wars, the fighting agents in the new wars fund themselves via the black market, looting and external aid, rather than legal taxes. Kaldor’s argument can be summarized as follows:

	Old Wars	New Wars
Agents	States	States & Non-State Actors (Terrorists, Warlords, Private Security Contractors, Cartels, etc.)
Aims	Geo-Political Interests	Identity Politics
Methods	Control of Territory	Control of Population
Financing	Taxation	Black Market, Smuggling & External Support

Last but not least, when making the distinction between “old” and “new” wars, Kaldor accepts that new wars are not a completely new thing. Although the essence of war never changes, its characteristics have changed (Sheehan, 2008: 406). She rather expresses that this kind of division would be beneficial to know how and to what degree new wars are different from the old

ones (Kaldor, 2005: 498). Hence, new wars (or “network wars” in Kaldor’s terminology) have caused a substantial alteration in the basic characteristics of wars in terms of agents, aims, methods and financing, but not in its nature.

In addition, these changes can be understood better in recognition of sociological and political changes (stemming mainly from identity issues) rather than technological and tactical changes (Kaldor, 2005: 491). Networks (VNSAs) may exploit common religious and ethnic identities as a main organization principle, and war itself functions as an *instrument* through which to mobilize groups around a certain discourse (Kaldor, 2003: 120-122). In this way, the war itself can be instrumentalized in order to extend and strengthen the network. It is nearly impossible to end these wars because the continuation of the war is for the benefit of conflicting parties to sustain their identities as if there is a tacit agreement between them. Therefore, these limited wars do not escalate into total war because their inner dynamics are continuous and endless (Kaldor, 2010: 271-272).

2. Reasons for the Rise of Violent Non-State Actors

2. 1. Global Factors

The post-Cold War environment, whereby multiple transnational networks of violence came about via the collapse of the bipolar world order, has shaped how we see non-state actors (Josselin and Wallece, 2001). These new networks, resorting to organized violence, went counter to not only states but also identities, ideologies and norms of world politics (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Aliyev, 2017). There are two interrelated reasons why VNSAs blossomed in world politics during the post-Cold War period: the ending of the bipolar world order and the rise of globalization along with the massive developments in technology.

International interactions throughout the Cold War were of a more state-centric nature, which kept VNSAs under control (Zhidkova, 2015: 6-7). This way discontents, disagreements and

hostilities of various ethnic, religious or cultural groups were masked. However, once the Cold War ended, these masked hostilities pop up and the actions of non-state actors started to escalate. According to the grievance models of civil wars, lower-level grievance factors (ethnic, sectarian, religious) were mainly concealed by the nuclear war threat. In contrast, during the post-Cold War era, respective geographies witnessed the appearance of these grievance factors, as a consequence of which VNSAs came forward forming a main transnational source of threat (Collier and Sambanis, 2002). Sub-identities emerged as an alternative form of identity in places where there was not a sound relationship between the state and citizens. When a state’s legitimacy is being questioned, it is common for societies to be divided based on kinship, ethnicity, or sectarian affiliations (Kasfir, 2010).

The ending of the struggle between the US and the Soviet Union regarding politics and ideology created an environment where transnational activities could take place with less difficulty (Aydınlı, 2008: 904). At this point, the results of globalization during the post-Cold War period should be analyzed carefully to understand these conflicts since globalization brings multiple cultures in contact with each other. The fact that it has become much easier to communicate thanks to the developments in communication technology ultimately causes more interaction between people of different cultures. This process sometimes leads to the intensification of enmities among different ethnic, religious or cultural groups.

Thanks to the developments in communication and transportation technologies, VNSAs have been better able to acquire weapons, find necessary resources, share information and build connections with other actors (Williams, 2008: 6). So, they have taken advantage of technological developments, which have improved the capability of reaching out worldwide connections (Kıras, 2008: 697). Therefore, the technologies that have advanced in parallel with globalization have helped VNSAs to be more effective and

extend their reach. To illustrate, Lashkar-e-Tayyaba used social media platforms to radicalize and recruit young fighters (Fair, 2019). Likewise, the Taliban recruited foreign fighters by online radicalization (Giustozzi, 2019). Further, while Al-Shabaab benefitted diaspora networks for fundraising (Anzalone, 2016), Al-Qaeda benefitted from the global *hawala* system to financially support its terror networks (Napoleoni, 2005). Furthermore, it is known that the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) have long utilized the global cocaine trade (Otis, 2014). Similarly, Mexican cartels exploit international transportation routes to smuggle drugs and weapons. Additionally, Boko Haram abuses migration routes for human trafficking (Comolli, 2015).

“New” VNSAs have the capacity to endure globally within the international system despite the recurring oppression coming from the state or states. The transnational spaces have proved to be quite resourceful for VNSAs in terms of attaining power and arms (Aydınlı, 2016: 17). Physical spaces (e.g., failed states), as well as non-physical spaces (e.g., cyberspace), could exist in transnational space. A VNSA could turn to these transnational spaces, instead of the sponsorship of states, in order to attain security and to exchange opinions, know-how, resources and the like. Exchanges of this kind could happen in the physical transnational space (e.g., not using banks but using couriers in order to transfer money) or the non-physical (e.g., using online platforms for propaganda). This brings us to a new understanding of transnational capacity which differs inherently in terms of not demanding or receiving any support from nation-states (Pearlstein, 2004).

Additionally, more practical, more insidious, more effective and deadlier weapons (such as nuclear weapons, mass destruction and ballistic missiles) became widespread with the developments in technology. This situation caused more people to suffer as a result of the attacks carried out and increased the severity,

psychological dimension, and societal impact of the activities (Dutka, 2006: 5). Then, because of the deterrence caused by this situation, states started to avoid facing one another directly and began to carry out fights against one another indirectly (Mumford, 2013: 41). This tendency of states increased their need for proxies and the appeal of VNSAs in their eyes (Rondeaux and Sterman, 2019: 16-18). All these factors have increased the complexity of VNSAs, have changed their nature and have given acceleration to their activities.

2. 2. Regional Factors in the Middle East

The Middle East has seen numerous violent conflicts, uprisings, revolutions, coups, civil wars and foreign invasions since the end of the Cold War. Alongside the global factors, the regional factors contributed to the rise of VNSAs. These factors can be listed as: state failure, territorial conflicts, and regional competition.

The first one of these regional factors is state failure (Mulaj, 2014). State failure can be defined as the decline in the state’s ability to preserve its monopoly over the use of violence and to fulfill “the requirements of statehood” (Vinci, 2008: 298). In broader terms, such requirements correspond to failure to deliver welfare and security, maintain border security, and represent the population. Political, economic and social spheres are where failure happens (Rotberg, 2010: 2-14). Providing basic public goods to the citizens, including human security, becomes impossible under a failed state, which means the Weberian criteria of a nation-state are not met anymore.

There are several states in the Middle East without having monopoly over the use of violence within their borders, which signifies the capability of VNSAs to exercise a significant amount of power in the political affairs of the region. Indeed, states are getting weaker and weaker due to the extent and nature of ongoing conflicts in the region. Thereby, VNSAs are able to have a say in regional politics (Dallas-Feeney, 2019: 2). For example, among the failed states in the region are Yemen,

Iraq, Syria and Libya, which function as a haven for VNSAs.

State failure happens over the course of time. The emergence of VNSAs could be taken as one of the events likely to happen as a state comes closer to failure. Lack of legitimacy, an excessively authoritarian character, failing to fulfill citizen demands and preventing violence directed towards citizens are some of the reasons leading to state failure (Williams, 2008: 5-6). In brief, it is capacity, security and legitimacy gaps that cause the failure of states, followed by VNSAs filling this gap and acting as a parallel state authority. In addition to challenging the military units of states by using force, VNSAs challenge government and local municipalities as well via such non-violent means as construction, maintenance, law provision and financial redistribution. Consequently, what is challenged by VNSAs is the legitimacy and borders of a state in that given territorial confine.

As pointed out by the state failure theories, violence among civilians happens before or during the collapse of a state, and state capacity and legitimacy are further weakened if it persists (Rotberg, 2010). It should, however, be mentioned that the likelihood of VNSAs actively playing a role in failing a state is less than VNSAs, along with civil strife, emerging as a result of state failure (Aliyev, 2017: 1978). State failure is a factor which increases the likelihood of an extensive amount of civil violence (Aliyev, 2017) as state institutions are overrun with “domestic anarchy”, which distorts social order and puts human security at risk if the central government collapses (Vinci, 2008: 296). Should states fail to carry out their administrative tasks, the legitimacy of states gets imperiled (Holzscheiter, 2005). Then, non-state challengers are better able to damage the state institutions whose legitimacy is questioned. In the same manner, the excessively authoritarian character of a state brings about the collapse of the state. It eases the rise of VNSAs and creates a self-feeding cycle of violence. In fact, a state escalating the level of violence against its citizens creates

legitimacy problems and forms an open gap for counter-violence. The degree of violence committed by an excessively authoritarian and illegitimate regime throughout the Syrian civil war is a pertinent example of how this led to a vicious cycle of violence.

The second factor causing the rise of VNSAs is territorial conflicts/demands. In addition to being a practical tool that makes VNSAs feel safe, make use of the natural resources in the region, and gain geographical advantage in conflicts; territory is one of the most significant tokens of belonging and identity formation at the same time. In this context, there are two dimensions of the way VNSAs perceive the concept of territoriality: the meaning attributed to the concept of territoriality and the tactical dimension of territoriality (Jabareen, 2015: 52-55). For instance, natural habitus is perceived differently by ISIS and YPG (People’s Protection Units); on the one hand, ISIS regards itself as the legitimate power in Sunni majoritarian areas of Iraq and Syria, but YPG takes a more ethno-nationalist approach in the areas where Kurds are the majority (Oktav et al., 2018).

Various kinds of political or military measures are taken by VNSAs with the aim of securing the perceived territory. In this way, it is ensured that that piece of territory is perceived as part of the envisioned identity. This way, all of these are used tactically to construct that identity in a manner that will also include violence (Vollaard, 2009). For instance, Hamas remains quite perseverant in terms of resisting the Israeli occupation and resorts to violence to force Israel to engage in negotiations to ensure the independence of Palestine. The Palestinian territory is the essential element of its identity and use of violence.

Thirdly, it is necessary to touch upon the significance of regional dynamics in the context of how VNSAs are becoming significant actors, particularly in the Middle East. The competition for regional hegemony between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a well-known case (Gause, 2014). Instead of direct confrontation, states support violent groups as per that hegemonic competition

(Byman, 2005). Accordingly, regional geopolitical rivalry increases the interaction between states and VNSAs and offers an environment in which VNSAs gain importance. Hence, due to the rivalry between states, VNSAs find opportunities to consolidate their powers, become more organized, advance their structures and lay the social groundwork through which to form identities. To illustrate, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), formed as a state-backed actor, came into being with the support of Iran for the purpose of protecting the people of Shia and the sacred cities in Iraq and became an alternative power in the region. Moreover, Hezbollah is a prominent ally of Iran, and it has been capable of exerting a dramatic influence in matters related to the balance of power in the Middle East (Dallas-Feeney, 2019: 7).

It is already mentioned that the state failure creates a power gap and thus paves the way for the proliferation of VNSAs. Instead of directly interfering to fill this gap, states usually prefer to cooperate with the domestic non-state actors, which is a less risky method, and use them as a tool for foreign policy. Put differently, VNSAs, ranging from rebels to militias, from guerrillas to terrorists, from warlords to criminal organizations, from paramilitaries to private security companies, could be explicitly or implicitly backed up by states (Schneckenner, 2006: 25-27). This is because these non-state actors are from the country in question, so they can reach out to necessary people or places, and they are more familiar with the atmosphere; it is merely that they are in need of any resources that would strengthen their finances and military. Hence, states try to actualize their own political agendas over these actors, and non-state actors shape the rivalry between the regional and international powers (Gause, 2014), even though this relationship does not always have to be asymmetrical and how autonomous non-state proxies could be and what leverage they hold over the patron state may change over time depending on the conditions and context (Kausch, 2017: 3).

3. Transnational Alliances

As emphasized above, once the Cold War ended, non-state actors and their transnational relations started to have a critical position in global politics. In other words, “multipolarity has supplanted bipolarity” (Rondeaux and Sterman, 2019: 4). This situation has revealed the significance of VNSAs in the geopolitical calculus of both global and regional powers. This fact indicated a major shift in conventional understanding of international relations as interstate relations (Halliday, 2001: 28; Aydın, 2015: 424-425; Charountaki, 2018; Oktav et al. 2018; Yeşiltaş and Kardaş, 2018). The current international system is *de facto* far from the Westphalian system centered upon nation-states. VNSAs challenge traditional patterns of the international system, the legitimacy of nation-states and the official territorial borders. Further, contrary to Weberian understanding, nation-states no longer have the monopoly of using violence within their given territories. Today, VNSAs have the capability of mass killings and tremendous levels of damage with the developments in technology (Dutka, 2006). Thus, their existence should be taken into account in international politics.

However, traditional IR theories, especially state-centric IR theories, have not paid adequate attention to VNSAs, and they have been ontologically, epistemologically and theoretically ignored (Wight, 2006: 293-294; Mulaj, 2014: 1; Charountaki, 2018; Oktav et al., 2018). According to the realist perspective, particularly classical realism and neorealism, states are the main actors of international politics (Waltz, 1979). Even though VNSAs might challenge the state authority, they are frequently considered tools or byproducts of geopolitical competition between states rather than autonomous actors, which might influence international power politics (Mearsheimer, 2001). VNSAs can be used by states to advance their strategic objectives, especially in proxy or asymmetric warfare (Byman, 2005). Therefore, VNSAs are typically viewed as secondary to the actions of sovereign states from a realist

perspective. On the other hand, the liberal perspective places more emphasis on cooperation, institutions, interdependence and norms, rather than power politics alone (Keohane and Nye, 1977). Despite their acceptance of the state-centric viewpoint of realism, liberalism and neoliberalism also recognize the impact of non-state actors, both violent and non-violent, on international affairs (Weaver, 1996: pp. 162-165). Nevertheless, they primarily concentrate on benign non-state actors and their liberal agendas (Aydınlı, 2015: 426). According to them, international institutions and multinational companies may lead global governance and a new world order (Slaughter, 2005). However, liberal analyses do not deeply explore VNSAs since they pose serious threats to the establishment of a stable and law-based global order (Ikenberry, 2010: pp. 517-518).

As a result, a comprehensive analytical framework for examining the function and effects of VNSAs on international relations has not been developed by traditional state-centric IR theories in the age of globalization. Although both have adapted to changing circumstances in world politics with globalization and attempted to offer alternative frameworks by including the rising role of VNSAs (Pierman, 2015), they still assume that the present-day VNSAs are just the continuation of its historical examples and are far from explaining the complexity and changing nature of VNSAs (Valensi, 2015).

VNSAs play an important role in global politics and directly influence foreign policy decisions of the regional and global powers (Vinci, 2008; Charountaki, 2018). Their transnational role has blurred the demarcation lines between the state and non-state actors and created a *grey zone* where they both act together. Moreover, both actors have relative advantages in negotiating and maintaining a certain amount of leverage over each other on diverse issues, and both have various options to choose from and ally with. While states offer financial, military and political support to non-state actors, the local expertise, the risk-taking inclination and elasticity of non-state

actors in turn decrease the risks and costs for states in their policies on the field. Therefore, there is a delicate bargaining and two-way process in the transnational alliances between states and VNSAs.

The scarcity of academic studies in the literature about VNSAs and the lack of theoretical framework do not necessarily signify the non-existence of VNSAs and their relations with states; it however means that they have been neglected (Halliday, 2001; Kausch, 2017; Charountaki, 2018; Oktav et al. 2018; Yeşiltaş and Kardaş, 2018). Thus, in contrast to the perception of VNSAs as anti-government and anti-state actors in existing research on state failure, they can be both challengers and partners to states depending on the changing circumstances.

In light of such information, new alliance formations, namely alliances with non-state actors (or *transnational alliances*), have started to become common in the post-Cold War period. This situation was clearly exemplified again through the alliances formed amid the turmoil of the current Syrian civil war: alliances such as between Iran and Hezbollah and the US and the YPG. Regarding the relations between states and VNSAs, these relations appear to signify an “example of alliance” instead of an example of proxy war or extension of geopolitics by different means. Be they through formal or informal means, alliances happen between two or more actors to defy a mutual foe or threat (Walt, 1987: 12). From the perspective of traditional IR theories, these actors and threats are mainly states. Yet, VNSAs, as the agents, are not necessarily to act on the behalf of the states (as the principal) as opposed to the general tendency in the proxy warfare literature (Rondeaux and Sterman, 2019: 20). Therefore, they can be part of alliances to confront common enemies and threats.

As a result, a solid theoretical framework is required to comprehend transnational alliances. The changing nature of alliances against transnational threats must be elaborated empirically as well. In this way, we can get a solid

grasp of the implications of trans-nationalization on alliances. This can only be satisfied by the incorporation of globalization and the VNSAs into the IR theories with a critical and holistic approach. In line with this purpose, answers to the following questions should be sought: when and why do states need alliances; what are alignment choices for states in the era of transnational relations; what motivates them to make alliances with VNSAs; what alliance groupings may or may not come into existence; how do they form; how do states justify their alliances with VNSAs; and how do these alliances have effect the existing structure of the traditional alliances of states. It appears that the traditional Cold War theories of alliances based on the inside-outside or internal-external distinctions are not fully efficient in bringing a thorough explanation to the alliances formed in today's world politics. They are mainly state-centric and exclusive of alliances between states and VNSAs. Yet, in the age of globalization, there are fewer wars between states while the number of transnational threats is on the rise.

Conclusion

It is no doubt that VNSAs have drastically changed the characteristics of the wars. Benefitting from the transnational context created by globalization, VNSAs have become important actors whose existence and power cannot be underestimated. Their activity rate increased despite the general downward trend in the number of casualties in organized violence. This situation exemplifies how states are no longer the only agency exercising power to achieve political aims in world politics. So, the factual inclusion of VNSAs into the political stage has changed our perception of wars in terms of their actors, purposes, methods and financing. In new wars, the power and authority of states are challenged by VNSAs. Identity politics has become a driving force as opposed to geopolitical and ideological interests and controlling populations via political means has become a more important method vis a vis capturing regions via military means as in old

wars. Besides, globalized and decentralized economy has become the main way of financing.

The end of the Cold War making transnational activities easier, the advancements in technology allowing for better use of physical and non-physical space, and states no longer wanting to endure the costly results of wars are among the global factors enabling VNSAs to strengthen. Additionally, regional factors such as state failure due to the lack of legitimacy and an excessively authoritarian character, territorial conflicts/demands, and regional power rivalry also play a key role in the rise of VNSAs, especially in the Middle East.

Consequently, globalization has a notable part in the making of such a change in how conflicts take place, and VNSAs are now an undeniable part of global politics. The “new wars” constitute an arena where VNSAs can function and operate as significant actors in wars. This is precisely why IR theories are in need of examining this significant actor in more depth in terms of their role in new wars and transnational alliances. This would provide a more accurate picture of world politics and its underlying dynamics, which is what this study is attempting to do.

To this end, the case studies which will be selected based on their influence on global security, their engagement with state actors, and their role in reshaping alliance structures would help to understand the impact of globalization on the role of VNSAs in today's world politics. In this regard, comparative studies would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how globalization impacts different types of VNSA based on their motivations, strategies, funding sources, geopolitical influence, and relations with states. Meanwhile, this study primarily relies on secondary data. Yet, future research could incorporate interviews with security analysts and policymakers to provide firsthand insights into state-VNSA relations. Additionally, expanding the dataset could provide further quantitative validation of the study's findings.

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