

RUSSIA & TURKEY AS STRATEGIC ROLE PLAYERS IN SYRIAN CRISIS*

Suriye Krizi'nde Stratejik Aktörler Olarak Rusya ve Türkiye

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Abstract

This paper examines the roles of Turkey and Russia as strategic actors in Syrian crisis and draw a light into theoretical debates on the issue. The two states with their efforts in Astana, Sochi and Ankara talks have made significant contribution to the lasting peace in the country. The initiatives of the two countries have saved many civilian lives. This prevented Syria from turning into the next Libya. In addition, Turkey's Open-Door Policy has prevented new humanitarian crisis.

Keywords: Turkey, Russia, Syrian Crisis, Military Intervention, Strategic Expectation

Öz

Bu makale, Türkiye ve Rusya'nın Suriye Krizi'nde rollerini stratejik boyutta incelemekte ve konuyla ilgili teorik tartışmalara ışık tutmaktadır. Zira her iki devletin de Astana, Soçi ve Ankara müzakerelerinde gösterdikleri çabalarla kalıcı barışın sağlanmasına yönelik sürece önemli etki yaptığı bilinmektedir. Bu ülkelerin inisiyatif alması, birçok sivilin hayatını kurtarmıştır. Bu da Suriye'nin Libya'ya dönüşmesini engellemiştir. Ayrıca Türkiye'nin uyguladığı açık kapı politikası da yeni insani dramlar yaşanmasını engellemiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Rusya, Suriye Krizi, Askeri Müdahale, Stratejik Beklenti

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Introduction

Syrian crisis has been one of the most complicated humanitarian crises of our time being both internal, interstate and international issue with some non-state actors that tackled the norms of international relations, hindered the security and threat perceptions of many states. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)¹ in August 2018, Syrian crisis affected 13.1 million people, out of which 5.3 million are children. In addition, as of September 17, 2018 there were more than 5.6 million registered Syrian refugees according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)², 2.5 million of them are refugee children. Cordesman and Nerguizian³ claim that presently Syria is disunited in chaos with no good prospects for stability and security. Diplomacy neither gives any hope for a permanent ceasefire, nor does it present any inclination towards feasible economic and political solution.

So far there has been different narratives of why the crisis emerged and why it escalated to today's levels in Syria. I will consider some of the narratives very briefly in the following paragraphs.

The literature written by Wieland⁴ and Lesch⁵ similarly concentrate on the personality of Assad in order to explain the uprisings due to his inability to carry out reforms. But these two aforementioned scholars do not emphasize the monarchical regime and power transfer from Hafez al-Assad to Bashar al-Assad.

1 "UNICEF Syria Crisis Situation Report-August 2018," *Relief Web*, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unicef-syria-crisis-situation-report-august-2018-humanitarian-results>, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

2 "UNHCR Situation Syria Regional Refugee Response-February 2019", *Operational Portal Refugee Situations*, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/113>, (Date of Accession: 08.06.2019).

3 Anthony Cordesman-Aram Nerguizian, "The Case for and Against a Realist Strategy in Syria", *CSIS*, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/case-and-against-realist-strategy-syria>, (Date of Accession 07.02.2019).

4 Carsten Wieland, *Syria-a Decade of Lost Chances: Repression and Revolution from Damascus Spring to Arab Spring*, Cune Press, Seattle 2012, p. 104.

5 David Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2013.

On the contrary, Burgat⁶ implies that the uprising happened due to authoritarian state that the uprising was a struggle against it. On the other hand, scholars like Seale⁷ and Balanche⁸ call the uprising a sectarian, pointing at the mutual kidnappings and killings between Sunni and Alawi societies of Homs and the latter arguing that the geography of the revolt shows a mobilization from Sunni populated regions with a small participation of Kurdish populations from other regions. Furthermore, Byman⁹ who concluded that Syrian crisis is a sectarian civil war in nature where Alawi-run state confronts with insurgency from Syrian Sunnis. Landis¹⁰ also calls Assad's regime a minority rule with his family on top. He claimed that regime used patronage to win the loyalty of different social groups by linking their interests to itself.

Unlike aforementioned rhetoric Gerges¹¹ asserts that the uprising erupted because of the socio-economic inequalities that made large portions of the population feel isolated. On the other hand, Abboud,¹² after examining the contemporary history of Syria and the revolt implementing a macro-level analysis concludes with two main factors for the uprising. First the lack of democracy and the second being growing inequalities. On a similar note Rafizadeh¹³ argued that neoliberal and economic liberalization policies that Assad undertook without simultaneous political reforms to reallocate the wealth dramatically worsened the

6 Francois Burgat, *al-Assad's Strategy: Divide to Survive: In No Spring for Syria* Discovery, Paris 2013, p. 32.

7 "Civil War in Syria must be Averted", *Gulf News*, <https://gulfnews.com/opinion/op-eds/civil-war-in-syria-must-be-averted-1.937023>, (Date of Accession 24.02.2019).

8 Fabrice Balanche, *Geography of the Syrian Revolt: Outre Terre*, 2011, https://scholar.google.com/scholar_url?url=https://www.cairn.info/load_pdf.php%3FID_ARTICLE%3D-OUTE_029_0437%26download%3D1&hl=en&sa=T&oi=ucasa&ct=ufr&ei=v3xzXa63I-J3KsQKB0K2ABA&scisig=AAGBfm0Mi8lvV2e0oX96Mu8Jugkg2d2PAw (Date of Accession 27.02.2019), p. 438.

9 Daniel Byman, *Sectarianism Afflicts the New Middle East*, *Survival* 56, 1, 2014, p. 83.

10 Joshua Landis, "The Syrian Uprising of 2011: Why the Asad Regime Is Likely to Survive to 2013", *Middle East Policy*, 19(1), 2012, p. 72-73.

11 Fawaz Gerges, *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, p. 34.

12 Samer Abboud, *Syria's War Economy*, *Carnegie Middle East Center*, 2014, p. 23-24, <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/54131>, (Date of Accession 19.01.2019).

13 "In Syria, Follow the Money to Find the Roots of the Revolt", *The Daily Beast*, 2013, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/04/08/in-syria-follow-the-money-to-find-the-roots-of-the-revolt.html>, (Date of Accession 21.01.2019).

disparity line between the rich and the poor. Daher¹⁴ claimed the fact of having no instrument for the masses to communicate their complaints through government institutions, strikes and popular mobilization followed. Thus, he argues that socio-economic and political characteristics have brought about the circumstances that gave rise to the uprising.

Having looked at the rhetoric on endogenous factors I will now consider the scholars who have argued on the exogenous factors. Zizek¹⁵ described the uprising in Syria as a “pseudo struggle” which lacks the fundamental liberating opposition. He claims that the scene does not include any unifying coalition with democratic ideas, but rather is composed of complex ethnic and religious associations that are influenced by the interests of superpowers. Similar arguments are seen works of Ali¹⁶ and Zakaria¹⁷ who classified the uprising as a conspiracy carried out by external powers, as well as “a false spring” under the scenario of Libya. Last but not the least, Phillips¹⁸ opposes the idea of foreign conspiracy. However, he gives explanations on how several regional and international players from the beginning of uprising were playing a key role in empowering the regime and the opposition.

The crisis has attracted a big international involvement starting with US-led coalition, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Gulf States, Russia, Turkey and Hezbollah¹⁹ as well as many non-state armed groups as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Ad Dawlah al Islamiyah fil ash Sham/DEASH), al Nusra Front, Kurdish fighters and Syrian opposition groups. The current situation in Syria implies

14 Joseph Daher, *Révolution and Counter-Revolution in Syria, Origins and Developments*, Université de Lausanne, Faculté des Sciences Sociales et Politiques, Lausanne 2018, (PhD), 2018, p. 52.

15 “Syria is a Pseudo-Struggle”, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2013/sep/06/syria-pseudo-struggle-egypt> (Date of Accession 13.03.2019).

16 Ali Tariq, “What’s Really Going on in Syria?”, *Russia Today*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZAdoLueRSY>, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

17 Fareed Zakaria, “Obama Caves to Conventional Wisdom on Syria”, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/fareed-zakaria-obama-caves-to-conventional-wisdom-on-syria/2014/07/10/6a60ad74-085c-11e4-a0dd-f2b22a257353_story.html, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

18 Christopher Phillips, *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2016.

19 Daher, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

complicated security issue due to the division between extremist rebels, Arab rebels and DEASH fighters, Arabs and Kurds. Looking at the numbers of different groupings in Syria from a wide angle one can observe divisions in each of them which complicates the security issue.²⁰

Moreover, Alkaff and Yussof²¹ claim that international diplomacy failed to produce a resolution despite the efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab League and the United Nations (UN). The work claims that the disunity among rebel groups is one of the reasons, along with the interests of foreign players, turned Syria into a ground where competition for dominance is constantly taking place. Disunity and infightings have severely weakened the oppositions' offensives against the regime. The disunity has even touched the Free Syrian Army (FSA) which has constantly failed to unite the opposition forces mainly due to two reasons. First, because of the growing number of opposition members. Second, the small groups breaking away from the main factions due to the ideological dissimilarity when it comes to the issue of Islamic governance.²²

Joseph Daher²³ similarly claims that there is a disunity amongst Syrian opposition groups, but he gives different explanation saying that before the uprising Syria was maintaining good ties both with the west and the east. The emergence of the uprisings and rapid militarization has made it unfeasible. Syria became dependent on support coming from Russia and Iran.

Most importantly, lack of common unified policy and commitment to the cause of ending the conflict amongst the "Friends of the Syrian People" have cultivated a ground where only difference of interests could occur and therefore cause divisions in the rebelling opposition groups. The emergence and expansion

20 Anthony Cordesman-Aram Nerguizian, "The Case for and Against a Realist Strategy in Syria", CSIS, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/case-and-against-realist-strategy-syria>, (Date of Accession 07.02.2019).

21 Syed Alkaff-NurulHuda Yussof, "An Overview of the Syrian Conflict", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 8(8), p. 10-11.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Daher, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

of DEASH made the Western coalition and some Arab countries of the region concentrate on fighting terrorism, similarly the growing power and expansion of Democratic Union Party (PYD) changed the priorities of Ankara towards Syria. Gulf Monarchies stopped their assistance to armed opposition groups after they multiple defeats by the pro-regime forces. Thus, all external actors had to increasingly concentrate on the priorities of their national interests.²⁴

Out of all foreign actors there are two most important players that are playing increasingly vital role on taking decisions in Syria one being a the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member Turkey and the other Russia. Both of the players have stakes involved in the conflict which are of strategic importance.

Russia's initial official stance was as follows:²⁵

"Moscow is convinced that the situation in the country must be resolved by the Syrians themselves without outside interference through an inclusive dialogue, which is the only way to solve the crisis. It is important that this position found reflection in the statement."

Furthermore, Russia firmly stands on the point of territorial unity of Syria, although it sees communal power-sharing deal as in the case of Lebanon as a solution for stability.²⁶

As of September 2015, Russia stepped into Syria where DEASH and oppositions factions were having an advantage over the regime forces.²⁷ According to World Wide Threat Assessment (WWTA)²⁸ as well as Daher²⁹ Russia's intervention increasingly

24 Daher, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

25 "On the Security Council Presidential Statement on Syria (August 4, 2011)", *Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, http://www.mid.ru/en/maps/sy/-/asset_publisher/9fcjSOwMERcf/content/id/198418, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

26 Dmitriy Trenin, "Putin's Plan for Syria", *Carnegie*, <https://carnegie.ru/2017/12/13/putin-s-plan-for-syria-pub-75001>, (Date of Accession 10.02.2019).

27 Current Context, "Syrian Civil War", <http://chssp.ucdavis.edu/current-context/syrian-war.pdf>, (Date of Accession 12.02.2019).

28 "World Wide Threat Assessment." 2018, *U.S. Intelligence Community*, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/world-wide-threat-assessment>, (Date of Accession 10.02.2019).

29 Daher, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

shifted the balance of the war to the regime's favor which would otherwise turn into another Libya. However, it does not imply that the intervention can bring an end to the conflict.

Turkey initially has had similar stance towards the Syrian conflict according to the website of the Foreign Affairs Ministry of the Republic of Turkey:³⁰

"Since day one, Turkey has pursued a policy aimed at preserving Syria's territorial integrity and unity, ending the bloodshed and resolving the conflict through peaceful conclusion of the political transition that would satisfy the legitimate demands of the Syrian people."

However, there was one fundamental difference between the two's approaches being a political transition, in other words change of leadership.

Turkey has become as the country hosting the biggest number of refugees reaching to 4 million by August. Almost 3.6 million Syrian refugees live in Turkey, out of which 1.6 million are children refugees.³¹

In addition to that Turkey has carried out two military operations in Northern Syria: first being Euphrates Shield³² and the second Olive Branch.³³ The two operations turned out to be successful in removing the terrorist groupings and bringing security to the civilians living in Northern Syria.

This paper aims to understand the relationship between Russia and Turkey and examine how each of them are playing a strategic role in the Syrian crisis. The study tries to find out whether the

30 "Turkey's Approach to the Syrian Conflict", *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey%E2%80%933syria.en.mfa>, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

31 "Syria Crisis Situation Report-August 2018 Humanitarian Results-Syrian Arab Republic", *UNICEF*, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unicef-syria-crisis-situation-report-august-2018-humanitarian-results>, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

32 "Fırat Kalkanı Harekatı'yla 1,5 Milyon Sivil Güvende", *Anadolu Ajansı*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/firat-kalkani-harekatıyla-1-5-milyon-sivil-iki-yildir-guvende/1237687>, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

33 Oytun Orhan, "Zeytin Dalı Harekatı'nın Muhtemel Siyasi Sonuçları", *Anadolu Ajansı*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz-haber/zeytin-dali-harekatinin-muhtemel-siyasi-sonuclari/1097198>, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

involvement of Russia and Turkey in Syrian Crisis over the past seven years has brought a positive impact trying to solve the crisis or it has had a negative impact which degraded the condition even more.

Glance at the Syrian Crisis & Mediation

The Syrian civil war that is approaching its ninth's year. It has taken more than a half million lives and forced more than half of the pre-war population of Syria to flee their homes in search of security.³⁴

The following paragraph will be divided chronologically to three phases of mediation by UN envoys briefly considering their approaches and factors for the failure.

First mediation mission under - Kofi Annan

Kofi Annan received his mandate as a Joint Special Representative for the United Nations and the League of Arab States (LAS) for Syria in February of 2012. Stopping the violence was a priority for Annan to be able to reach a solution.³⁵ Annan came up with a six-point peace plan on March 16, 2012. The plan was based on a plan given by LAS.

After the acceptance of six-point peace plan by United nations Security Council (UNSC) and Syrian government thanks to Russia's pressure, although a considerable level of cease-fire was achieved which lasted about six weeks before regime stopped withdrawals. Despite the fact that six-point plan was formally negotiated with the Syrian government, the demands of the regime were rejected. Following Russia's veto on the issue holding Syrian regime responsible of Houla massacre on May 25, the regime started to use heavy weaponry again which marked the end of six-point peace plan.³⁶

34 Angus McDowall, "Syrian Observatory Says War has Killed more than Half A Million", *Rueters*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria/syrian-observatory-says-war-has-killed-more-than-half-a-million-idUSKCN1GO13M>, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

35 Raymond Hinnebusch-Zartman William, *UN Mediation in the Syrian Crisis: from Kofi Annan to Lakhdar Brahimi*, *International Peace Institute*, New York 2016, p. 6.

36 Hinnebusch-William, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

On June 30, 2012 Annan brought together an Action Group for Syria including Permanent five as well as Turkey and Qatar (later known as the Geneva 1 Conference). With it the demands on the regime were increased. The final document had 12 clauses including mandate for regime change through negotiation, clearly depicting a multiparty government with constitutional reforms on Syrian state. Most importantly, the final report of Geneva Conference called for a transitional government which would have full executive powers including the agreement and approval of the government and the opposition.³⁷

Although the Geneva Communique was accepted by Assad under Russia's pressure, the opposition rejected it because Assad's removal was not a necessary precondition for lasting peace. After a long tussle between parties of Syrian Action Group, the UNSC resolution requiring the regime to implement the peace plan or face military sanctions was vetoed by Russia and China. The failure of passing the resolution at UNSC brought to the frustration of Kofi Annan who resigned on August 2, 2012, after which the violence from all sides escalated which turned Syria into a failed state.³⁸

Hinnebusch³⁹ points out the obstacles for peaceful resolution as Annan emphasized regime's rejection of the peace plan, the opposition's growing hard power campaign and lastly the absence of unity in the UNSC as reasons for the failure. However, the author criticizes this point by claiming that the six-point peace plan and most importantly Geneva Communique depended on an external pressure on Assad rather than giving it considerable reason to implement the plan. On the context of reasons for failure Lynch⁴⁰ pushed forward the idea that war in Syria was more prone to military campaign than to mediation. Moreover, Hinnebusch⁴¹ also claims that any of the parties should not put demands as a

37 "Final Communique Action Group for Syria", *UN Diplomacy*, <http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/FinalCommuniqueActionGroupforSyria.pdf>, (Date of Accession 09.03.2019).

38 Hinnebusch-William, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

39 Hinnebusch-William, *op. cit.*, p. 9-10.

40 March Lynch, "The Political Science of Syria's War", *POMEPS Briefings*, 22, (2013), <http://www.pensamientocritico.org/primera-epoca/promid0114.pdf>, (Date of Accession 29.01.2019).

41 Hinnebusch-William, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

precondition of talks what ought to be negotiated. Besides that, the author presents the miscalculation of West that the regime was close to fall and Annan's belief that the regime would have to implement his six-point plan as opposed to military intervention were the reasons behind failure. Interestingly, International Crisis Group,⁴² in a report had warned that Assad's regime almost had no interest in mediation due to its military might over opposition and used diplomatic negotiations to win time.

Second mediation mission under – Lakhdar Brahimi

Lakhdar Brahimi received the position of UN-LAS special envoy to Syrian on August 18, 2012.⁴³ An experienced special representative started his mission with inner circle communicating with parties inside Syria. His call was "there is no military solution to this devastating conflict" and the basis for only political solution is Geneva Communiqué. He had two meetings with Assad: the first seemed to go smooth with wishes of success, but when Brahimi, in the second meeting, has put forward the question of stepping down as a president - Assad changed his views on elected legitimate president and Brahimi was accused of being biased. In December 2012 National Coalition was considered legitimate in international arena but not in Syria.⁴⁴ But still he had little progress with the coalition due to its maximalist demands. Brahimi observed the opposition to be divided into hundreds of groups under the support of rivaling regional powers. Thus, he went for second circle strategy to try and persuade regional powers for leverage over the opposition. After seeing no success from the second circle he turned to outer circle strategy. Brahimi organized multiple meetings with US Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov (the meetings of 3Bs), but all the meetings came to a deadlock when the question touched upon the status of Assad. US claimed that Assad would not participate in transitional government to which Russia opposed.

42 "Now or Never: A Negotiated Transition for Syria, (5 March 2012)", *International Crisis Group*, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/now-or-never-negotiated-transition-syria>, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

43 Muriel Asseburg et al., *Mission impossible? UN mediation in Libya, Syria and Yemen*, SWP Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit, 2018, p. 10.

44 Hinnebusch-William, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Only in January of 2014, Brahimi could organize a meeting with the regime and the opposition which came to be known Geneva II. The first round of talks merely resulted in government letting women and children leave the opposition-controlled regions of Homs. The government was not ready to make any concessions thus the second round of talks collapsed in the first thirty minutes and the conference was suspended. Brahimi concluded that the conflict was not ripe for negotiation that would produce a peaceful resolution and he admitted that he had no leverage to bring a solution. He also claimed that no Syrian party had belief in non-military solutions. Brahimi, most importantly asserted that Geneva II was a mistake, the government had to come due to Russian pressure but not ready for concessions, the opposition saw only Assad's removal as the solution to the whole conflict and parties still sought military solution on the ground. Remarkably Brahimi points out in an interview with Hinnebusch⁴⁵ that in the outer circle Western powers were not able to see the real conditions on the ground in Syria and Russia as an obstacle to removing Assad by external forces due to a possible scenario like in Libya contributed to the failure of the mediation. Brahimi believes that Russian assessment of the situation was more accurate but was mandated to bring out a condition where Assad would agree to resign.

Third mediation mission under – Staffan de Mistura

On July 10, 2014, Staffan de Mistura was assigned for the mission. Mistura started with efforts of setting up a ceasefire in most populated city Aleppo where both regime and the opposition were present. He carried out consultation both with regime and the opposition as well as different groups of the society to find out possible points of agreement. But only after Russian-American joint initiative in November of 2015, the international agreement on a political transition and a ceasefire was concluded in Vienna which created International Syria Support Group (ISSG) that comprise all actors as well as Iran. In December 2015, UNSC unanimously agreed on the Resolution number 2254 that confirmed "Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political transition to end

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the conflict” with the help of ISSG’s transitional roadmap based on Geneva Communique clauses. It also assigned Mistura responsible for organizing talks between the regime and the opposition to come up with a comprehensive ceasefire and a monitoring mechanism. Mistura tried to start intra-Syrian talks which lasted two days but suspended due to violence. Although he was able to bring the parties together for the second round of talks in Geneva in March of 2016 to discuss forming of transitional government, the meeting collapsed right after the opening of intra-Syrian talks. September of 2016 was marked by the ending of cooperation between Russia and US when both exchanged accusations of bombing the regime and UN convoy. Thus, Moscow and Washington handed over their task of cease fire as the joint presidents of ISSG to the UN mission. 2017 saw a stalemate of the mediation process, Mistura could bring neither a ceasefire nor a political resolution to the war. Overall involvement of Mistura only enabled the UN to exercise its humanitarian role in specific cases of evaluations, the protection of civilians, aid convoys and ceasefires through diplomacy.⁴⁶

Three main factors blocked the success of UN mediation. First, International arena had an agreement on political resolution of the conflict in theory, however parties that are not directly involved in the conflict and non-state actors continued giving military aid to the parties in conflict. Thus, continuous intervention through different factions and violence never let a favorable mediation environment emerge at the scene. Second, although the conflicting parties from inside Syria welcomed UN’s mediation and attended the Geneva talks, it was merely a formality instead both parties had little interest in entering extensive talks therefore heavily depended on military force. Lastly, the difference of official positions in the UNSC blocked the possibility of using effective coercive measures.⁴⁷

Role of Turkey in the Syrian crisis

In order to grasp the rationale behind Turkey’s stance towards Syria and Assad it is important to look at the history of relations

46 Muriel Asseburg et al., *Mission impossible? UN mediation in Libya, Syria and Yemen*, SWP Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit, 2018. p. 38.

47 Asseburg et al., *op. cit.*, p.43.

between these two neighboring states. Thus, the following section will be divided into crises points in historical relations of two countries and the policies of Turkey as well as military and humanitarian efforts undertaken by Turkey for seven years of war.

Dinc and Yetim⁴⁸ examine different periods of Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East, of which initial stages are characterized by disdain and neglect, the periods of Cold War are overwhelmed by enmity due to belonging to different strategic blocs and the period since Turgut Ozal or the end of Cold War can be said that Turkey started to give increasing importance to the region.

Turkey and Syria have had some territorial issues and disputes. For instance, in 1939, when Sandjak of Alexandretta, today's Hatay province of Turkey, was resolved in Turkey's favor, though it became a disputed border area for Damascus. Besides, 1957-58 crisis with Syria also dramatically damaged Turkey and Syria relations as well as the image of Turkey in Arab countries eyes. This can be seen in the behavior of Arab states supporting Greek Cypriots when Turkey got involved in Cyprus crisis. The following years due to the internal left and right divisions in the 1970s and the appearance of a more serious dispute with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê/PKK) in 1980s Turkey was weakened claim the authors. Thus, Turkey's secularists were convinced that the increasing PKK threat and Islamism hindered the creation and accomplishment of a state with secular and nationalist characteristics. Moreover, Turkey also believed that its immediate neighbors are supporting either PKK or Islamists to hinder Turkey's national security and therefore had unfriendly relations with them as well as with Syria.⁴⁹

In the middle of 1990s, due to its military ties with Israel, Turkey had confrontational relations with Syria, Iran and Iraq, which made the region more unsteady and conflict prone.⁵⁰

48 Cengiz Dinc-Mustafa Yetim, "Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy toward the Middle East: From Non-Involvement to a Leading Role", *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 11(1), 2012, <http://alternatives.yalova.edu.tr/article/view/5000150684>, (Date of Accession 12/02/2019), p. 69.

49 Dinc-Yetim, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

50 Kemal Kirisci et al., *A Neighborhood Rediscovered Turkey's Transatlantic Value in the Middle East*, Transatlantic Academy Paper Series, 2010, p. 17.

In 1996 because of tensions on PKK issue Turkey sent a memorandum charging Syria with aggression due to its support for the PKK and requiring it to end its support for the group and turn over Abdullah Ocalan. When Syria did not accept these requirements, all official contacts were stopped by Turkey in early 1996.⁵¹

In addition to that, Dinc and Yetim claim that Turkey's sensitivity on the Kurdish issue reached new heights in 1997 that it pursued tense and security-oriented relations with all the neighboring states. Out of all Iran and Syria were seen as the main threat to Turkey. Because Iranian territories were used by PKK to carry out attacks in Turkey and Syria supported PKK since Abdullah Ocalan have found a safe haven in Damascus, which consequently pushed Turkey to come closer with Israel in order to balance against these threats.

Despite that diplomatic dialogue was started but did not bring any success and 1998 became the most intense crisis in relations of the two states.⁵²

Only after considerable mediation efforts carried out by Egypt and Iran, Turkey and Syria reached an agreement called Adana agreement in 1998. As stated by the agreement Syria had to make most of the compromises. Later on, under Bulent Ecevit's government the foreign policy of Turkey was directed to make contacts with all neighboring regions that are not under western influence with the regionally based foreign policy.⁵³

Aras & Karakaya⁵⁴ claim that after 2000s a considerable softening of relations took place between Syria and Turkey. In regional terms the authors state that Turkey's interest in diminishing dependence on US in security matters, common issues concerning a Kurdish matter in both countries and Syria's struggle

51 Adam Szymański, "Turkish Policy Towards war in Syria", *TEKA of Political Science and International Relations*, 12(1), Institute of Political Science University of Warsaw, Warsaw 2017, p. 68.

52 Adam Szymański, "Turkish Policy Towards war in Syria", *TEKA of Political Science and International Relations*, 12(1), Institute of Political Science University of Warsaw, Warsaw, 2017, p. 68.

53 *Ibid.*

54 Bülent Aras-Rabia Karakaya Polat, "From Conflict to Cooperation: Desecuritization of Turkey's Relations with Syria and Iran", *Security Dialogue*, 39(5), 2008, p. 504.

to find allies in the region to counterbalance US' pressure made it necessary to normalize relations. Despite all these obstacles, transformation of politics in Turkey and partially in Syria, helped both states to even reach free trade agreement in 2004 after some high officials' visits to Turkey and Syria as well as the mutual support of states in regional issues such as Israel and Palestine and Lebanon crisis. After AK Party acceded to power, with "zero problem with neighbors" strategy by Davutoglu Prime Minister Erdogan's first adviser, the bilateral relations between the two started to improve significantly that can be seen in the exports of Turkey to Syria between 2006 and 2010 which saw fourfold increase as well as the removal of visa regime between the two.

However, all the improvement and development of relations between Turkey and Syria has been put to test when an unexpected wave of Arab spring reached Syrian cities in 2011.

Turkey is one of the most affected states by the Syrian conflict since it shares over 800 km of border in its south-eastern border. Turkey has become the destination for the biggest number of refugees where almost 3.6 million Syrian refugees took shelter out of which 1.6 million are Syrian child refugees.⁵⁵ Initial stance of Turkey towards Syrian crises was to influence Assad in diplomatic ways to persuade for political reforms.⁵⁶ When it was clear that Assad did not keep promises for reforms, there was a meeting of Syrian rebels in Istanbul on September 11, 2011 with the idea of uniting all opposition factions under a single name. Subsequently Syrian National Council announced its establishment on October 2, 2011, Moreover, the group of Friends of Syrian People was created by the initiative of Turkey.⁵⁷ Erdogan and Davutoglu called Assad as an illegitimate leader and declared that he should step down for the conflict to end. Besides, Turkey has put much effort to bring the attention of different international organizations such as NATO

55 "Syria Crisis Situation Report-August 2018 Humanitarian Results - Syrian Arab Republic", UNICEF, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unicef-syria-crisis-situation-report-august-2018-humanitarian-results>, (Date of Accession 10.02.2019).

56 Imran Demir, *Overconfidence and Risk Taking in Foreign Policy Decision Making: The Case of Turkey's Syria Policy*, Springer, Switzerland, 2017, p. 44.

57 Pınar Özden Cankara, "The Sunni Identity of Ak Party Governments in Syria and Egypt Policies", *International Journal of Turcologia*, 13(25), 2018, p. 58.

and UN to take measures against state violence in Syria.⁵⁸

On March 26, 2012 Turkey closed its Embassy in Damascus due to violence.⁵⁹ In June of 2012 Turkish jet was downed by the Syrian army after which Turkey warned Syria that the recurrence of similar behavior would mean military action against the regime.⁶⁰

Turkey has had multiple ambitions such as becoming an influential regional player in the Middle East,⁶¹ stopping intense mobilization and expansion of Kurdish factions in Syria,⁶² as well as it desired to have a more welcoming neighbor in political and economic terms as compared to Assad-led regime Syria stood for.⁶³

In toppling Assad's regime Turkey has sided with Gulf states: Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the most active international actors: US, France and the UK. It assisted opposition forces as well as started receiving the flow of refugees.⁶⁴

Turkey was blamed for its passive approach both in its border security and non-involvement with the international coalition against DEASH up until 2015 but following the bombing in Ankara in 2015 and three bombings in Istanbul in 2016 as well as international pressure have pushed Turkey to take more actions.⁶⁵ This can be seen in the statement in Foreign Affairs Ministry website of Turkey.⁶⁶

"DEASH poses a direct threat to the Turkish national security. Turkey, as an active member of the Global Coalition Against DEASH since its inception, is contributing to this campaign by its national means. Since July 24, 2015, the Turkish military, in line

58 Demir, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

59 Özden Cankara, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

60 Francesco D'Alema, "The Evolution of Turkey's Syria Policy", *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, 17(28), 2017, p. 7.

61 . "The Syrian Conflict: A Systems Conflict Analysis." *ARK Group*, Dubai UAE, 2016, p. 27.

62 Asli Okyay, "Turkey's Post-2011 Approach to its Syrian Border and Its Implications for Domestic Politics", *International Affairs*, 93(4), 2017, p. 840.

63 ARK Group, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

64 D'Alema, *loc. cit.*

65 Szymański, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

66 "Turkey's Approach to the Syrian Conflict" *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkey%E2%80%9393syria.en.mfa>, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

with Article 51 of the UN Charter on self-defense and the relevant UNSC resolutions, has targeted DEASH positions and responded to terrorist attacks originating from Syria in accordance with the rules of engagement.”

With the increasing threat coming from PKK and People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel/YPG) as well as increasing tensions with United States of America (USA) over support for YPG, PYD and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Turkey started to cooperate with Russia and Iran extensively which let it deal with the threats more pragmatically.⁶⁷ In summer of 2016, Turkey launched its operation “Euphrates Shield”, which marked the first extensive military operation into Syria, under the pretext of article 51 of UN charter on self-defense against DEASH and PKK affiliates YPG and PYD. It cleared around 2000 square kilometers reaching cities of Jarablus, Azaz, Mare, Dabiq and Al-bab.⁶⁸

According to Anadolu Agency (AA),⁶⁹ after operation Euphrates Shield 1.5 million people have been living under security for two years as well as the health, education and roads of transportation have seen much reconstruction and relaunch. The security of the region is being maintained by five thousand police from FSA who were trained with the help of Turkey.

On January 20, Turkey launched second operation called “Olive Branch” to eliminate the growing threat of YPG and PKK. YPG was used by US to fight DEASH. After the fall of many DEASH strongholds Turkey claimed that US' rhetoric “YPG is the only actor capable of fighting DEASH as no longer valid and only posed a threat for Turkey's territorial integrity as well as not welcomed by the locals in Afrin region.”⁷⁰

67 D'Alema, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

68 Daher, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

69 “Firat Kalkanı Harekati'yla 1,5 Milyon Sivil Güvende”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/firat-kalkani-harekatiyla-1-5-milyon-sivil-iki-yildir-guvende/1237687>, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

70 “Afrin Operation Proved YPG not Needed for Post-Daesh Stability, Experts Say SETA”, *SETA*, Istanbul 2012, <https://www.setav.org/en/afrin-operation-proved-ypg-not-needed-for-post-daesh-stability-experts-say/> (Date of Accession 25.03.2019).

As for the operation Olive Branch, Orhan,⁷¹ claims that the removal of YPG fighters from Afrin by Turkey has changed the balance of power in Syria and showed the military might of Turkey to other actors as well as YPG in other cities. It also earned Turkey a bigger say on the ground and on the mediation table with all the actors and regime. Orhan also points out prospects for the increase of military cooperation between Russia and Turkey in Syria.

Other than two military operations Turkey has engaged establishing and guaranteeing ceasefires together with Russia and Iran. On 20 December 2016 the foreign ministers of these countries issued a common declaration that set the roadmap for ceasefires in Syria. The declaration confirmed the fight against terrorism was the priority not the regime change and based on this the three actors were ready to support a peace deal. After the meeting a nationwide ceasefire entered into force in Syria, on 29th December 2016. Syrian peace talks in Astana in September 2017 talks produced four zones of de-escalation where observers were deployed starting with Idlib, Eastern Ghouta, Southern Syria and Northern rural Homs. Following Astana talks, Russia, Turkey and Iran started to have peace talks parallel to Geneva negotiations with Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi in January 2018. Despite the absence of some oppositions new summit was held in April 2018, in Ankara by the three state leaders who reasserted their pledge to reaching a long-lasting ceasefire.⁷²

D'Alema,⁷³ counted four factors deriving from Syrian conflict that threatened the interests of Turkey the most. First, the rise of jihadist groups that threatened Turkey in its south-eastern borders. Second, the intensification of Kurdish forces in Syria particularly YPG meant a strategic catastrophe for Turkey due to the fact that it was supported by US against DEASH and it also altered its peace process with PKK which ended in 2013 and the policy of giving greater autonomy to Kurdish people living in Turkey, later SDF made the situation even more tense. Third, the refugee influx has financially exhausted Turkey and created socio-economic

71 Ortan, *loc. cit.*

72 Daher, *op. cit.*, p. 391.

73 D'Alema, *op. cit.*, p. 8-9.

problems. Lastly, Russia's direct involvement in Syrian since 2015 has changed the balance against the goals of removing Assad as well as the jet crisis ruined its relations with Russia resulting in economic sanctions and suspension of visa-free regime for Turkey.

Role of Russia in the Syrian Crisis

By diplomatic efforts and military intervention Russia has become one of the main actors in the Syrian war. Its military intervention resulted in saving Assad's regime.⁷⁴ Russia has made it clear from the beginning that it will veto any resolution that includes using UN Chapter VII against Syria.⁷⁵ From 2011 until 2015, Russian involvement was putting diplomatic pressure through UN to block any attempt to topple Assad's regime.⁷⁶

Special relationship between Russia and Syria head back to 1971, when Hafez al-Assad came to power after carrying out a coup d'état. It started with Syria's need for allies and weapons. The importance of Syria for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) increased when it lost Egypt - its biggest ally. Although, Syria did not become a proxy for Soviets, neither accepted communist ideology, their bond was strong in military sphere. After Cold War ended, Russia-Syria partnership lost significance, but it was restarted when Russia's Putin and Syria's Bashar al-Assad came into office as presidents in 2000. After Russia ceased its operations in military bases in Vietnam and Cuba, Tartus became the only Russian military base left outside post-Soviet region. Besides, Syria supported Russia in its military intervention to Georgia in 2008.⁷⁷ In 2006 around 10.000 Syrian military officers who have been educated and trained at both Russian and Soviet academies as well as 2000 military Russian advisers were

74 Dmitriy Trenin, "Putin's Plan for Syria", *Carnegie*, <https://carnegie.ru/2017/12/13/putin-s-plan-for-syria-pub-75001>, (Date of Accession 10.02.2019).

75 Roy Allison, "Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with A Regime in Crisis", *International Affairs*, 89(4), 2013, p. 798.

76 Nikolay Kozhanov, "Russian Policy Across the Middle East: Motivations and Methods", *Chatham House*, 2018, p. 4.

77 Florence Gaub-Nicu Popescu, "Russia and Syria-The Odd Couple", *EU Institute for Security Studies*, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Alert_Russia-Syria.pdf, (Date of Accession 20.02.2019).

in service in Syria.⁷⁸ On the contrary, Allison argued that Russia's criticism of Western-led interventions, the rhetoric of legality cannot explain its policy choices when it comes to Syrian crisis. Instead he states that Russian stance is based on the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity. It also rejects the idea that state can be judged by the political legitimacy standards of western states. Thus, Allison reasserts the stance is largely influenced by the conflict in Libya. He emphasizes the importance of the historical close association of the Soviet Union and Syria as well as Syria being the only strong ally among other states in the region has influenced the current security and foreign policy attitude of Russia. Similarly, Charap⁷⁹ believes that Russian policy makers hold that series of humanitarian interventions by US that have brought to regime change in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya constitute a threat to peace in the international system and to regime stability in autocratic states. Thus, Moscow disagrees that UNSC has any right to approve removal of elected governments. Charap reasserts that Russia opposes intervention into Syria due to concerns over the impact of US power, because it is convinced that interventions were aimed at regime change under the name of Responsibility to protect (R2P).

Unlike Allison and Charap, Gaub et al⁸⁰ give a different outlook at the reasons for Russian support for Assad, claiming that it has to do with Russia's recent history and similarities between the two. At their birth both Russia and Syria had lost big territories and found themselves to be multinational in demographic terms. Moreover, Russian elites agree that the fall of Soviet Union was the biggest catastrophe, while Syrians are always nostalgic about Arab Kingdom of Syria. Furthermore, both Russian and Syrian elites believe that the best type of governance to manage their multinational population is by the way of politically centralized governments which do not tolerate street protests, street political movements against its sovereignty. They also hold strong beliefs that revolutions in Egypt, Ukraine and removal of Qaddafi in

78 Allison, *op. cit.*, p. 802.

79 Samuel Charap, *Russia, Syria and the doctrine of intervention*, *Survival*, 55(1), 2013, p. 36.

80 Gaub-Popescu, *loc. cit.*

Libya have turned them into weak states. Indeed, they even share a perception that their states are threatened by Sunni Islamic extremism. In contrast,⁸¹ Allison claims that despite identity similarities and loyalty to a historical ally, the stakes for Russia are strategic and material. As for strategic interests Tartus as its only naval base in the Mediterranean, although much symbolic, Russia has plans to further upgrade and expand both Khmeimim and Tartus base to make it a permanent base that can be used for its nuclear ships too.⁸² This means continuous Russian naval military presence thanks to the contract signed for 49 years to operate in Khmeimim base,⁸³ which Russia has been using since its military intervention in 2015. Moreover, Russia has some solid arms trade with Syria. Russia has supplied up to 72 percent of arms to Syria between 2007 and 2011.⁸⁴

The cooperation between Russia and Syria jointly opposed UNSC resolution to intervene to Iraq in 2002 and 2003. Syria in its way expressed support to Russia's military intervention to Georgia.⁸⁵ In comparison to above said Katz⁸⁶ and Charap,⁸⁷ indicate Russian concerns over Assad's fall which might trigger opposition activities from its 20 million Muslim population in Caucasus. In the past Russia has an experience of fighting two wars with the Caucasus emirate. Katz⁸⁸ claims that Russia fears that the removal of Assad will mean a loss for Russia and a geopolitical gain for US.

A more interesting approach to viewing Russian involvement in Syrian crisis came from Souleimanov & Dzutsati⁸⁹ who divided

81 Allison, *op. cit.*, p. 803.

82 Trenin, *loc. cit.*

83 "Putin Signs Deal to Keep Base in Syria for Half a Century", *Independent* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/russia-syria-50-years-half-century-air-base-deal-putin-assad-regime-president-rebels-isis-a7863031.html>, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

84 Allison, *loc. cit.*

85 Allison, *op. cit.*, p. 811.

86 Mark Katz, "Russia and the Conflict in Syria: Four Myths", *Middle East Policy*, 20(2), 2013, p. 43.

87 Samuel Charap, *Russia, Syria and the doctrine of intervention*, *Survival*, 55(1), 2013, p. 36.

88 Mark Katz, "Russia and the Conflict in Syria: Four Myths", *Middle East Policy*, 20(2), 2013, p. 38.

89 Emil Aslan Souleimanov-Valery Dzutsati, "Russia's Syria War: A Strategic Trap?", *Middle East Policy*, 25(2), 2017, p. 42-50.

the period into three phases: first phase 2015-2016, second phase 2016-2017, third phase 2018. Initially Russia merely played a role of providing weapons and ammunitions to the regime in Syria. In the end of 2012, Russian military personnel have been positioned to operate the most sophisticated air-defense systems to make external intervention impossible. The authors claim that after Russian aggression in Crimea, it tried to break the international isolation by joining its efforts with the West to fight a common enemy which would be DEASH and rebels who are non-state actors. Authors refer to some observers who claimed that Russia's military intervention was meant to revert the attention international arena away from Crimea. In phase two, Moscow started considering its interests and increased its military presence by reinforcing its naval base Tartus and air base Khmeimim. It also started working closer with Iran and cleaned Syria's vital areas from opposition forces attacked DEASH with 10 to 30 percent of its airstrikes. In phase three, the rapprochement between Turkey and Russia was a big win for Putin. It is also claimed that the cooperation was more tactical in nature. So far, Russian organized peace talks have given little leverage upon ending the conflict, but Russia has shown its ability to engage with regional actors who hold different opinions and interests on the issue.

A more remarkable viewpoint has come to be considered in recent years by some scholar that started claiming that Russia is interested in Syria due to its geo-strategic location to play a significant role for oil and gas transit.⁹⁰ Szénási,⁹¹ in his work explicitly argues that the Syrian war is the war for future gas pipelines from Middle East to Europe. He claims that there are two multibillion-dollar pipeline projects that serve one end. But one is backed by the US and another by Russia. Russian backed pipeline is called Iran-Iraq-Syria reaching to European market. While US-backed gas pipeline project is projected to link Qatar, Saudi Arabi, Syria to Turkey and eventually Europe. The two pipeline projects intersect in Syria. The author argues that US' goal is to stop Europe's dependence on Russian gas. But Syria's Assad refused the US-

90 Allison, *op. cit.*, p. 813.

91 Endre Szénási, *Syria: Another Dirty Pipeline War*, Hungarian Ministry of Defence, Hungary, 2017, p. 188.

backed pipeline project saying that it would protect the interests of its ally - Russia. Therefore, he says US, Saudi Arabia and Qatar became biggest enemies of Assad. In 2012 Russia and its allies had memorandum on their pipeline project and in 2013 Syrian, Iranian and Iraqi leaders gathered to sign an initial agreement on the project. Furthermore, Maçães,⁹² Mammadov⁹³ and Costigan⁹⁴ hold more or less similar arguments when it comes to energy issues in the Syrian crisis.

Since the beginning Russia has used twelve vetoes on Syrian issues in UNSC. Four of the vetoes stopped investigation of chemical weapons use in seven-year war of Syria. Furthermore, many other vetoes were against UN resolutions calling for sanctions against Syria, condemning Syria for war crimes, sanctions for using heavy weapons, condemning human rights violations, referring Syrian crimes to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and halting the bombing of Aleppo since 2011.

Theoretical debates on the issue

There are multiple theories that were applied by the scholars to explain the involvement of both Russia and Turkey in the Syrian Crisis. This chapter will consider some of the works written on the issue. Salam Alsaadi⁹⁵ in his work used an integrated realist and constructivist approach to explain Russia's role and motives in Syria. He emphasizes the importance of ideational motives such as worldview of the international order and the agency as well as features of Putin regime. He found out that, Russia's military presence in Syria is led by multiple interconnected aspects that include the following: Putin regenerating legitimacy and winning the election at home, transformation of the international system,

92 Bruno Macaes, "Russia's New Energy Gamble", *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/russias-new-energy-gamble/>, (Date of Accession: 10.02.2019).

93 Rauf Mammadov, "Russia in the Middle East: Energy Forever?", *The Jamestown Foundation*, 9, 2018, p. 212.

94 Thomas Costigan, "Syria Conflict and Regional Pipeline Geo-Strategy", *Center for Counter Hegemonic Studies*, Ecuador 2017, p. 8.

95 Salam Alsaadi, "Russia's Military Involvement in Syria: An Integrated Realist and Constructivist Approach", *International Journal of Law, Humanities & Social Science*, 1(5), 2017. p. 88.

necessity to maximize military capabilities and economic profits, restoring its global power prestige. In contrast, Muharrem⁹⁶ has argued that Syrian crisis and International involvement can only be explained by realist perspective in the framework of great power politics. He has put forward two arguments claiming: first, the geopolitical tussle that erupted among US, Russia and China in Syria turned to a proxy war similar to the great game of Central Asia; second, this relationship alters the international system. The situation in short can be explained by Russia and China's stance as guards of the principle of non-intervention and state sovereignty of the Westphalian system against the American unilateral introduction of intervention law to the international system. His findings were that at the regional level there is a geopolitical competition between Russia and the US and an economic competition between the US and China. But at the global level all three countries are involved in great power politics struggle just as classical realism defines it. Thus, he claims the great power tussle between them is going to change the geopolitics both in the middle east and in the international arena. In addition, he points out a very useful observation saying that the Syrian conflict has reflected the proxy war developments between regional actors and between great powers. There is a proxy war between Iran and Turkey as well as Iran and Saudi Arabi. A bigger proxy war is being fought among great powers that are supporting regional allies. One can see two groupings: first group where Iran is supported by Russia and China; second group where US is supporting Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This whole scene is further complicated by sectarian conflicts. Thus, he concludes Syria became scene for global competition for influence and power.

Another work more similar to Alsaadi⁹⁷ has introduced a realist approach towards the issue. Afridi and Jibrán,⁹⁸ have come up with an argument based on neorealist perspective that the fall of al-Assad threaten Russia's vital strategic and economic interests both

96 Muharrem Eksi, "The Syria Crisis as a Proxy War and the Return of the Realist Great Power Politics", *Uluslararası Kriz ve Siyaset Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 1(2), 2017. p. 106.

97 Alsaadi, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

98 Manzoor Khan Afridi-Ali Jibrán, "Russian Response to Syrian Crisis: A Neorealist Perspective", *Strategic Studies*, 38(2), 2018, p. 57.

in Syria and in the international system. Pointing at the great power past of Russia and its experience of losing strategic and economic interest after the fall of Libyan regime Russia is fiercely protecting its military bases and presence, economic and energy interests by blocking the realization of Qatar gas pipeline in Syria.

Another interesting combination of theories can be seen in the work of Daoudy⁹⁹ who have introduced realist constructivism approach to analyze the rapprochement between Turkey and Syria and the collapse of relations in 2011, explaining why Turkey has chosen to side with the global narrative that called for regime change. She claims that the relations of the two reflect how connection between material factors and idea-driven elites set out foreign policy decisions. She clarifies that the change of identity of leaders in both states in 2000s and the change of international system structure from bipolar to unipolar have brought the two states to consider the benefits of cooperation. The author focuses on identity, context and policy factors. Thus, the ideas and values of both governments' elites were contradictory and firm to the level that they were ready to give up material gains when Syrian uprising erupted.

Dal Emel¹⁰⁰ examined Turkey's approach to Syria and reasons for its choices. The author has used normative International Relations theory referring to cosmopolitanism and communitarianism divide to explain Turkey's foreign policy choices. She claims that Turkey's call for regime change in Syria reflects ethical, value-based and cosmopolitan rhetoric. Ankara's true intention is communitarian trying to create a new community in its region that will be under Turkey's domination. However, she claims there was no global support for its cosmopolitan policies and ethical rhetoric. She also points out some transformation of Turkey's foreign policy towards commitment to global duties, obligations of human rights and international law.

99 Marwa Daoudy, "The Structure-Identity Nexus: Syria and Turkey's Collapse, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 29(3), 2016, p. 1081.

100 Emel Dal, "A Normative Approach to Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy: The Cosmopolitanism-Communitarianism Divide", *International Journal*, 70(3), 2015, p. 433.

Conclusion

Syrian conflict that has attracted the attention of a number of regional and global powers has entered its eighth year, having taken a half million people's lives, there still does not seem to be a political solution due to conflicting interests. Three UN mediation missions have failed to bring about a resolution to end the war and establish peace on the ground between the Syrian regime and the opposition. The issue the opposition and the regime could never agree on was the status of Assad and the opposition was demanding his removal as a precondition before starting the talks though it never had the power to remove him without external support. The literature is overwhelmed by claims that the opposition fragmented to an extent that UN mediators had a difficult time to even find a representative of the opposition that would be supported by at least the majority. Even though there were some resolutions and peace plans proposed to UNSC, Russia along with China vetoed all the efforts to put pressure on Syrian regime and had played the role of diplomatic shield for it. Thus, the roles and the rapprochement of the two states Russia and Turkey started to make significant difference when it comes to establishing ceasefires and putting pressure on Syria in negotiations. This can be seen in four de-escalation and ceasefire zones established and backed by Russia, Turkey and Iran. Russia itself is an important player since its military intervention that prevented the fall of Assad's regime. Turkey has taken the burden of more than three and a half million refugees since the beginning of the uprising by pursuing an open border policy. In fact, Turkey due to its humanitarian immigration policies has been the most affected by refugee influx, terrorist attacks and cross border fires originating from Syria. It should be recalled that Turkey in the beginning of the crisis has put much diplomatic effort to persuade Assad to make political reforms and stop the violence against its citizens but continuous use of force by the regime in spite of its promises for reforms changed the approach of Turkey. Turkey created a political opposition under the name Syrian National Council. Russia on the other hand has been playing an important role to block any scenario that would lead to another case similar to Libya with respect to its ally. In total it has used 12 vetoes to defend its ally. It has successfully

kept Syrian regime alive throughout eight years of crisis both politically and militarily engaging in the conflict. Considering military assistance of western states both to opposition and extremist groups that have no legitimacy in terms of International norms, Russia has supported a legitimate government based on the principles of territorial integrity and state sovereignty at Assad's invitation. Furthermore, bearing in mind US's unilateral interventions that brought regime change in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya and instabilities that followed; the roles of Russia and Turkey as well as their recent rapprochement has significantly helped to manage the war and let besieged Syrians out in multiple deals, negotiations and ceasefires. Turkey has taken care of refugees both coming from Syria and the ones returned by Europe facing various social difficulties in assimilating them. Russia on the other hand has served as a block to western intervention, forced regime change in Syria that would destabilize the whole Middle Eastern geo-politics. It also showed willingness and effort to bring peace in Syria in Astana, Sochi and recent Ankara talks with Turkey and Iran. There is no doubt that the two states will have a huge impact how security and peace will be reached, how phase of transitional government unfold as well as how the terms of regional power balance will be set. The rapprochement provides possibility for these two states to have a more or less negotiated common voice on the issue and act which would not be possible for Turkey alone or Russia being on its own.

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