

SECURITY GAP AND PARADIGM SHIFT ON THE AXIS OF TURKEY'S
TRANSFORMING SYRIA POLICY

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ABSTRACT

SECURITY GAP AND PARADIGM SHIFT ON THE AXIS OF TURKEY'S TRANSFORMING SYRIA POLICY

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This thesis analyzes the mutually interacting relationship between Turkey's changing Syria policy, border security deficiencies and the comprehensive security challenges of Turkey between 2011 and 2019. From the very beginning of the Syrian civil war, Turkey firmly supported the Syrian opposition and demonstrated a clear position as a side in the intestine war. However, the duration and outcome of the Syrian civil war have not developed within the framework of Turkish decision-makers predictions, and the contagious nature of the civil war has produced increasing geopolitical consequences. In this framework, this dissertation seeks an explanation of the reasons for the paradigm shift in Turkey's Syria policy. In other words, this dissertation incorporates the evolution of Turkey's Syria policies in the context of the power vacuum, cross border transitivity and security turbulences in the region.

Keywords: Security, Turkish Foreign Policy, Mass Migration, Arab Spring, Terrorism

ÖZ

TÜRKİYENİN DÖNÜŞEN SURİYE POLİTİKASI EKSENİNDE GÜVENLİK KRİZİ VE PARADİGMA DEĞİŞİKLİĞİ

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Bu tez 2011 ve 2019 yılları arasında, Türkiye'nin değişen Suriye politikası, sınır güvenliği açıkları ve yaygın güvenlik zafiyetleri arasındaki karşılıklı ilişki biçimini incelemektedir. Suriye iç savaşının erken dönemlerinden itibaren, Türkiye, Suriye muhalefetini açık bir şekilde destekledi ve iç savaşta bir taraf olduğunu gösterdi. Ancak Suriye iç savaşının süresi ve sonucu Türk karar vericilerin öngörülerini çerçevesinde ilerlememiş ve iç savaştaki şiddet sarmalının bulaşıcı doğası artan jeopolitik sonuçlara sebep olmuştur. Bu jeopolitik sonuçların da etkisiyle Türk dış politikası ofansif realist çerçevede bir paradigma değişikliğine uğramıştır. Bu tez, Türk dış politikasındaki paradigma kaymasını nedensellik mekanizması içinde açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Başka bir ifadeyle, bu tez, bölgedeki güç boşluğu, sınır ötesi geçişkenlik ve güvenlik zafiyetleri bağlamında Türkiye'nin Suriye politikasının değişimini incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güvenlik, Türk Dış Politikası, Kitlemel Göç, Arap Baharı, Terörizm

This thesis is dedicated to Hülya and Ahmet Özatici

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DEZ	De-escalation Zones
E.U	European Union
FSA	Free Syrian Army
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OES	Operation Euphrates Shield
OOB	Operation Olive Branch
OPS	Operation Peace Spring
PKK	The Kurdistan Workers' Party
PYD	The Democratic Union Party
SNC	Syrian National Council
SNHR	Syrian Networks for Human Rights
TAF	Turkish Army Forces
U.N	United Nations
U.S	United States
YPG	Peoples Defence Units

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Purpose and Relevance of the Study

The Arab Spring that broke out in 2011 caused a significant dissolution in the region's geopolitical equation and security paradigms. Syria, as a country with an important geostrategic position, has become a failed state that exported terrorism and instability to the Middle East, in which the global power struggle is knotted. In this manner, Syria has been a vital crisis, dynamism, and testing ground that will lead to radical changes in Turkey's foreign policy and security concept. Within the framework of the geopolitical factors stemming from the Syrian civil war and the power vacuum in Syrian lands, this study investigates the mutual interaction between Turkey's changing Syria policy over time with the impact of border control deficiencies and security vulnerabilities. The reasons behind Turkey's changing policy between 2011 and 2019 are the main research area of the thesis.

In the early stages of the Syrian civil war, Turkey's main objective concentrated on the toppling of the Assad regime; therefore, Ankara intervened in the Syrian civil war to strengthen and support the Syrian opposition politically and militarily. In this respect, assertive and offensive policy preferences emerged from Turkey's direct involvement in the Syrian civil war, either discursively or inaction. Nevertheless, Turkey's priorities in Syria policy have changed drastically over time due to Ankara's miscalculations, international balances, and "unexpected" security threats. Turkey's power maximization goals set at the beginning of the Syrian civil war have predominantly transformed security-oriented policies after 2016. Turkey's goal of overthrowing Assad in the Syrian crisis fell into second place in time due to the security risks it faced. These security risks can be evaluated in two layers: internal and external security crises. As the violence in the Syrian civil war increased, thanks to the power

vacuum in Syria, various terrorist groups intensified terrorist acts in Turkey. A domestic security weakness occurred in the country. On the other hand, with the power vacuum in the north of Syria, various terrorist organizations have strengthened their power on the Turkish border. Thus, Ankara has become a border neighbor with terrorist elements on the Syrian border, namely ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and YPG (People's Protection Units). Thus, while overthrowing the Assad regime has lost its importance and meaning over time, the goal of neutralizing security risks has become the primary issue for Ankara.

At this point, the main purpose of the thesis is to explain the transition process of Turkey's Syria policy in the context of offensive realist theoretical framework. The meaningful questions arise that need to be answered by the thesis. First, although Turkey has followed an open border policy since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, why did it abandon this policy after 2016? In other words, what is the process that pushed Turkey from a fully open border policy to the construction of the third-largest border wall in the world? Why were the border crossing points between Turkey and Syria closed in the post-2016 period but not before? Second, while Turkey had been searching for a safe zone primarily based on the US and NATO from the beginning of the Syrian crisis, particularly in the north of Syria, why did it seek to achieve this goal through unilateral military operations in the post-2016 period? Besides, Turkey's transition to security policies such as closed border policy and the military operations and the transformation of Turkey's relations with the US and Russia in the post-2016 needs to be explained in the Syrian civil war crisis context. The main point that the thesis underlines is that the answers to these questions cannot be understood without analyzing Turkey's increasing security risks from Syria over time. Inasmuch as Turkey's security risks arising from the Syrian civil war and its effects on Turkish foreign policy will be analyzed in this thesis.

In the thesis, I use the offensive realist perspective, which represents an axis of structural realism, to explain the transformation in Turkey's Syria policy. As defensive realism, offensive realism sees nation-states as concerned mainly with figuring out how to survive in a world where there is no agency to protect each other; they quickly realize that power is the key to their survival (Mearsheimer, 2001). Nonetheless, offensive realism differs sharply from defensive realism at one point; "the question of

how much power states want" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.77). At this point, the offensive realist perspective denies the argument that preserving power, rather than increasing it, is the main goal of states. Contrary to Kenneth Waltz's ideas, Mearsheimer (2001, pp.78-79) as a pioneer of offensive realism argues that "status quo powers are rarely found in world politics because the international system creates powerful incentives for states to look for opportunities to gain power". Consecutive revolutions in more than one country, of course, simultaneously pose significant risks or opportunities for the states in the region. The Arab Spring and the Syrian crisis meant Turkey not only the democratization process in the Middle East but also a radical change in the geopolitical and geostrategic balances in the region. The process of Arab Spring was not only about the political emancipation movement of Arabic countries in the eyes of the Turkish decision-makers but also references to a historical opportunity for Turkey in order to increase the political influence in the region. Thus, seizing opportunities by taking risks in order to increase power is fully compatible with the offensive realist framework. Within the framework of Turkey's Syria policy; the desire for power maximization, the discourse and actions towards regime change in Syria, the security weaknesses due to the power vacuum, the proxy war and subsequent direct cross-border military operations can most effectively be explained within the framework of offensive realism. With the start of Arab Spring, following a short-lived confusion, Turkey adopted to offensive foreign policy paradigm and based its strategic calculations on the desire for power maximization in the region, primarily through Islamic networks like Muslim Brotherhood. Turkey has given full support to overthrow authoritarian regimes, particularly in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria. During this process, Ahmet Davutoğlu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, declared the position of Turkey as "*leader of the change wave in the Middle East*" (İşyar, 2018, p.139). Turkey voiced active assistance for toppling authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. In this context, not only rhetorically but also operationally, Turkey has become the center of political and military opposition from the very early period of the Syrian uprising. At the beginning of the Syrian civil war, the Turkish government assumed that the Assad regime would fall in a short time, as other examples of the Arab Spring. However, the Syrian uprising did not progress as Turkish decision-makers expected, and soon it turned into a multi-dimensional proxy war that contained significant powers in world politics.

Despite the early temporary successes, the Arab uprising process was reversed by 2013 after the coup in Egypt and the degeneration of the democratization continuum with the civil wars in Syria. Although the toppling of the Assad regime was Turkey's priority in the Syrian crisis, Turkey could not maintain this target due to its inability to use the essential means and international balance of power. To be more specific, Russia, China' and Iran's support for the Assad regime in the international arena and the inaction of the Western authorities had turned the international balance against Turkey in time. Turkey's claim to be the "*pioneer*" in the region (İşyar, 2018) and its offensive strategies brought some burdens. First of all, as the violence in the Syrian civil war increases, the mass migration to Turkey has grown, and Turkey has become the country hosting the highest number of refugees globally (UNCHR, 2021). In addition, Turkey's open border policy paved the way for uncontrolled crossings from Syria to Turkey. The Syrian mass migration and Turkey's open border policy have exposed Turkey to serious security vulnerabilities over time (Dora, 2020). Furthermore, the long Turkey-Syria border with the rise of terrorist organizations in northern Syria provided convenient ground for terrorist infiltration from Syria to Turkey, which posed an increasing security risk for Turkey. In other words, the long Turkey-Syria border, the rise of armed non-state actors, increasing intensity of severity of the civil war with the combination of open-door policy created a proper ground for terrorism not only in Syria but also in the homeland of Turkey. According to data given by the Turkish General Staff, from January 1, 2011, to June 9, 2016, 78,011 border incidents happened, and 397.216 non-refugee people were apprehended by security forces (Uzman, 2016, p.156). During this process, many members of radical Islamic terrorist organizations have been detected by Turkey while crossing the border from Syria to Turkey (Dora, 2020).

Turkey faced the most severe terrorist attacks in its history in city centers, such as the Ankara Train Station attack on October 10, 2015, and the İstanbul Atatürk Airport attack on June 26, 2016, which have been only one dimension of Turkey's security risk. Moreover, Syrian territory has become a separate case study of the potential for entry of non-state actors into the arena. The power vacuum left by the fading Syrian regime was used by various actors that captured control of large territorial areas in northern Syria. Thanks to the Syrian civil war and power vacuum in the north of Syria, the security threats have increasingly emerged as armed insurgency groups like radical

Salafists and armed Kurdish groups in terms of Turkey (Parlar Dal, 2016). The miscalculation of Turkish decision-makers about the duration and outcome of the Syrian civil war seems to have enlarged the risk of contagion of the civil war. Turkey's explicit support to opposition groups in Syria from the beginning of the civil war crisis has been reasonably utilized by the Assad regime to augment the territory of conflict and transfuse the armed groups along its borders (Moubayed, 2016). The geographical, political, and economic growth of various terrorist organizations in northern Syria has become strict border security and external security problem for Turkey. In addition to these internal and external security threats, the separation of interests between Western countries and Turkey in Syria, especially after the radicalization of the Syrian civil war and Russia's direct landing in Syria in 2015, caused a stalemate in Turkey's Syria policy. Therefore, Turkey's Syria policy has undergone a severe paradigm shift to overcome this impasse. As a result of security turbulence, the priorities of Turkey's foreign policy objectives shifted from the fall of the Assad regime to preventing the political, geographical, and economic expansion of terrorist elements in the region (Altunışık, 2020). Based on the above analysis, it is argued that Turkey's policies toward the Syrian civil war might be separated into two main phases, between 2011-2016 and from 2016 until the present. This classification is placed on the remarkable transformation in Turkey's Syria policy in 2016 that will be explained in the thesis within a causal mechanism.

Turkey's increasing security turbulence fed from two sources: the first is the external security crisis that grew under the influence of the power vacuum in Syria and the spreading process of armed non-state actors in the region. The second is the internal security crisis which benefited from mass migration, an open-door policy of Turkey, and again expanding terror network in northern Syria due to the lack of central authority. Under certain specific conditions, nation-states might adapt their foreign policies to the newly developing requirements. Herman (1990, p.12) asserts that the foreign policy change might result from dramatic cross-border events, and he called this situation as external shock. In that sense, Turkey has experienced three external shocks. First of all, the priority goals of Turkish foreign policy at the beginning of the Syrian civil war, such as the fall of the Assad regime and the re-construction of Syria under a pro-Turkish government, failed. The second external shock was about the evolving threats from the Syrian civil war to Turkey, namely ISIS, as growing power

on Turkish borders and pro-Kurdish organizations gaining more territory that directly threatened Turkey's security. Thirdly, due to the massive migration wave that Turkey has been exposed to, unprecedented internal security problems have emerged in Turkey.

The internal and external security challenges that Turkey is exposed to due to Syria started to show especially since 2013 but reached the highest point in 2015 and 2016. In this thesis, all of the processes of internal and external security vulnerabilities, that affect Turkey, have been conceptualized and analyzed as a whole through the definition of "Security Gap". The "Security Gap" process has had a transformative impact on Turkey's Syria policy because it has changed the priorities of Turkish decision-makers in time. The security problems created by the spiral of violence and the central authority vacuum in Syria caused the initial foreign policy objectives to undergo radical changes in terms of Turkish foreign policy over time. However, the paradigm shift in 2016 with the strong impact of the "Security Gap" process did not remain solely in the axis of Turkey's Syria policy but went beyond. The new approach of Turkish decision-makers has prioritized the security challenges which stem from the power vacuum in Syria; therefore, Turkey reduced its rhetoric against the Syrian regime and maintained more consistent policies with Russia. The convergence process between Turkey and Russia as of 2016 was accompanied by the divergence process with the US, which openly supports the YPG in Syria. Thus, the increasing security risks originating from Syria have directly affected not only Turkey's Syria policy but also its relations with the great powers in the world. If we consider the change in Turkey's relations with Syria as one layer and the change in its relations with the USA and Russia as the second layer, then it is not necessary to add a third layer to this equation; change in domestic politics. At this point, processes such as Davutoğlu's resignation and the 15 July coup attempt, and the subsequent change of the political regime in Turkey are also important areas of transformation. In fact, the main objective of this thesis is not only to emphasize the transformation in Turkey's Syria policy in 2016, together with other layers. Beyond that, the main purpose of this thesis is to explain the driving reasons for this entire paradigm shift in a chain of cause-and-effect relationships. At this point, the originality of the thesis is that Turkey explains the great paradigm shift that took place in three layers within the framework of the unique security risks that emerged within the framework of the Syrian crisis. This thesis

demonstrates how security gaps can radically change the state's policy paradigms, with internal and external security risks originating from a neighboring country. In these respects, the thesis touches on a previously untreated area in Turkish foreign policy.

The radical transformation of countries' own foreign policies was defined by Hermann (1990, p. 5) as "self-correcting change" that directly refers to an alternative course in foreign policy. within the framework of Hermann's *self-correcting change* approach, my argument concentrates on the fundamental transformation of Turkish foreign policy, such as; 1) transition from open border policy to closed border policy, 2) launching unilateral military operations and abandoning efforts to establish a safe zone through the United Nations and NATO, 3) abandoning the target and discourses of overthrowing the Assad regime and making terrorist organizations the primary target of Turkey 4) increasing coordination and cooperation with Russia by breaking away from the axis with the United States 5) implementing more "nationalistic" and authoritarian tendencies in domestic politics.

Within this scope, this thesis questions the relationship between these three essential elements of international relations: foreign policy, border security and cross border activities in a specific context. This thesis presents an overarching argument that explains the paradigm shift observed in Turkey's Syria policy in 2016. The thesis is unpacking the relationship between foreign policy choices, security, and mass migration by employing the following hypothesis: **H1:** In the first period of the Syrian civil war, Turkish decision-makers internalized the Syrian civil war and Turkey perceived the Syrian uprising as adequate tools for Turkey to achieve Turkey's claim to regional power in the international system. In this respect, Turkey's Syria policy broke away from the traditional Turkish foreign policy and gained a maximalist and politically expansionist identity which refers to seizing opportunities by taking risks in order to maximize the political influence in the region. This offensive is compatible with the elements of offensive realism that shaped Turkey's early policies in the Syrian crisis. **H2:** As a result of; a) miscalculation of Turkish decision-makers about the outcome and length of the Syrian civil war, b) full-scale open door policy, c) border control vulnerabilities, d) acceleration of the rise of armed non-state actors in the region due to Power vacuum in northern Syria e) spread and strengthening of terrorist elements across borders f) infiltration of terrorist groups into Turkey (or vice versa) -

Turkey experienced unprecedented internal and external security challenges and those security challenges are called as "*Security Gap*" period in this thesis which refers to Turkey's intense and unique internal and external security vulnerability, which reached its peak in 2015 and 2016. As a result of the security turbulence experienced by Turkey inside and outside, the fall of the Assad regime has become a secondary issue for Turkey. Turkey continued the offensive realist paradigm after 2016 by supporting it with military operations. **H3:** Terrorist components utilized the opportunity of the instability of Syria, and security deficiencies emerged in border control. When the evaluation is done, the Security Gap period has transformative power on Turkey's Syria policy because the security gap caused a break in the causal mechanism in Turkish foreign policy. This process is also essential to understand why Turkey's proxy war in Syria turned into a direct military intervention as of 2016. Moreover, the Security Gap process is the reason for the security-oriented foreign policy in Syria and one of the driving reasons for reshaping Turkey's relations with the US and Russia.

Within the framework of these basic arguments, the thesis will explain the change in Turkey's Syria policy and the driving reasons for this change within the causality mechanism.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

Turkey's Syria policy between 2011 and 2019 reflected fundamental elements and principles directly related to neo-realism, such as *power maximization and shortage of security*. The first and the most basic assumption of realism is that the nation-state is the primary actor in international relations (Donnelly, 2005). States are conceived as rational, self-interested, and power maximizer actors in the international structure. According to the neorealist perspective, when the structure of the international system is formed, it becomes a supreme structure of the actors (nation-states) and cannot be controlled by them. Nation-states cannot influence the structure, but the structure affects the behavior patterns of nation-states:

1. The state exists as a central actor in the structure. As evidenced by the powerlessness of UN, the civil society, and any other actor to incentivize states to sign international binding agreements and principles, states remain the most powerful entity in the international community.

2. The international system is based on an anarchical structure (Waltz, 1979). By anarchy, I do not mean Hobbesian war of all against all, and I mean the absence of a world government that can enforce its rules and regulations in world politics. As Kenneth Waltz asserted in *Theory of International Politics* (1979), all states (as international system units) are limited in this anarchic structure.
3. Due to the anarchical system, any actor has superior power to solve disagreements or direct international politics according to particular and predictable rules.

Since all states trust no one but only themselves for their security. The essential motive of the state's attitude is *survival* in an anarchical system. Hence, "The international affairs as a struggle for power among self-interested states" (Walt, 1998, p.31). Under these circumstances, states tend to accumulate power due to *animus dominandi* (the human race's weakness for power), and they also desperately need the power to respond to fear and uncertainty in an anarchic realm (Schdmit, 2007). According to neo-realist logic, power is critical for nation-states to maintain their security, implement their action within the limits of the structure, provide a maneuverable space under pressure, and obtain their undivided interest. In other words, power is significant because it allows for a particular position for nation-states in the international structure. This position might shape the actions of nation-states in world politics. For this reason, neorealism presumes that the nation-states seek to gain power unceasingly to guarantee their security in this anarchic structure. Mearsheimer (2001), as one of the proponents of the theory, states that the connection between war and anarchy is established by the absence of an authoritarian force that maintains order. In a nutshell, the international system is shaped by a decentralized structure. Therefore, states must rely on their power to ensure their security.

From the offensive realist perspective, the international system as an organic structure provides opportunities for states to gain power and influence over rival states. The anarchic structure of the international system might provoke nation-states to maximize their share of power in world politics and look for superiority rather than equality to make themselves more secure (Lobell, 2010). Just as prominent classical realists such as Thucydides, E.H Carr, and Hans Morgenthau, the offensive realists argue that states seek power maximization – they are ruthless seekers of power and influence (Donnelly,

2005). Gilpin (1981, p.106) asserts that "as the power of a state increases, it seeks to extend its territorial control, its political influence, and/or its domination of the world politics." In this context, the offensive realist theory put forward the constant requirement of power and influence to sustain security through the domination of rival states. Offensive realism claim that only great powers can secure themselves solely through a continuous power maximization process (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.21). Mearsheimer (2001), as one of the most important representatives of offensive realism, admits that the pressure of the international structure will frequently hinder states from succeeding maximization of power. Therefore, states' need for security and their desire for power cannot be separated from each other with sharp lines. As Waltz underlined, "the use of offensive or a defensive is always determined by the specific context" (Waltz, 2004, p.6).

In this thesis, offensive realism will be used to explain the theoretical framework of Turkey's transformed Syria policy between 2011-2019. In the first years of the Syrian civil war, Turkish decision-makers perceived the Arab Spring as an opportunity for power maximization in the region so that offensive rhetoric and implementations came to the fore. At the very beginning of the Syrian civil war, the contrary to traditional Turkish foreign policy notion of what, the Prime Minister Erdoğan underlined that their patience was over, and he asserted that "*the* Syrian crisis is an internal problem of Turkey" (TRT, 2011), Turkey directly internalized the Syrian civil war. In particular, Ahmet Davutoğlu, as the Foreign Minister and later the Prime Minister of this period, explicitly reflected its power maximization approach through discourses just as "Between 2011 and 2023, we will meet our brothers in territories where we lost between 1911-1923" (Milliyet, 2012 cited in İsyar, 2018). Not as a geographical occupation, but in terms of political and cultural influence, the political and cultural integration of Turkey with its "brothers" in the lands where we lost 100 years ago reflected the desire to expand its domain towards the Middle East Basin. Turkey has used offensive instruments since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, both rhetorically and operationally. The political and military extensions of the opposition in Syria used Turkey as a base (Gürpınar, 2015; Altunışık, 2016; Moubayed, 2016) and Ankara supported them immensely. In the summer of 2011, the main center of the political structuring of the opposition in Syria was İstanbul, and its military center was Hatay. Turkey's break with the traditional status quo policy and its participation in the

Syrian civil war under the Justice and Development Party (from now on, JDP) indicates an offensive foreign policy tendency. From the perspective of Realism, states pursue security and power maximization to sustain themselves in an anarchical international system but prioritize which one is up to decision-makers and circumstances. The ideas of Ahmet Davutoğlu, who was the Foreign Minister of Turkey at the beginning of the Syrian civil war and the ideologist of the JDP in foreign policy, was influential. Ahmet Davutoğlu openly criticized the status quo of Turkish foreign policy in the articles he published before he became the minister. For instance, he asserted that "a central country with such an optimal location cannot define itself in a defensive manner" (Davutoğlu, 2008). He argued that Turkey should pursue an expansionary foreign policy, not as a land occupation but as a political sphere of influence (Davutoğlu, 2008). This notion found an application area with the Arab Spring. In particular, the Syrian crisis was seen as an opportunity for Ankara to expand its sphere of influence in the Middle East. With the Arab Spring and the Syrian crisis, a ground has emerged that would separate Turkish foreign policy from the status quo and guide the wave of change in the Middle East, to be specific in Syria.

Nevertheless, the Assad regime did not fall as Turkish decision-makers expected, so the equation of Syrian civil war conflict turned against Turkey over time and created serious security problems that pushed Turkey to prioritize security. Because on the one hand, the power vacuum caused by the civil war in Syria caused terrorist organizations to gain space and strength in the region. On the other hand, Turkey has become the target of terrorist infiltrations and attacks through a border security deficiencies (Dal, 2016; Dora,2020). I define this security vulnerability as a "security gap process" (which refers to the deep internal and external security crises that Turkey is exposed to) will be analyzed in the thesis as one of the main arguments explaining the changing response to Turkey's Syria policy. Just as Waltz (1979, p.118) underlined that nation-state "at minimum, seek their preservation and, at maximum, drive for universal domination" When we read this proposition of Waltz from another angle, if the possibilities for expansion and maximizing power are diminished, security would become a primary concern. As a hegemonic scope and area of expansion disappeared, Turkey put its national security at the top of its policy implementation agenda over time in the Syrian civil war. The use of unilateral military force, ending the open border policy, the building of one of the immense border walls along the Syrian border, and

the closure of crossing points between Turkey and Syria by Turkey- demonstrate the essential elements of Turkey's "*new foreign policy*" which has become overwhelmingly security-oriented as of 2016. Due to internal and external security sensitivities, this transformation redefined Turkey's role vis-a-vis international partners and opponents. While in the early years of the Syrian crisis, Turkey had aimed to topple the Assad regime, particularly after 2016, Turkey's strategic priorities in Syria changed. Turkey's proxy war tactic before 2016 turned into a direct military intervention with security weaknesses. Turkey's offensive policies aimed at overthrowing the regime in Syria have evolved to the point of controlling the region with military operations after 2016. In the post-2016 period, the offensive realist paradigm of Turkish foreign policy has continued to exist, only changing its form and method due to the conditions that have developed against it. Turkey still contained offensive realist components regarding the size and purpose of the military operations carried out by Turkey in Syria.

In the Syrian case, at the beginning (2011), the political position of Turkish decision-makers was based on assertive foreign policy and offensive realism, which I am going to entitle with *X*. In the first chain of causal mechanisms, there is a strong belief in Turkish decision-makers which based on the ambitious goal of removing the Assad regime and substitution of the regime with Turkey-friendly political opposition. Contrary to traditional Turkish Foreign Policy, the JDP decided to be involved in the Syrian civil war to maximize power. Turkey has been involved in the Syrian civil war as a direct party. Due to the complex and multisided nature of the Syrian civil war, either at the regional or international level, the replacement of the incumbent regime has not happened. However, because of the violence brought on by the civil war, Turkey has experienced one of the most significant mass migration waves in late human history. Moreover, the engagement of Turkey in the Syrian civil war, the authority vacuum in northern Syria, and the open-door policy of Turkey allowed terrorist elements to infiltrate Turkey from its southern borders.

Firstly, Turkey experienced deep public safety problems in urban areas due to Turkey's increasing internal security problems and uncontrolled cross-border population movement. Suicide bombers and terrorist attacks intensified in many parts of Turkey, especially in major cities such as Ankara, İstanbul, and Izmir. These attacks hit the

highest point, especially in 2015 and 2016. Secondly, after the strategic retreat of the Assad regime powers from northern Syria in February 2012, the power vacuum filled by terrorist organizations such as ISIS and YPG posed a mortal threat to Turkey's national security: the following: *external security crisis*. The external security crisis combined with internal security crises as *trigger factor (Y)* drives the causal mechanism of Turkish foreign policy into a new phase together with the effects of international power centers on the Syrian civil war that covers the post-2016 period. The intensification of cross border population, and the increasing internal and external terror threats, decrease the probability of the fall of the Assad regime, which drives Turkey to alter its foreign policy methods into two layers. In the post-2016 period, Turkey has applied security-oriented and militarized policies due to internal and external security problems in the first layer. As concrete indicators, firstly, between 2016 and 2018, Turkey constructed the third-longest border wall in the world on the Turkey-Syria border; therefore, the full-scale open-door policy was abandoned unofficially.

Moreover, border crossing points are closed mainly between Turkey and Syria. Turkey attempted to reduce terrorism threats through migration waves and open border crossings. In the second layer, Ankara has begun to rely on hard power as an operative instrument in Turkish foreign policy, particularly toward the Syrian crisis since August 2016. Ankara launched Operation Euphrates Shield and took control of Al-Bab city and the Azez – Jarablus line in the north of Syria to neutralize the terror threat and ensure border security. Subsequently, Turkey launched Operation Olive Branch and Peace Spring Operations for border security and to prevent the establishment of separatist pro-Kurdish state in northern Syria (İşyar, 2018). In this context, the Turkish military intervention in the north of Syria was mainly motivated by the need to establish a security zone to push any structure that would threaten Turkey's national security beyond the border. All these militarized and security-oriented policies Turkey's Syria policy entitled with *(Z)* in the causal mechanism. In the overall picture, it can be seen that within the framework of Turkey's foreign policy towards the Syrian civil war, *the (X), (Y), and (Z)* processes triggered each other.

1.3. Methodology and Research Design

1.3.1. Process Tracing

The process-tracing technique has become a progressively used and cited instrument in qualitative research, a propensity that has lately accelerated. In this section, I am interested in three primary issues. First all, the uses of elite interview data for the process-tracing method, secondly emphasis on how to set up the evidential value of interview data and thirdly, the implications of the process tracing methods - how researchers have to touch upon sampling their interview subject? Process tracing aims to acquire information about specific and well-defined incidents and processes. Therefore, the most appropriate sampling methods identify the key political actors who have had the most relevance to the particular process. In this thesis, the goal is not to construct a representative sample of a more significant population of political actors that might be used to generalize instead of drawing a sample that contains the most significant players who have been associated with the political incidents. In process tracing, the researcher analyses histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other sources to observe the causal process (George & Bennet, 2005). Nevertheless, I argue that interviewing, particularly elite interviewing, is immensely thematic for process tracing approaches to case study research. Because process tracing often involves the analysis of political development at the highest level, executive and elite actors are constantly critical sources of information about the political process of interest. George and Bennett (2005, p.223) also underlined that the process tracing and case study research contains various uses data, including interview data.

The Syrian civil war is a multisided, complicated and dynamic process. Thus, in this study, I am going to analyze the changing responses of Turkey to Syrian foreign policy in the context of mass migration and security challenges in different phases. In order to trace a causal mechanism in any political - and social case and identify the turning points, the most accurate methodology is process tracing. Process tracing involves "attempts to identify the intervening causal process— *the causal chain and causal mechanism*— between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable" (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p.1). Ontologically, the understanding

the nature of the world refers to the natural causality in my research. This ontological position in social science embraces a mechanistic understanding of causality that position underlines the process-tracing method (Bennett, 2008). Epistemologically the main argument is how a researcher should best study causal relationships in the social world. Social scientists and also human beings as well, try to perceive complex processes and cases by breaking them down and, after that building them back up again in general. The fundamental question here is what specific mechanism does play at particular points in the evolution of the Syrian civil war and the security challenges of Turkey? What mechanism moved Turkish decision-makers from a proxy war methods to direct military intervention to Syria? What mechanism moved Turkish decision-makers from open-door policy to building up the third most extensive border wall in the world? What mechanisms have pushed Turkey from seeking a safe zone supported by international forces to unilateral military operations in northern Syria? Which mechanism can explain the transformation of Turkey's relations with Russia and the USA in the post-2016 period?

The causal mechanism and outcome could be perceived through machine analogy. Every single part of the mechanism could be seen as a toothed wheel that *X* transmits the dynamic causal energy of the causal mechanism to the subsequent toothed wheel, finally creating outcome *Y*. If process-tracing is seen just like a car, where *X* could be the motor and *Y* is the acceleration of the car. But, in the case of the absence of driveshafts and wheels, the engine by itself cannot accelerate. In this case, the driveshaft and wheel could be understood as the causal mechanism that put cross forces from *X* to *Y* (Beach & Pedersen, 2013). Basically, process-tracing is divided into three variants within social science: theory-testing, theory-building, and explaining the outcome. My methodological approach is not compatible with the theory-centric one of building or testing a generalizable mechanism; instead, this study operates to craft an adequate explanation of the outcome. Mahoney (2008) underlined that we should operate deterministic understanding in small-*n* research. The cause-and-effect relationship is vital so that the evidence from a particular case cannot be compared with other studies. For qualitative scholars, the term determinism is used primarily to refer to a "mechanistic - understanding of causation, focusing on the process whereby causal forces are transmitted through a series of interlocking parts of a mechanism to produce an outcome" (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p.6). Within the scope

of this thesis, the (X) as the early periods of Ankara's Syria policy primarily relied on the desire for leadership in the region and the maximization of power, (Y) as a trigger factor refers to mass migration, infiltration of the terrorist elements from Syria to Turkey, the rise of armed non-state actors in northern Syria (internal/external security challenges) that leads to the Z which refers to militarization of foreign policy, reprioritize national security and domestic instability.

1.3.2. Elite Interviews

When a researcher conducts political research, different methodological approaches are commonly applied in the qualitative research method to have more profound insight into the fact behind the surface. To achieve this aim, a growing number of researchers use elite interviewing (William, 2015) as an effective research method. There is no clear definition of the term "elite" understanding across the social sciences; scholars have tended to embrace different approaches. Significant Public duties held by political elites give them access to critical information; therefore, just as Burnham suggests, elite interviews are generally the most productive way to acquire information about the decision-making process (Burnham et al., 2004). Zuckerman (1972) prefers to use the term "ultra-elites" to define individuals who hold a substantial amount of power within a social hierarchy. By "elites" I am referring to a group of people who have been at critical points in politics or public office due to their duty or otherwise play leadership roles of some form in the political process such as engage in decision-making activity in domestic or foreign policy. It is generally suggested to avoid asking "elites" closed or ended questions because they tend to dislike being limited and restricted answers (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002). On the other hand, ultimately releasing the person in elite interviews may prevent obtaining important information about the relevant subject. For this reason, semi-structured interviews were the appropriate concept for the elite interview. The advantage of the elite interview is the opportunity to get confirmation from other sources. Elite interview data is a commonly accepted way to confirm information that has already been gathered from other origins. For example, when examining documents, memoirs and secondary sources maintain a preliminary outline of the issues, elite interviews with key players might be used to verify the initial findings. From this point on, elite interviews contribute to the research objective of triangulation through cross-checked data from multiple sources to

improve the findings' strength. Secondly, the process of tracing entails conducting elite interviews to identify the political decisions and actions that lay behind a series of incidents.

Before an interview, I try to be as transparent as possible and ensure the interviewee the following information: Who am I, where am I doing my Ph.D. and where am I working? What is the ultimate purpose of my thesis? How long will the interview take? How will the data be used? Interview questions were prepared according to the expertise of the interviewees and specifically addressed specific processes. Stephens (2007) also found that an average interview lasted the same amount of time, but the length varied significantly from one interview to another, from nearly three hours to less than one hour.

My own experience is that interviews with elite subjects were significantly shorter and often around 45 minutes in length. There was no significant difference in the length of my average face-to-face interview. The primary purpose of conducting elite interviews was to have knowledge and ideas on subjects not found in open sources and this goal has largely been achieved.

There were several difficulties encountered in conducting the elite interviews. First, the fact that the interviewees held important public positions or were academicians who were experts in their fields was a factor that made the process of getting an appointment for the interview difficult. I had to contact more than once for an interview and sometimes wait weeks.

Moreover, it was difficult to determine the interview time, especially with MPs and retired ambassadors, due to their busy and variable schedules. Apart from all these, one of the most important difficulties was the tendency of the interviewees to go beyond the questions asked. The interviewees tended to express what they wanted due to both their extensive knowledge of the subject and their position. I tried to intervene with additional questions to bring the people I interviewed back to the relevant topic. As the interviewer, I had to choose what I would use in the thesis among the many information given and include them in the text.

My thesis plan basically consisted of three stages within the framework of the subject I determined since April 2020. The first stage was the preparation of the thesis proposal and it resulted in the defense of the thesis proposal made on June 26, 2020. The second stage was divided into three in itself. First of all, reading the texts to be written within the scope of the thesis proposal within the framework of the relevant sources and gathering scholars. Then, obtaining and collecting information on the subject that cannot be found in open sources through elite interview method. Finally, writing a doctoral thesis within the framework of primary and secondary sources. The third stage or layer is the shaping of the thesis within the framework of the feedback from the thesis monitoring committee from the very beginning. At the end of the three-stage process, the process was terminated with proofreading.

Among the many academic studies examining Turkey's Syria policy, it is necessary to highlight certain points that distinguish this thesis. Many academic studies have been conducted on Turkey's Syria policy and the change of this policy (D'elama, 2017; Altunışık, 2020; Kösebalaban, 2020 Siccardi, 2021). These academic studies have generally been conceptualized through the change in Turkey's Syria policy in 2016. The purpose of this thesis is not only to emphasize that there was a paradigm shift in Turkey's foreign policy in 2016, but also to explain the driving reasons for this change. The aim of this thesis; It explains the reasons for the wide-ranging transformation observed from Turkey's domestic policy dynamics to its border policy and foreign policy preferences. A deterministic ontological approach would be correct for the purpose of explaining the change concentrated at a certain point of a linear flowing temporal line (Beach & Pedersen, 2013). Because the determinist perspective can provide the clarification and explanation of the cause-and-effect relationships in the linear flowing temporal line. This is why the process tracing method was chosen over a single sample. It has been tried to obtain information that cannot be found in open sources by using elite interviews about the Syrian civil war crisis and Turkey's Syria policy in the context of process tracing.

CHAPTER 2

TURKEY'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

2.1. Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy; Turkey's Middle East Policy and the Arab Spring

The Middle East has surfaced as one of the centric points of a new, more assertive, and offensive style of Turkish foreign policy, especially after the Arab Spring. The unexpected dramatic incidents in the Arab world have profoundly affected Turkish politics. Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East, before the onset of the Arab Spring in the era of the Justice and Development Party, had tried to build reciprocal close ties that were based on cultural or religious closeness, primarily through Islamic civilization, which Pınar Bilgin defines as "civilizational geopolitics" (Bilgin, 2011). In that regard, the JDP government had established close relations with the Middle East countries (Taşpınar, 2012). The JDP had also mediated in the Syrian – Israel conflict and the nuclear standoff with Iran (Turan, 2012). Ankara's diplomatic connections with Iran and Hamas have paved the way to divergence with the United States (U.S) and Israel, which created an impression partially that Turkey was shifting from the Western axis. During the first 8 years of JDP rule, Turkey -Syria relations advanced remarkably. A Joint Economic Committee was instituted that made possible trade agreements and industrial exposition events in Damascus; in January 2004, 300 Turkish businesspeople returned homeland with 250 million dollars worth of Syrian contracts (D'alema, 2017). After 2007, a bilateral free-trade agreement entered into force, and the foreign ministers of the two countries signed a visa liberalization agreement in 2009. Turkey's exports to Syria tripled between 2006 and 2010, rising to 1,85 billion dollars, making Turkey the seventh-largest market in the Middle East (D'alema, 2017).

After an almost decade of cooperation and closeness with Syria, Turkey's policy has changed radically due to the crisis in Syria. The Arab Spring changed the political and economic equation in the region irrevocably. After the onset of conflict between authoritarian regimes and their populations as of 2010 in Arab geography, the "zero problems" policy which refers to balance between security and freedom, proactive diplomacy, and zero problems with neighbors (Sözen, 2010) was no longer feasible in terms of JDP. In the beginning, Ankara had followed the "watch and see policy" in Tunisia in December 2010; nevertheless, when the firing of demonstrations spread to Egypt in January 2011, the JDP government noticed that a great wave of change was on upcoming hand. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was the first leader to call for President Hosni Mubarak to be put aside. Abdullah Gül was the first president to visit Egypt after Mubarak fell from power. As the Arab Spring expanded, the JDP government followed a more proactive policy in the Middle East. Turkey has been deeply engaged with the Syrian crisis and forced its resources politically and diplomatically to reshape Syria. In the first phase of the crisis, Turkey explicitly claimed its support to the "democratization" process and became a party to the Syrian civil war by going beyond its traditional foreign policy line. To accomplish this competitive strategy in the region, the "*zero problems with neighbors*" policy was replaced by more aggressive foreign policy choices. At a diplomatic level, Turkey reinforced either the Arab League's plan (November 2011 – January 2012) and the UN's Annan Plan (February – August 2012). Although Syrian regime agreed to an Arab League peace plan to the effect that its army would no longer be enforced in violent oppression against peaceful protesters (Al Jazeera, 2011), when on 6 November 2011 at least 23 demonstrators were killed by the regime (CNN, 2011), the members of Arab League agreed to exclude Syria over its failure to end crackdown on protests. The other peace initiatives of the Arab League were concluded just like the first one. Moreover, Annan announced to step down as UN mediator in Syria on 2 August 2012 with blaming the escalating military campaign of Syria opposition and the lack of unity in the UN Security Council (NYTIMES, 2012). As a result, both plans finally failed to stop violence, and no solution was found. On the other side of fruitless diplomatic attempts, Ankara desired Turkey to be a "*central country*" in the region, As Ahmet Davutoğlu expressed in the Turkish parliament, considers itself as the pioneer of the wave of change in the Middle East (İşyar, 2018) for that reason the Arab Spring

and the Syrian crisis were seen as an opportunity to overthrow Assad. As the fall of the Assad regime, which relied on a Nusayri (a member of religious group centered in Syria who follow a branch of Shia Islam) minority, and the coming to power of a Sunni government close to the JDP meant that Ankara would gain a serious advantage over Tehran and Moscow in the region. By organizing opposition conferences – and meetings and taking direct action by hosting and supporting the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian National Council, Turkey soon became the center of the Syrian opposition. The JDP perceived the Arab Spring as an opportunity for political expansion, became a direct party to the Syrian civil war, and waged a proxy war in the region. However, Turkey's policy towards Syria had severe limits and contradictions regarding its grand strategy.

There might be identified two significant limitations of Turkey's policy towards Syria. At first, Russia, China and Iran had a strategic interest in Syria; hence, they took an active role in leading resolutions and statements in the international arena, which meant great diplomatic support for the Assad regime (Allison, 2013). The military support of Russia and Iran has increased the resilience of the Syrian regime against the opposition. Secondly, the potential of the resistance and the robust capacity of the Assad regime in Syria were underestimated by Turkish decision-makers. Turkish decision makers' underestimation and miscalculation about the Syrian crisis caused some severe problems for Ankara in time. For instance, due to growing violence in Syria, Turkey received 224.665 Syrian refugees at the end of 2012 and had been bombarded by Assad's forces (Erdoğan, 2020). More importantly, after the confrontation of Erdoğan with Assad in 2011, the Assad regime has stimulated its relations with the PKK terror organization (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan –“Kurdistan Worker's Party”) and its extension in Syria as an ultimatum to Turkey's Syria policy. This situation significantly increased the maneuvering area of the PYD terror organization (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat – “Democratic Union Party”), the Syrian extension of PKK, in the region. Despite these potential security threats, Turkey has escalated its offensive policy towards Syria in three stages since March 2011; cutting all diplomatic ties with the Assad regime, increasing anti-Assad diplomatic efforts regionally and internationally, and supporting Syria's political and armed opposition explicitly.

2.1. The first period in Turkey's Syria policy; Break with Traditional Turkish Foreign Policy and Neo-Ottomanism

The primary foundation of the traditional foreign policy of the Turkish Republic, which derived from the last period of the historical experience of the Ottoman Empire, basically referred to the balance of power. The nationalist Kemalist revolution and establishment of the Republic of Turkey occurred based on Westernization (Murinson, 2006). The Turkish Republic's foreign policy was guided by the dictum "peace at home, peace abroad," which was expressed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic. The new Republic was born out of the Ottoman Empire, whereas not similar to its forerunner. In this context, it might be argued that traditional Turkish foreign policy is formed by its historical experiences, vulnerabilities, and elite ideology (Kemalism) (Aydın, 1999). Therefore, Turkey has historically followed a relatively coherent security perception of *realpolitik*, "which has evolved from a predominant offensive character into a defensive one" (Karaosmanoğlu, 2000, p. 202). Turkish imperial history ended with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. The Treaty of Lausanne, signed after the nationalist resistance against the occupying forces on July 24, 1923, altered the imposed Peace Treaty of Sevres and established a new, fully independent Turkish nation-state. Although the Treaty of Sevres is left behind with the Treaty of Lausanne, it left a traumatic effect on the memory of Turkish foreign policy. The Sevres Treaty was detrimental to Turkish independence and devastating to its homeland: The Turks were only allowed to control a small part of isolated central Anatolia (Mufti, 1998). Thus, it might be claimed that Turkey's national security policy and Turkish foreign policy always have been influenced by "Sevres-phobia" or "Sevres Syndrome," which conceptualizes the idea that "internal and external enemies are trying to divide and destroy Turkey." Eventually, the new state was no longer a great empire but a nation-state. In this context, Turkey had any aspiration for territorial expansion, and it did not have enough strength for that either. Under these circumstances, Turkey needs a new, realistic foreign policy perception that could challenge the difficulties of the new international system after World War I.

The ideas and policies of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk were highly decisive in the construction of Turkish foreign policy. Atatürk's foreign policy aims reflected a

separation from the expansionist logic of the Ottoman Empire (Aydın, 2003). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was concerned about the young nation-state's independence and existence. Hence, the motto "peace at home, peace in the world", reflects the principle of adopting a policy of balance to sustain the nation-state. In other words, he desired to preserve the status quo, which would be the main principle of Turkish foreign policy for many years. Apart from that, one of the basic features of traditional Turkish foreign policy has been its Western tendencies. Although Turkey had struggled against Western powers in the First World War and the War of Independence, the new state opted for Western civilization after establishing the Turkish national state.

While the West is the modern civilization level to be reached, the Middle East dominated an immense space in Turkish security thinking. The Middle East has always been unstable since World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. For that reason, Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East mainly required stability and status quo because the destabilizing incident would create security problems for Turkey in the region. For Mustafa Aydın (2003), there are three strains of the Ottoman past, namely pan-Ottomanism, pan-Islamism, and pan-Turanism, which emerged as a solution to save the collapse of the Ottoman Empire but continued to be inherently imperial. The imperial Ottomanism was refused, and it was replaced with republicanism, pan-Islamism replaced with secularism, and pan-Turanism replaced with nationalism (Yükselen, 2016). In practice, this major split became visible by appointing the Turkish Parliament as the "only rightful representative of the Turkish nation" that was the discursive emphasis of the separation from the Ottoman past by handing rule from the monarch over to the crown. Parallel to this, the Ottomans' ideology of expansionism was abandoned in favor of a peaceful and balanced foreign policy.

The 2000s have witnessed a significant transformation in Turkish foreign policy, particularly following the establishment of the JDP in 2002. It might be said that Turkish foreign policy has experienced a profound paradigm transformation, "moving from its traditional defensive and Western-oriented stance to a new approach known as Neo-Ottomanism or Strategic Depth doctrine" (D'alema, 2017 p.1). The term of Neo-Ottomanism or Pax Ottomanica was first used in Turkey early in the 1990s; it might be seen as the missed reminiscence of the power and hegemony that had

prevailed through multi-continental territories of the Ottoman Empire, apparently much more reference to Mehmet the Conqueror and Süleyman the Magnificent. The geopolitical conditions shaped by the fragmentation of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War created a convenient political environment for such mind refreshment. In that sense, Pax- Ottomanica or Neo-Ottomanism had a severe impact on the minds of decision-makers in Turkey, not only in the 1990s but also during the pending JDP rule, particularly following the Arab Spring. After the instantaneous fall of the authoritarian Arab governments, which had been ruling territories that belonged to the Ottoman Empire *once upon a time*, a kind of nostalgia reconnected with the Ottoman legacy and influenced deeply Turkish foreign policy from 2011 forward (Ataç, 2018). In the context of new pretentious discourse, becoming an "order-building actor" and "maximization of capabilities" has been put forward as the only way for Turkey. By Hasan Yükselen (2016), the JDP foreign policy era has been identified with the discourse of "We have responsibilities". Under the JDP rule, the new Turkish foreign policy foundations were laid by Ahmet Davutoğlu, first as an academic and author of *Strategic Depth*, as a foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Erdoğan, then as Foreign Minister and Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey. When Ahmet Davutoğlu became a foreign policy advisor of the JDP government, he began to utilize his "strategic depth" doctrine in foreign policy implementations (Sözen, 2005). In the context of the "strategic depth" logic, Ahmet Davutoğlu was trying to answer this question: "What should be the basis for Turkish foreign policy?" (Yükselen, 2016). According to Davutoğlu, Turkey should redefine its agency in its self-perception (Davutoğlu, 1997). Davutoğlu did not adopt a status quo or a defensive understanding of foreign policy-making processes. Instead, he put forward the concept of assertiveness of agency by underlying that "assertive countries define security threats according to their strategies; however, non-assertive and submissive countries shape their fragile strategies according to their definition of threats" (Davutoğlu, 2001, p.62).

Besides, in his speech at the Third Ambassador's conference in Ankara, Davutoğlu explicitly underlines the role of Turkey "in the remaking of the global order" (Kardas, 2011). According to Davutoğlu, once upon a time, the Ottoman Empire dominated its surroundings, such as the Balkans and the Middle East. Meanwhile, referencing the expansionist policies of the Ottoman Empire toward its periphery, Davutoğlu used similar concepts such as "land basins" that cover the Balkans, Caucasus, and the

Middle East to describe potential spheres of the modern Turkish Republic in his book (Davutoğlu, 2000). It is seen that this approach of thought and discourse deeply affected the actions of the state of the Turkish Republic during the Syrian civil war. Ahmet Davutoğlu believed and underlined that nation-state in the Middle East were established on the artificial background through the Sykes-picot agreement; therefore, he asserted that one his speech in Diyarbakir, "we will break the chains shaped for us by Sykes-Picot" (MFA, 2013). This discourse demonstrates that Davutoğlu's vision which did not accept existing Middle East borders as it is. To achieve the "pro-active" foreign policy objective, Davutoğlu defends abandoning the status quo in Turkish foreign policy (Murinson, 2006; Özkan, 2009; Ataç, 2018). For instance, Ahmet Davutoğlu asserted,

Why integration of whole Europe does not count as Neo-Romanism, but the integration of Middle East count as New Ottomans? Until 2018 we close this bracket. We will connect the Sarajevo to Damascus, Benghazi to Batum... the establishment of a new regional order to this geography is our responsibility (Anadolu Agency, March 3, 2013).

Davutoğlu, before and during the Syrian civil war crisis, explicitly reflected its offensive approach. One of the clear examples of his stance in January 2012 when he expressed that "Between 2011 and 2023, we will meet our brothers in territories where we last between 1911-1923" (Milliyet, 2012 cited in İsyar, 2018). This political and cultural expansionary foreign policy vision in the Middle East, seen as the "Ottoman legacy," has impacted Turkey's Syria policy for a while. In other words, this vision of Davutoğlu was reflected not only in rhetoric but also in actions.

2.1.1. "Historical Opportunity"; Arab Spring and Syrian Civil War

The Arab Spring started in Tunisia on 17 December 2010, the self-immolation incident of Muhammed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old street seller, protested the local officials. Then hundreds of thousands of Tunisians began street demonstrations and demanded the fall of the incumbent regime. It was impossible to resist such a massive wave of social protests, so Tunisia's President Zein Al- Abidine resigned on 15 January 2011 and ran away to Saudi Arabia (SETA, 2011). The self-immolation of Bouazizi was a catalyzer to initiate an unprecedented democracy demand in the Middle East countries called Arab Spring. The Arab Spring was a wave of -pro-democracy protests and uprising that overthrew authoritarian regimes in the region. The rapid and unexpected

achievement of protesters in Tunisia and Egypt encouraged protest movements that took hold in Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria at the beginning of 2011.

Before and during this period, Davutoğlu was a widely influential person in Turkey's foreign policy, first as the chief foreign policy advisor of Prime Minister Erdoğan between 2002 and 2009, as Minister of Foreign Affairs between 2009 and 2015, and then as Prime Minister of Turkish Republic from 2014 to 2016. The JDP perceived the Arab Spring process not only as a political emancipation movement of Arabic countries in the Middle East but also as a historic opportunity for Turkey in the context of expansionism and offensive realist foreign policy. I do not directly mean territorial expansion by expansionism but the political influence on Syria and the Middle East. To be more specific I refer to efforts to become regional power in the Middle East through emphasis on common culture, history, and civilizations around Ottoman legacy. In the Turkish general elections of 12 June 2011, Prime Minister Erdoğan and his political party won the election by taking 50 percent of the total vote (BBC, 2011). In his victory speech, similar to Davutoğlu, Erdoğan declared his regional desires as follows: "My brothers, believe me, Sarajevo won today as much as İstanbul. Today Beirut won as much as Izmir. Today, Damascus won as much as Ankara, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, the West Bank, Jerusalem won today as much as Diyarbakir" (BBC, 2011). Prime Minister Erdoğan, just like Davutoğlu, put forward an assertive vision on the first day of his election success. JDP has internalized the Arab Spring process that will cause uprisings and revolutions in authoritarian Arab countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Syria from the very beginning. Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu put forward the same point of view at the sixth Al Jazeera Forum in Doha, Qatar. He asserted that "The past was an abnormality. Arab Spring is the natural flow of history" (Al Jazeera, 2011). This approach was a clear indication that the principle of neutrality was abandoned in the Middle East, and the government would take a side in the developments in the region.

Before the Arab Spring, the pragmatic position of Davutoğlu on Middle Eastern oppressive regimes tended to maintain nourish relations with dictators such as Assad in Syria or Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. As a matter of fact, before the Arab Spring, Davutoğlu was aware of the reality that the Turkish Republic had neither the strength nor the chance to defy oppressive incumbent political structures in the Middle East

(Davutoğlu, 1994). According to Davutoğlu, there were two options in front of the Turkish Republic, "either put herself at the center of the circle of unification and dominate its hinterland or persist on a defensive foreign policy that made her undefended to attack by those had defeated the Ottoman Empire" (Davutoğlu, 1994).

Within this framework, the JDP believed that Turkey should support the transformation in the Middle East by assisting the Islamic groups (Bekaroğlu, 2016). Parallel to this process, Davutoğlu also described the Arab Spring as the "*Turkish Spring*" (Cumhuriyet, 2011). According to Ahmet Davutoğlu, the Arab Spring was a normalization process for Arab societies, and "Turkey was leading the process of normalizing politics and history in the region" (Cumhuriyet, 2011). The Prime-minister Erdoğan was also defining the Arab Spring as an "opportunity" and "acceleration of democratic transformation" in December 2011 (Hürriyet, 2011). In other words, Turkish decision-makers were convinced that the long-awaited opportunity came with the uprising in Tunisia in 2010 and extended into Libya, Egypt, and Syria. When Arab Spring emerged, Ahmet Davutoğlu asserted that "Turkey is the protector of all oppressed societies in the Middle East" (MFA, 2011).

Associate Professor Yasin Atlıoğlu, who was in Syria at the beginning of the Syrian civil war, evaluated the process of Turkish decision-makers' involvement in the Syrian civil war as follows;

Turkish decision makers assumed that all these authoritarian regimes would collapse like dominoes one after another when the power in Tunisia and Egypt changed rapidly and there was a military intervention in Libya. I saw the sign of this when I was in Damascus in March (2011). Syrian Muslim Brotherhood broadcast live in İstanbul meeting in April. I see this as a breakdown. Because although the Muslim Brotherhood had visited Turkey before, it was not visible. As of April, the statements of the Turkish side have begun to harden. I think that the hardening in Turkey's Syria policy has to do with some emotional approaches. The opening of the path to power for the Muslim brothers in Egypt gave birth to the idea that Muslim brothers-dominated regimes would emerge in the region. In this context, the neo-Ottomanist discourse has been on the agenda since 2010. (Atlıoğlu, 13.10.2022, Interview)

According to the "strategic depth doctrine", Turkey had become a reactive and one-dimensional actor that who denied the Ottoman geopolitical legacy, particularly in the post-Cold War era. Davutoğlu's "strategic" vision drew apparent parallels between the

Republic of Turkey and the Ottoman neighborhood. Davutoğlu claims that there are three types of behaviors of societies. The first type of society adopts a static behavior; it prefers to wait until dynamism ends in the international system (Bağcı & Acıkalın, 2015). This static behavior limits its dynamism too. According to Davutoğlu, if a society has no self-reliance to lead its dynamism and is even afraid of its dynamism, it will generally prefer to act statically. The second type of society considers itself as an ordinary actor, and because of this, it leaves its destiny in the course of dynamism of the international system under the impact of developed powers. The third and last group of society can transform its potential stamina as a power indicator into the dynamism of the international system. This kind of behavior results from understanding and explaining the dynamic international system's elements, mechanisms, and flow. (Bağcı & Açıkalin, 2015). According to Davutoğlu's foreign policy perception, the first type of society tries to protect itself from chaos, the second type of society prefers letting itself into chaos, and the third type of society aims to be an actor of transformation from "*chaos to cosmos*" (Bağcı & Açıkalin, 2015). The chaotic nature metaphor matches with the offensive realist paradigm; the chaotic nature of the international system pushes nation-states to maximize their capabilities and maximize their relative influence to sustain their advanced position among nations (Wendt, 1995). According to Davutoğlu's vision, Turkey should have been a third type of country and turned chaos into "*cosmos*" thanks to its unique geographical position and cultural and historical depth.

In a similar line, the rationale of offensive realism embeds aggression, competition, and expansion to increase power capability (Lobell, 2010) since states as self-regarding egoist mechanisms pursue to accumulate power in an anarchical international system (Schmidt, 2007; Wendt, 1999). Within this scope, the third type of society vision of Davutoğlu is compatible with offensive realist components such as seizing opportunities by taking risks, expanding geographical domain politically, economically, and culturally, and maximization of power through expansion. Seeing Arab spring as an opportunity to internalize the Syrian civil war despite security-oriented traditional Turkish Foreign Policy, defining the Syrian civil war as a way of offensive policy demonstrates that Turkish decision-makers adopted to offensive realist paradigm at the beginning of the Syrian civil war. As a natural consequence of this view, Turkey turned its face to the Middle East and tried to empower Islamic

groups, in particular Muslim Brotherhood. In the first phase, Turkey conducted an offensive realist policy in Syria, it has not only been involved in the Syrian civil war, but also it has tried to give a form the route of the Syrian civil war. In the context of Davutoğlu's assertive foreign policy perspective, the reaction of Turkey toward the Syria civil war crisis has been re-produced through the rights of the oppressed Middle Eastern peoples. After Turkey began supporting the opposition in the ongoing conflict in Syria, its foreign policy was no longer perceived as objective and dialogue-oriented (Altıok & Tosun, 2019). In the first phase, the replacement of the Assad regime with a Turkey-friendly government was the driving force in Turkish Foreign Policy. Nonetheless, there was a severe calculation error made by Turkish decision-makers about the duration, course, and outcome of the Syrian civil war.

2.2. First Reaction of Turkey to the Syrian Uprising

In southern Syria, the first significant protests occurred in March 2011. The violence of the Assad regime exacerbated the visibility and momentum of the volume of the protesters' motivation, and in a short time parallel, nonviolent protests started around the country. After this point, Turkey faced critical political, security-related, and humanitarian challenges and responsibilities due to conflict. At the beginning of the Syrian civil war process, Turkish officials made several attempts to convince the Assad regime to initiate reforms to appease the pervasive upheaval (Önhon, 2021). In the early months of the crisis, the Assad regime put forward two forked implementations; on the one part, the regime made some small gestures to the opposition; for instance, it started to free some political prisoners. On the other part, the Assad regime also began harshly suppressing the mass demonstrations in the streets. Despite the personal relationships between Erdoğan and Assad and mutual collaboration between institutions, diplomatic initiations did not bring any desired result. On 9th August 2011, Erdoğan sent Davutoğlu to Damascus to warn the regime last time (Önhon, 2021 p.151). Nevertheless, it became clear that all attempts to influence the Assad regime would not be effective in a short time.

Ömer Önhon, who was the ambassador of Turkey at that time, said the following about Turkey's inability to convince the Syrian regime and the attitude and decisions of the Syrian regime;

Attempts to persuade Syria were unsuccessful. The Syrian regime made a judgment within itself. They thought that if we went to meet the demands of the demonstrators, we would weaken our power as a result. They concluded that sharing power would eventually result in the loss of power. Thus they decided to fight. (Interview, 14.11.2022).

After the failed attempts, Prime-Minister Erdoğan, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, and President Gül, one after another, started complaining publicly about their loss of trust in the Assad regime. After his return from Damascus, Davutoğlu defined the methods used by the Syrian regime power as “unacceptable”, and he asserted that “*we discussed ways to prevent a confrontation between the army and the people, and tensions like those in Hama, most openly and clearly*” (BBC, 2011). In early August, Prime Minister Erdoğan underlined that their patience was over and “Syrian crisis is an internal problem of Turkey” (BBC, 2011). In September 2011, Prime Minister Erdoğan declared that “*they had no trust in the Assad regime and there was nothing to talk with them*” (Önhon, 2021). After this declaration, Turkey’s position politically has become more intrusive and rigid. Turkey put its weight behind the dissidents on the ground by supplying logistical and material support (Altunışık, 2016). Decision-makers in Turkey explicitly demonstrated that Turkey would not pursue a neutrality policy, unlike the traditional Turkish foreign policy. Thereby, the negotiation process ended in the autumn of 2011, when the Assad regime chose the intense oppression and violence against the opposition so that Turkey abandoned its policy of dialogue with the Assad regime at the end of September 2011; Turkey also cut all diplomatic ties with the Assad regime formally (Philips, 2012). The Turkish decision-makers overestimated their soft power and influence over the Syrian regime (Altunışık, 2016). On the other hand, it might be stated that the Turkish government overestimated the strength of the Syrian opposition, especially the power of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood Organization. Ömer Önhon, who served as the Turkish Ambassador to Syria in 2011, said the following in the report he sent to Turkey before the events started in Syria (January 2011);

President Assad is popular among the people. It is a fact that the Nusayris, who hold the administration and key positions, are privileged. Still, the regime has not excluded other religious and ethnic groups from the administration and business world. Muslim brothers are silent and ineffective. They are already in exile outside Syria (Önhon, 2021, p. 93).

In addition, the retired ambassador Önhon gave the following information about the process;

At first we saw where the events in Syria could go and how much damage they could do to us. Diplomatic and political agents of the state observed the events. Everything was happening right before our eyes. It's never possible to see the whole picture, but we've seen much of the picture and seen where it can go. (Interview, 13.11.2022).

The information given by the Damascus ambassador to Turkey of the period directly emphasizes the inadequacy of the Muslim brothers, who constituted the main backbone of the Syrian opposition. Another important emphasis in the information note sent by retired ambassador Önhon to Turkey is that although there is a Nusayri hegemony in Syria, other ethnic and religious groups have not been excluded from the administration and the business world. For this reason, it is understandable why the regime under the domination of the Nusayri minority and its social disintegration did not occur as quickly as Turkish decision makers had envisioned.

2.2.1. Turkish Foreign Policy and Organization of Syrian Opposition

The first Syrian opposition meeting was held in Turkey at the beginning of April 2011 in İstanbul by Mazlum-Der, which is a human rights organization that is close to Erdoğan's government, with the participation of Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (SMB) Secretary-General Shaqfeh and Political Chief Muhammed Tayfur (Gürpınar, 2015). According to the meeting documents, the Political Chief of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammed Tayfur, said that "the most suitable government model for Syria and even for the Arab world was Turkey's model" (Mehmet, 2011). In the İstanbul meeting, Lovay Safi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, underlined the intimate relationship between Turkey and SMB (Gürpınar, 2015). After the April 2011 İstanbul Meeting, the second meeting was held in Antalya on 1 June 2011 by sort of a permanent committee just like the Libyan National Transitional committee (Gürpınar, 2015). This meeting was also named the "conference of change" and drew further participation and broader global attention.

After these two critical meetings, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood organized plenty of meetings and they had a chance to declare their demands through a lot of press conferences and press releases in Turkey. The SMB managed and participated in

opposition conferences and the key theme of those conferences was "calling for reform" (Booyesen, 2018). Apparently, Turkey has become a sort of channel for the regime opponents since the very beginning of the Syrian civil war crisis (Hinnebusch, 2015). These meetings were initiation points of the broader political and military uprising in the region. Against the explicit collaboration between Turkey and SMB, the Assad regime tried to persuade Turkey that the Muslim Brotherhood was linked with terrorist activities. In one of his speeches of Assad in June 2011, he called for national dialog to construct the political reforms, but meanwhile, he was attacking SMB and labeling them as "saboteurs" (Moubayed, 2016). In June 2011, Turkey took a more severe step and decided to give some protection to Syrian army defectors. This protection played a crucial role in the course of the Syrian civil war because those defectors formed the basis of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in a short time. In response, the Syrian Ambassador in Ankara asserted that "the protection of military defectors and supporting the Muslim Brotherhood is equivalent to the support of Syria to PKK" (Moubayed, 2016).

Once it had become clear that the Syrian regime would not maintain any reformist implementation in the future, Turkey took an apparent position against the Assad regime. Indeed, before August 2011, Turkey had already hosted Syrian opposition in İstanbul and Antalya. While Turkey cleared its anti-Assad position in August 2011, the Syrian regime initiated a political campaign against the Turkish Government, which claimed that Turkey sustains neo-Ottomanist policies in the Middle East (Önhon, 2021). Furthermore, the meeting between Syrian Foreign Minister Mualllem and Turkey's Ambassador to Syria in April revealed the discontent of the regime over Turkey's sympathy for the Muslim Brotherhood. Turkey's last Ambassador to Syria, Ömer Önhon, describes his meeting with the Syrian Foreign Minister as follows:

As of April 2011, we started to receive messages from the Syrian regime. Holding meetings in İstanbul with the participation of regime opponents, the constant coming of the members of the Muslim brothers to our country, criticism of the Syrian administration, especially in media organs close to the government, Prime Minister Erdogan's discourse of "not allowing new Hamas" was disturbing the Syrian administration... Syrian Foreign Minister Mualllem called me about this inconvenience, and he told me that the latest statements made in Turkey are causing discomfort. In addition, he also said to me Erdogan's analogy with Halabja was very disturbing for us. (Önhon, 2021, pp. 118-119).

As seen clearly through the conversation between the Syrian Foreign Minister and Turkish Ambassador, the Turkish government's Muslim Brotherhood-oriented politics from the first page of the civil war was evaluated as a hostile move by the Syrian regime. Insomuch as Vice President Hasan Turkmani, who is responsible for relations with Turkey in Syria, invited the Turkish Ambassador to Syria to his office, he asserted that "what the PKK terrorist organization is to you, the Muslim brothers are the same to us" (Önhon, 2021, p.122).

In the interview, Professor Doctor Serhat Erkmen, who is a Syria expert, evaluates the Syrian civil war and the process of Turkey's involvement and opposition organization process in the civil war as follows;

The period between March 2011 and June 2011 was the period in which the Assad regime applied excessive force to the unarmed demonstrations. Jisr ash-Shughur clashes on June 4 is a turning point and the first sign of intense conflict. 120 members of the Syrian army were killed in the incident. During the July-August 2011 process, Syria's opposition in exile sought international support to overthrow the regime. Since September 2011, Turkey's Syria policy has clearly entered into a tendency to change the regime. The visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to Damascus in August 2011 and Riyadh Al Assad's declaration of a free Syrian army on Turkish soil in the summer of 2011 were two important events. The declaration of the Free Syrian Army on Turkish territory was the clearest indication of the target in Turkey's Syria policy. However, up to this point the demonstrators were still largely unarmed, disorganized and reactive. From the beginning of 2012, as the demonstrations spread from Aleppo, Hama Homs, Idlib, and even the suburbs of Damascus, towards the periphery and the demonstrators began to take up arms, a picture of a full-scale civil war became a reality. From this point on, we see those countries such as Turkey, the USA, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates were positioned against the regime. But since each of them has different expectations, capacities and concerns in Syria, they formed groups close to them and followed a separate policy. they could not produce a common policy through a joint consortium, everyone had their own agenda.

At this point, when we look at it in terms of decision-making, we see that Turkish decision-makers do not know the social structure as well as they claim, especially in the beginning. In April 2012, I first published the report on Kurdish movements in Syria in Turkey. That report was published in consultation with all Kurdish opposition groups in Syria. The subject, perceived by Turkish decision makers as the Syrian opposition, was the Sunni opposition to Assad. In fact, the places where the rebellion arose were not only the places where the Muslim Brotherhood was strong. Arab nationalists and those who suffered damage from the Assad regime

in the village and in the city also joined the rebellion. Turkey's expectation was the overthrow of the regime at that time. This was the purpose of establishing and supporting the Free Syrian Army and supporting the opposition political movement in Syria. The political administration in Turkey thought that the regime would be overthrown quickly. Turkish decision makers thought that the civil war would end quickly and, there would be a power structure in Syria that Turkey would penetrate. Meanwhile, the change in Egypt inspired Turkish decision makers. (Interview, 12.10.2022).

2.2.2. Syrian National Council

The Arab Spring and then the Syrian uprising allowed the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood to re-enter the Syrian political arena (Gürpınar, 2015; Booyesen, 2018). As emphasized before, some significant members of SMB, such as Mohammed Tayfour, the deputy leader of SMB, were active in the field. On August 23, 2011, the opposition established the Syrian National Council (SNC) in İstanbul. The SNC was a framework that gathered different groups; Apart from the Muslim Brotherhood, there were also liberals too. However, the Muslim Brotherhood was dominant in this structure and this case would create a disturbance in the Western countries. After August 2011, with the establishment of the SNC in İstanbul, Turkey became the center of the consolidation of Syrian opposition evidently. In that sense, members of the Muslim Brotherhood had been the actual interceder between Turkey and the Syrian opposition. For instance, the Syrian Turkish businessman Gazi Mısırlı (Ghazwan al Masri) has become efficacious in the first phase of the Syrian civil war crisis as a member of MÜSİAD, with ties to both the JDP government and also the Muslim Brotherhood (Balcı, 2012). The membership composition of the SNC included many exiled members of the Muslim Brotherhood (Gürpınar, 2012). Briefly, the Turkish decision-makers tried to put on the Assad regime by hosting opposition members and leaders, mainly Muslim Brotherhood, as a potential post-civil war government. The structure of SNC was very similar to Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC) but tailormade for the Syrian version (Talmon, 2013). The Western Countries confirmed the SNC as the legitimate representative of the opposition and sought further construction for its authority in the beginning. In fact, the SNC was composed of three main factions, the first one was overwhelmingly based on the Muslim Brotherhood, the second one was called as National Bloc, that might be labeled as a more secular group and the third one was the National Coordinating Committees who are resident in Syria (Cebeci & Üstün, 2012).

The SNC had claimed that they were speaking for the entire opposition. However, it was not possible to mention about a monolithic structure of opposition (Khatib, 2017). As Robin Yassin- Kassab and Leila al-Shami have argued: "Syria's revolutionaries did not make a formal collective decision to pick up arms – quite the opposite; rather, a million individual decisions were made under fire." (Yasin-Kassab & al-Shami, 2016, p.79).

The legitimization in an international era or the “certification” is described by Tilly and Tarrow (1996 p. 875) as an “external authority’s signal of its readiness to support the existence and claims of a political actor”. The SMB’s efforts in the SNC had become successful in the first place in terms of the legitimization in the eyes of international community. The establishment of “Friends of the Syrian people” made SNC a legitimate representative of the Syrian opposition in April 2012. During this process, Turkey actively encouraged regime change in Syrian through SNC, and the SNC was mainly based in Turkey (Altunışık, 2016). On March 12, 2012, the SNC announced that it demanded a no-fly zone and humanitarian corridor in the whole of Syria (Gürpınar, 2012). It also underlined the establishment of a coordination bureau for communication between foreign governments and the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

2.2.3. Friends of Syria and Geneva Meetings

The support of China and Russia to the Assad regime in the international arena encouraged the Assad regime in their ruthless repression of its people. The Russian and Chinese vetoes in October 2011 (The Guardian, 2011) prepared the convenient ground for more violence. As a result, the Assad regime started increased the number of deaths in a short time, the second veto on February 5, 2012 in U.N, came just as the regime unbind its assault on Homs (Byman, 2012). Russians have successfully prevented American efforts to boost pressure on Assad particularly through the United Nations Security Council. On the other hand, the Syrian opposition was not united; therefore, the Obama Administration put forward the coercive diplomacy choice because the US was not affirmative about a direct intervention strategy. Thereupon, the establishment of the Friends of Syria Group became an option through forming a sub-group outside the UN that could make it easier to keep pressure via a multilateral framework.

The core of the US diplomatic strategy concentrated on establishing the “Friends of Syria” group, a coalition that includes some European states and significant regional actors such as Turkey. Turkey’s involvement was necessary to succeed in bringing down the Assad and within the “leading behind” policy framework of the US, therefore Ankara has been encouraged to play a more active role in the Syria crisis. Even at the beginning of the Syrian civil war process, there were deep contradictions in the Syria policies of Turkey and the US with the impact over Kurdish issues; Turkey has frustrated the efforts of the US to highlighting the Syrian Kurds as an opposition against the Assad regime. From the perspective of Turkish decision-makers, the SMB should have been the center over all other opposition groups, which the US did not accept. Under these conditions, the first “Friends of Syria” group meeting was held in Tunis on February 24, 2012, with the attendance of more than 60 states and representatives from the League of Arab States, the European Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Gulf Cooperation Council to solve the Syrian crisis (Gürpınar, 2012) and the second meeting was held in İstanbul in April 2012 with the participation of 83 countries.

According to Turkey's ambassador to Syria, Ömer Önhon, who participated in these meetings with the Turkish delegation, US and Turkey reached a definite agreement on the departure of Assad through the meeting held between the US Minister of Foreign Affairs Clinton and the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Davutoğlu (Önhon, 2021, p.243). In the second meeting, Turkey mentioned the need for a “no-fly and safe zone” to preserve the FSA and promote more defections from Assad’s army. However, regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and the Western countries, mainly the Obama administration, were not willing to move from political rhetoric to military action at this point (Yükselen, 2020). The third meeting of friends of Syria was held in Paris on July 6, 2012; 107 countries participated (Kanat, 2015). The presence of Muslim Brothers disturbed Western countries and countries with a phobia of Muslim brothers such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, post-Mursi Egypt, and Jordan. These countries were worried that the Muslim Brothers would take over the structure of the Syrian opposition. Therefore, the priority for these countries was shifting to the prevention of Muslim Brothers instead of creating a resistance that could be an alternative to the regime. Although the number of countries participating in the “*Friends of Syria*” meetings was high, there were severe differences of opinion

between participants. Regional powers such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia agreed that the regime needed to be overthrown, they differed over which groups should be supported, as each country sought influence over a post-Assad order (Khatip, 2017). There was also a mismatch between Turkey, Gulf Countries and their "Western allies" in terms of mobilization and action in the context of Syrian crisis. Therefore, these countries did not meet again after the Marrakech meeting on 12 December 2012.

2.2.4. Syrian National Coalition

The composition of political opposition was arranged at the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, starting from the Antalya conference in April 2011, which brought together varying ideological, religious, and ethnic opposition groups in Turkey. The Antalya conference was followed by the establishment of the Syrian National Council in August 2011 in İstanbul (Mencütek, 2015), which became the biggest and most significant Syrian opposition group in exile. However, SNC faced substantial difficulties in sustaining unity and had challenges with international recognition and assistance at the time. As highlighted before, the SNC essentially contains Islamic components, and it is composed chiefly of former Muslim Brotherhood members. The U.S and other Western Countries emphasized that they felt uncomfortable with some groups in the SNC which allegedly acted on ideological priorities. In response to the Islamic fabric and the inability to unify the opposition, Hillary Clinton declared that the SNC "can no longer be seen as leading the opposition to embattled Syrian President Bashar al-Assad" (Voanews, 2012). Clinton also underlined that the U.S expected new opposition leaders to emerge in Doha, Qatar, through the same declaration (Kanat, 2015). Apparently, the U.S was disappointed by Syrian National Council's unsuccessful in unifying the opposition groups in Syria, particularly Alawites and Kurds. As a result, the Syrian National Council restructured and turned into the National Coalition of Revolutionary Forces (Syrian National Coalition) in November 2012. The former imam of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Moaz al-Khatib, considered a moderate, was elected the president of the Coalition and resigned on 21 April 2013. On Coalition's official website, the primary purpose Syrian National Coalition is defined as "change Syria into a democratic, inclusive and pluralistic civil state" (Etilaf, 2013).

In this manner, the Syrian National Council was replaced by the Syrian National Coalition, so the leader of the Coalition declared itself the legitimate representative of the Syrian people and issued a call for states to recognize it. France became the first Western power to be recognized by the Syrian National Coalition on 13 November 2012 (Talmon, 2013). Thereby, both Turkey and the Syrian Muslim Brothers lost power and ground in the international arena.

Nevertheless, two days later, Turkey also declared its recognition; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu pointed out the Syrian National Coalition as the “only legitimate representative of the Syrian people,” and he also called the international society to support the Coalition (BBC, 2012). Despite the Syrian opposition’s failure to achieve a political victory, Turkish Prime-Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan evaluated the current situation positively and asserts that “Over 100 countries in the world have recognized the Syrian National Coalition. I wonder how many countries remain who recognize Assad” (Talmon, 2013 p. 229).

According to Ömer Önhon (2021, p.244), Turkey's last ambassador to Syria;

The international community, including Turkey, thought that an organized opposition to Assad would positively affect the political solution in Syria. But it was not easy. Different views, different affiliations, different goals, personal causes and egos were serious obstacles. The opposition consisted of different groups. It was the Local Coordination Committees that organized the street demonstrations and took to the streets in Syria. Another group was those who fled Syria and came to Turkey, and another was those who had been in exile outside Syria for years. The opposition did not have an accepted leader or cadre.

In other words, the fragmented nature of the Syrian opposition draws attention from the very beginning. Nonetheless, Turkish decision-makers were backing not only the non-armed extension of Syrian opposition, but they also endorsed the Arab League-UN Plan, which eventually became unsuccessful. UN- Arab League peace plan was put forward just before the “Friends of Syria” conference, and the Arab League in Tunisia organized it. The UN and Arab League assigned Kofi Annan as the representative in February 2012. However, just as the inconclusive sanction attempts on the Assad regime through United Nations Security Council, the attempts of the UN-Arab league did not yield any results too. The failure of the sanctions against the Assad regime by the international community has led to an increasing burden on Turkey's

Syria policy. First of all, the foreign policy goals of the Turkish government, which was a party direct party in the Syrian civil war, came to a dead end with fruitless attempts to impose sanctions on the basis. Secondly, The fact that Assad did not weaken or fall with the sanctions meant that the violent civil war environment in Syria continued. For Turkey, this meant increased security risks and mass migration from Syria.

2.2.5. Free Syrian Army and Syrian Political Opposition

The Assad administration's use of force and torture against its people caused reactions, especially among the Sunni soldiers in the army (Hassan & Weiss, 2015). After the mass demonstrations started in March 2011, the Assad regime interfered violently to suppress the mass demonstrations, and defected army officers, and the civil population built a defensive army structure. On July 29, it was announced that the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was founded by Colonel Riad al-Assad (Syper, 2012), one of the first officers to leave the Syrian army. Turkey's last ambassador to Syria, Ömer Önhon, expressed this process as follows:

"After the establishment of the Free Syrian Army, desertions from the regime army increased. Some units that I remember from those periods are as follows; Halid Bin Velid and Ali Bin Abu Talip in Homs, Hamza El Hatip in İdlib, Al Omari in Daraa, Muaz El Rakkad in Deir Ez-zor, Ebul Fida in Hama and Muaviye Bin Abu Sufyan in Damascus. These military groups were scattered and were attacking the Assad forces with mostly hit-run tactics. In the Syrian regime, the view that Turkey was supporting the opposition began to prevail. It was openly said that the FSA had made Turkey a center for operations" (Önhon, 2021, p.146 - 147).

Genuinely, as Turkey was sustaining diplomatic support for the SNC, there was another effort to empower the opposing military capacity in Syria. Riad al-Assad, the leader of FSA, was staying in the Apaydın refugee camp in Turkey's Hatay province (Yenişafak, 2012). Even this situation alone revealed how much Turkey engaged in the Syrian crisis. According to the Turkish ambassador in Syria at that time, a view that Turkey supported the opposition began to prevail in the Syrian regime. It was said that the Free Syrian Army militants made Turkey their center, and the operations were led by them (Önhon, 2021). Not only in the claim but also, in reality, the JDP

government allowed the creation of the embryonic armed dissent in Hatay Province in Turkey at the very beginning of the Syrian civil war crisis. Colonel Riad al-Asaad, a leader of the FSA, declared that the fundamental purpose of the FSA was the "protection of unarmed civil protestors and toppling the Assad regime" (Al-Awsat, 2011). During this process, Turkey cooperated closely with its Western allies, especially the US, the U.K, France, and regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The intensification of violence and militarization of the Syrian civil war increased the need for armed opposition, which undermined the social aspect of the Syrian uprising (Booyesen, 2018). The initiatives of Turkish decision-makers at this point concentrated on the coordination between Syrian National Council (SNC) and Free Syrian Army (FSA) (Philips, 2012). At the beginning of 2012, the SNC and FSA made a deal to work together (Altınışik, 2016). The US and Turkey allegedly sent weapons and armed FSA (Phillips, 2012). The existence of both SNC and FSA in Turkish territory from the summer of 2011 demonstrates the grift connection of Turkey with the Syrian opposition structure in a political, diplomatic, and military way. In this process, Turkey engaged with military and diplomatic actions simultaneously, and it hosted the headquarters of FSA in Hatay and the center of SNC in İstanbul.

2.2.6. Free Syrian army and Accommodation Centers

Weiner underlined that "a refugee receiving country may actively support the refugees in their quest to change the regime of their country of origin" (1993, p.16). Because, in some cases, refugees might be used as a tool in inter-states conflicts (Greenhill, 2010). Greenhill (2008, p.7) explains the utilization of refugees in some cases as a tool through Strategic Engineered Migration concept which refers to those in- or out-migrations that are deliberately induced or manipulated by state or non-state actors, in ways designed to augment, reduce, or change the composition of the population residing within a particular territory, for political or military ends. Foreign policy might also be directly employed to streamline "existing" refugee movements (Teitalbaum, 1984). There are numerous examples, for instance the U.S armed Cubans to overthrow Fidel Castro's regime; the again U.S supported Contra exiles from Nicaragua; the Indian state ensured military assistance for Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka to gain leverage against the Tamil-Sinhalese dispute (Weiner, 1993; Betts 2009); Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United States armed Afghan refugees to push

Soviet troops to withdraw from Afghanistan, Chinese government-supported Khmer Rouge refugees to help take down Vietnam-backed regime in Cambodia; and Palestinian refugees received military support from Arab world against Israel (Greenhill, 2010). When viewed from this angle, it might be said that Turkey welcomed refugees not only for humanitarian concerns but also as a natural consequence of offensive ambitions in the region and the strategy of overthrowing Assad. The Turkish-Syria borderline has a pivotal role in the military dimension of the Syrian civil war crisis. The borderline maintained a standing for rebels, defecting from the Syrian army, accommodation centers, and FSA safe houses (Naftalin & Harpviken, 2012). Under specific circumstances, accommodation centers and long-time refugee cases are possible sources of radicalization, and they might be used as rebel bases (Betts, 2009). Like Betts described some refugee camps in Turkey were beyond where refugees gather (Betts, 2009). There is a widespread opinion that especially Apayadın and Yayladağı accommodation centers were used for military purposes, and this view is supported by solid reports and information. In addition, the control and management of the accommodation centers in the region were directly managed by the AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Authority).

Some accommodation centers were closed not only to international society but also to leading opposition party deputies. For example, in August 2012, two Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP) deputies were not allowed to enter the "Apaydın" accommodation center, where FSA leader staff were in Turkey (Cumhuriyet, 2012). According to Naftalin and Harpviken (2012), the Apaydın accommodation center has had over 2,000 defected Syrian soldiers. Their press releases demonstrated that the Turkish authorities also gave FSA officers, foot soldiers, and funders access to the accommodation centers (Cumhuriyet, 2012). International Crisis Group (ICG) report revealed in 2013 that claimed several accommodation centers in the zone close to the Syrian border were being used by a member of FSA (Versavel, 2016). Therefore, besides the Syrian refugees, Syrian refugee fighters were also present in the camps, especially in the areas close to the border. Moreover, Hatay Yayladağı accommodation center was the first place where the members of the Free Syrian army settled. Riyad el Asaad, the leader of the Free Syrian Army, was giving statements from this accommodation center to Western media organizations such as *Reuters* or *The Independent* (İsyar, 2016).

Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo describe "refugee warrior" groups as;

Highly conscious refugee communities with a political leadership structure and armed sections engaged in warfare for a political objective, be it to recapture the homeland, change the regime, or secure a separate state (1989, p.275).

There is strong evidence that some accommodation centers in Turkey have similarities described by Zolberg and their colleagues. For example, in August 2012, two deputies of the CHP tried to enter the Apaydın accommodation center which is very close to the Syrian border. CHP Assembly Member and Kocaeli Deputy Hurşit Güneş and CHP İstanbul Deputy Süleyman Çelebi with the accompanying delegation were not taken to the tent city in Apaydın village of Hatay, where officers from the Syrian army were housed. Güneş and Çelebi, who came to the camp's door where the soldiers took extensive security measures, said that "the camp is closed to visitors" (Cumhuriyet, 2012). The Prime Minister of the time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, reacted to Hurşit Güneş when he wanted to enter the camp and said: "Are you a police officer?" (Cumhuriyet, 2012).

Hurşit Güneş, who made a press statement in the TGNA said that

Apaydın Camp is a significant symbol that shows the wrong that Turkey has followed in Syria ... Who is Muhammed Hamdullah, did he stay in Apaydın Camp? Did Colonel Riyad al-Assad come to this camp on 25 June with more than 30 generals? Who is Malik El Kurdi? In this camp, he met with Pravda reporter Daria Aslamova and said they would overthrow Assad by August. There are 575 shelter tents in Apaydın Camp. The border is three kilometers. Why is the border three kilometers long? If it is a camp where the defectors of Syria's official army are stationed, shouldn't it be relocated to a more remote area? (Cumhuriyet, 2012).

He also stated that the allegations that the CHP deputies went to Apaydın's Camp as a *fait accompli* were not true; the official application was made by the party headquarters for visits to the camps and that they received the answer, "You can go to Yayladağı camp, but you cannot go to Apaydın camp." (Cumhuriyet, 2012).

In the interview with Hurşit Güneş, the deputy of the period who was not taken to the controversial Apaydın camp, he said the following:

To go to the accommodation centers in Hatay, it was necessary to obtain permission from the governorship. I called the CHP headquarters and told

them to get permission from the governor's office and, in this way, to enter the camps. We obtained the necessary permissions through the CHP headquarters. Later, when the governor asked which camp we wanted to go to, I said, "Apaydin camp." The governor told me that this would never happen. I said why not. The governor said we could not ensure your life safety; your permission would not be valid there. Despite this, we went to Apaydin's camp with a delegation. There was a foreign militant besides the Turkish soldiers at the door. He said he was in charge of this place, and he threatened us and tried to get us out of that area. They did not allow us to enter because the Apaydin camp was established as the Free Syrian Army headquarters under the intelligence agency's supervision. Our observations there are in this direction.

At that time, the person who was most disturbed by the emergence of this event was Prime Minister Erdogan and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu. Prime Minister Erdogan attacked me politically, and the event escalated in Turkish politics. With the Apaydin camp creating a debate in Turkish politics, it became clear that Turkey is an actor who is a side in the Syrian civil war. This situation shows that Turkish foreign policy was not as liberal as the government claimed. Although followed a very aggressive foreign policy, this was not known until the scandal in the Apaydin camp incident. At the fore of the Apaydin incident, Turkey was an actor in the Syrian civil war and even an actor in the armed action. (Interview, 09.10.2021)

The observations of another deputy, Süleyman Çelebi, who was in the CHP delegation and visited the Apaydin camp, are as follows:

We went to Hatay for another program. When we went there, the people of the region and especially the shopkeepers had a great complaint about the accommodation centers. So we decided to visit the accommodation centers in the region. We called AFAD (the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) and said we wanted to visit the accommodation centers. We were told that you could go to other camps except for Apaydin camp. At this point, I insisted on going to Apaydin camp. After all, we went there. We were not taken into the camp; a person stated that he was a colonel from the free Syrian army. They treated us so harshly. Foreign and uniformed militants blocked us. Two foreign people in their early 20s, who heard that the CHP delegation was coming from the inside, threatened to kill us. I do not know Arabic, but the party members were living in Hatay were translating what they said. As a result, we were not taken to Apaydin's camp as a member of parliaments, and we were threatened. This situation caused the public to hear about the unknown Syria issue. (Interview, 13.10.2021).

The early refugee policy of Turkish decision-makers might be seen as a natural extension of their offensive political goals. Turkey became directly involved in the Syrian civil war instead of following a balanced policy in the 1st and 2nd Gulf Wars.

Turkey's abandonment of its balance policy and taking an offensive foreign policy position can be concretely understood by Davutoğlu's statement: "We are the pioneer of the wave of change in the Middle East" (İşyar, 2018, p.139). In the Syrian case, spearheading this wave of change meant bringing down the Assad regime by providing military and political support to the opposition. In other words, the JDP government faithfully assumed that it could manage the course of the Arab Spring and the wave of change in the Middle East. In parallel to this, the Turkish government also assumed that the Assad regime would fall rapidly and that the Syrian opposition would soon establish a Turkey-friendly government in Syria. So, the Turkish foreign minister propounded that "the Assad regime would fall within weeks" (NTV,2012). There were some developments in the field in 2012 that made Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu think that the Assad regime would soon be gone. Ömer Önhon, who was one of the information sources of the Turkish government at that time and Turkey's Ambassador to Syria, describes the situation at the beginning of 2012 as follows:

After the bomb attacks in the districts in the center of Damascus, the presidential residence, the Prime Minister's office, and the foreign affairs building, the intelligence agencies and the offices of the Baath party were blocked with concrete barricades. The regime had difficulty maintaining control in some regions, especially Homs, Idlib, and the Damascus countryside. Road safety could not be ensured, especially on Damascus-Aleppo Road. The information we received from various sources was that the opposition armed elements reached a strength of around 15 thousand with civilian participation (Önhon, 2021, pp. 211-212).

Nonetheless, the Assad regime consolidated its power over time despite the disadvantageous situation.

2.3. Turkey's Open-door Policy and Syrian Refugees

Historically, Since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the modern Turkish Republic, both emigration and immigration have become inseparable parts of essential state policies regarding the nation-building cycle and national unity (İçduygu & Aksel, 2013, p.168). In the frame of social engineering initiatives for Turkifying the population living in the Turkish Republic were mainly established in the 1930s. The 1934 Law on Settlement might be defined the key element of the nation-building process. This law established two dissimilar statuses by (i)

facilitating the migration and integration of those of “Turkish origin and culture” either as migrants or as refugees and (ii) preventing and impeding the entry of those who did not meet this criterion as migrants or refugees (İçduygu & Aksel, 2013). Nonetheless as starting from 1980's, Turkey exposed mass influx of refugees and also irregular migrations, especially from the Middle East and also Africa and Asia. The mass influxes reflect the shifting nature of the refugee crisis the post-Cold War era in terms of Turkey. During this process, both mass migration flows, such as from Iraq in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, and the entrance of enormous numbers of irregular migrants became more apparent issue to be referenced by Turkey. Turkey’s role as a transit country became more explicit as the number of irregular migrants arriving in Europe through Turkey increased throughout this period (Aras & Mencütek, 2018). While the transit country profile was not straightly questioned by Turkish decision-makers, it was the mass refugee inflow from the Middle East that drew more attention, resulting in the introduction of a 1994 regulation that was the first of its kind directed at regulating the mass influx. It was also in the 1990s that the European Union (EU) became a much more pervasive influence in Turkey’s migration policies.

Prior to 2011, Turkey had adopted a closed-door approach to mass migration from the region, a policy most clearly mirrored in Turkey’s geographical limitation to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which made certain that Turkey would not approve refugee status to people fleeing from clashes and persecution in non-European countries, as had been the case for the 1991 mass migration from Iraq. After 2011, however, Turkey pursued an open- door policy to those fleeing the war, which represented a 180-degree shift from its pre-2011 approach to mass migration from the Middle East (Aras & Mencütek, 2018). Contrary to Turkey’s “non-arrival policy” of the 1980s and 1990s, the open-door policy of Turkey has maintained until 2016 (Mencütek et al., 2021, p.8).

The roots of Syrian mass migration date back to March 2011, when Syrian protesters have exposed violence in Deraa after the arrestment and persecution of children who had painted anti-government graffiti in the public sphere (İşyar, 2018). In other words, in March 2011, pro-democracy demonstrations arose in the southern city of Deraa, as revealed by the Arab Spring movement in neighboring territories. The Assad regime responded ruthlessly; due to the killing of some protesters by the regime, the

demonstrations spread to other provinces. According to Ferris and Kirişçi (2016), by June 2011, the Assad regime had killed over 500 people which triggered one of the most significant waves of migration in recent human history. At the beginning of the mass migration process, the Turkish government was quite optimistic about the displacement process because of previous examples such as Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia; their central assumption was based on the “*Syrian uprising would become successful as similar examples.*” However, the conflict and uprising in Syria escalated into a civil war, not a successful revolution.

In such cases of mass migration, nation-states might pursue different political choices due to power politics calculations and take into account domestic and international matters (Mitchell, 1989, p.682). The JDP government desired to expand its political, economic, and cultural sphere of influence where it perceived the Arab Spring as an opportunity. Therefore, Turkish decision-makers internalized the Syrian civil war and defined Turkey as the protector of oppressed peoples (Yükselen, 2020). Considering the offensive and intrusive approach of the JDP government in the Syrian crisis, following an open border policy against mass migration was a natural extension of “we have responsibilities” politics, just as Hasan Yükselen argued (Yükselen, 2016). Therefore, Turkey unconditionally implemented an open-door policy that welcomed all Syrian refugees in the first phase.

One of the main reasons for this approach was the assumption that cross-border population movement was “temporary” (Ferris & Kirişçi, 2016; Mencütek et al., 2021); the Turkish decision-makers expected the Syrian conflict would not be long-term. Therefore, the JDP government built its Syria strategy on predicting the collapse of the Assad regime in a short time and the substitution of the regime with a pro-Turkey government. For instance, in 2012, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu asserted that “The Syrian civil war will not continue in a long period. This process should be conceived not with years, but with months even weeks” (NTV, 2012). In a similar line, the Prime-Minister Erdoğan asserted that “In a short time we will go to Damascus, and we will embrace our brothers there in in the Umayyad Mosque. With the permission of God, that day is near” (Hürriyet, 05.09.2012). A high-level government bureaucrat makes the following background analysis on this statement;

The Umayyad Mosque has a very deep symbolism. In the Umayyad mosque, there is the head of Hussein inside the sarcophagus. This is the famous Kerbala incident. Karbala is the point where the distinction between Shiism and Sunnism begins. At that time, the Umayyads brought the head of Hussein killed in Karbala to Damascus, the center of power, and exposed it. For this reason, the message of praying in this mosque, which Shiites care so much and which is historically important, also makes a reference to a historical sectarian distinction. Shiite pilgrims from Iran and Lebanon come and pray in that mosque with their own rituals. (14.10.2022, Interview).

To begin with, Turkey rejected any international support for its humanitarian effort (Aras & Mencütek, 2015; Kale, 2018). Besides this tendency, there was a desire to prove that Turkey could deal with this crisis with its resources (Aras & Mencütek, 2015, p.202; Kirisci & Karaca, 2015; Altıok & Tosun, 2019) as a natural extension of offensive claims in the region. The decision-makers in Turkish Foreign Policy makers believed that Turkey could generate the process of “chaos to cosmos” in the contest of the Syrian civil war. In the first phase, Turkey presented itself as a regional power with the assertive foreign policy notion. In substance, Davutoğlu underlined that they pursued an open-door policy that the world appreciated (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012).

During this period, Syrian refugees were officially defined as “guests,” by Prime-minister Erdoğan (NTV, 2012) even if there was no equivalent in international law to such a concept. This classification stems from the fact that although the Turkish Republic is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, it maintains a geographical limitation on the Geneva Convention that covers geographical annotation against those coming from outside Europe. The “guest” policy was not sustainable because it had no Turkish or international law equivalent. Therefore, legal regulation on immigration has changed. The previous version of the Migration and Asylum Bureau transformed into the General Directorate of Migration Management (DGMM) under the Ministry of Interior in 2013. Besides, the legal regulation process that Turkey has been carrying out since the 1999 Helsinki summit within the framework of harmonization with the EU regarding international protection has been completed with the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) which was enacted in April 2013 (İcduygu, 2015). Article 91 of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection states that:

Temporary protection may be provided for foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, cannot return to the country that they have left, and have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey in a mass influx situation seeking immediate and temporary protection (LFIP, 2013).

With the entry into force of this law and later the Temporary Protection Regulation, Turkey has provided official temporary Protection to Syrian refugees. The Temporary Protection Status was detailed in no 6883 regulation by DGMM in 2014. Temporary Protection contained a right to education and health; through the regulation Syrian refugees have also official access to public services (Makovsky, 2019).

2.3.1. Mass Migration and Safe Zone Initiations of Turkey

Turkish decision-makers perceived the uprising and instability in Syria as an opportunity to establish its power in the region and shape the external environment (Aras et al., 2020). Regarding the offensive realist paradigm, "status quo powers are rarely found in world politics because the international system creates powerful incentives for states to look for opportunities to gain power at the expense of rivals and to take advantage of those situations when the benefit outweighs the costs" (Snyder, 2001). At this point, it is necessary to remember the three types of social allegory of Davutoğlu, which are motivated by the drive to shape the region and history. First, the JDP government aimed to turn the chaos in Syria into a cosmos with an aggressive and interventionist foreign policy in the first phase of the Syrian civil war.

Regarding the open border policy, Kirişçi argues that "Turkey's expectation, which was in line with a good part of the international community, was that the Assad regime would not last long. In such a background Turkey declared in October 2011 an open-door policy towards refugees fleeing Syria" (Kirişçi, 2014, p.1). In 2012, Minister of Foreign Affairs Davutoğlu gave some successful uprising examples, and he expressed that "it (fall of the regime) took one week in Tunisia. In Egypt, it took one year, so we cannot mention a long time in this process" (Dailymotion, 2015). On July 26, 2012, Prime-Minister Erdoğan asserted that "After this, Assad is about the fall. Syria is preparing for a new era" (Euronews, 2012). According to Syrian expert Associate Professor Yasin Atlioğlu;

When we came to the summer of 2012, decision makers in Turkey believed that the Assad regime would fall within 2-3 months. On July 18(2012), an explosion took place in Damascus and Syria's Minister of Defense died. This is an important breaking point. The belief of Turkish decision makers that Assad would fall was at its peak. (13.10.2022, Interview).

Nevertheless, it did not work as Turkey's government expected, and the Syrian uprising has transformed into a multi-sided and dynamic civil war. Despite the wrong assumption about the duration of the Syrian civil war, the Turkish decision-makers' open-door policy was not the most problematic issue. At that time the number of refugees were relatively low, in addition the general opinion of the society was that the Syrians would return soon. For instance, by the end of 2011, Turkey was hosting only about 8000 registered Syrian refugees (Makovosky, 2019). Nonetheless, as the severity and duration of the war exacerbated, so did the volume of mass migration. As a result, in October 2013, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoglu noticed that "the red line has been crossed" regarding the number of refugees coming to Turkey (CNN Türk, 2013).

Contrary to Turkey's non-arrival policy of the 1980s and 1990s, borders remained open while Turkey suffered a mass exodus from the Syrian civil war (Mencütek et al., 2020). This is primarily because of Turkey's post-2011 Middle East policy and traditional Turkish foreign policy vision. Just as Ahmet Davutoğlu claimed in the Turkish parliament at the beginning of the Syrian civil war, Turkish decision-makers believed that "Turkey would manage the wave of change in the Middle East, and she also was the pioneer of the new regional order (İşyar, 2018). This aggressive approach, together with the belief that the Assad regime will soon collapse, can be seen as the reason for the transition from a non-arrival policy to a fully open border policy. If Turkey, as Davutoğlu puts it, "is at the forefront of the wave of change in the Middle East," and again, if Turkish foreign policy sees the humanitarian and political developments in the region as "its own responsibility" then an open border policy against mass immigration becomes not an option but a necessary extension of this ambitious foreign policy. As a result of conscious political choices, since 2014, Turkey has become the country that hosts the most refugees globally, the vast majority of whom are 3.6 million Syrians under temporary protection (UNCHR, 2020). In late 2012, another phase of the refugee response started, and Turkey began to seek regional and international assistance (Aras, 2016). During this period, mass migration intensified,

and Turkey concentrated on "zero-point aid delivery" to decelerate refugee arrivals under international law (Mencütek et al., 2020). This meant that Turkey wanted to arbitrate the influx of refugees geographically and logistically at the border.

Meanwhile, Turkey started to signal a need for international burden-sharing, referencing the high economic cost. Turkey presented the thesis of establishing a safe zone in Syria (Kanat, 2015; İşyar, 2018; Yükselen, 2020) to overcome this problem with global initiatives. There were two main reasons for the safe zone quest; the first was the protection of the opposition elements against the air superiority of the Assad regime, and the second was the slowdown of the mass migration that Turkey was exposed to. In February 2012, Russia and China vetoed the UN Security Council's reproval of the assaults on civilian people in Homs and used their block power against the UN resolution that postulated the Assad regime's adherence to the Arab league's plans. Russia and China maintained a diplomatic shield for the Assad regime, and they stopped the international reaction from the very beginning of the process. One day before Russia and China hindered the UN, Obama announced that they would boost their support for the Arab uprising and the demolition effort of the Assad regime if Russia tried to stop the US assistance to opposition groups. Against this protection to the Assad regime, which Russia and China provided, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Davutoğlu blamed Russia and China for moving with cold war logic. Besides, Davutoğlu interestingly stated that "we might accept 25 million Syrian people to their country," which means the whole population of Syria (Sabah, 2012). This statement was again an indication of Turkish Foreign Affairs' belief about Assad's short life despite the strong international support from Russia and China. This approach might be evaluated as a natural consequence of Turkish decision-makers misperception about the Assad regime's lifetime. In March 2012, right after the veto of Russia and China, Prime Minister Erdoğan emphasized the necessity of a "*safe haven in Syria*" in a speech he made in the TGNA (İşyar, 2018, p.128). Not only the Prime Minister of the time but also the president of the period, Abdullah Gül, pointed out "there should be an international intervention" during a trip to Tunisia on March 8, 2012. However, Kofi Annan, the special envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League, said that "military initiatives are not the solution to solve the problem" (İşyar, 2018).

After the unsuccessful UN attempt of the Western bloc, on March 6, 2012, Prime-Minister Erdoğan suggested a "*humanitarian corridor*" in Syria, but this suggestion was also not answered (Kirişçi & Ferris, 2016). The US was not affirmative about the buffer zone approach of Turkey (Kanat, 2015). Nevertheless, when the Assad regime's artillery fire caused the death of five Turkish citizens in the Hatay Akçakale district (Hürriyet, 2012), Turkey became more aggressive about calling NATO and the international community to react due to direct attacks on its territory. This assault on the Turkish territory, whether consciously or not, was the beginning of the internationalization of the violence in the case of the Syrian civil war. After the increase in attacks on Turkish territory, the Chief of General Staff of Turkish army warned Syria. It underlined that "they will respond in very ways if the attacks continue" (TRT, 2012). Another side effect of escalating violence in Syria, the dimensions of the mass migration from Syria to Turkey were increasing exponentially. As the Assad regime increased its brutality and suppression, Turkey was exposed to more and more refugees. According to Murat Erdoğan, the number of Syrian refugees was 14.237 at the beginning of 2012. Nevertheless, the number of refugees became 1.519.286 in January 2014 (Erdoğan, 2020). Therefore, Turkish authorities repeatedly underlined the possibility of setting up a safe zone on Turkey's border in collaboration with the international society (Oktav, 2013). While the civil war continues more harshly, Turkish decision-makers duration of the expectations about the Assad regime have become more suspicious.

Seybold (2008) has identified different humanitarian military interventions in his work, and he found that particular and limited targets in such cases are inclined to be the most successful examples. One of the best examples of the safe zone established in northern Iraq in 1991 was when about 500,000 Iraqi Kurds ran away from the inhuman actions of Saddam Hussein's regime. After the Iraqi military had attacked the northern Iraqi Kurds as of March 1991, 500.000 Iraqis arrived in Turkey, but they were not allowed into the country directly (Aras & Mencütek, 2015). In 1991 Turgut Özal stated that "we cannot place this many people in Turkey" (Milliyet Archive,05.04.1991, s.13). During this period, Turkey immediately referred to international diplomatic actions at the UN Security Council (UNSC) because it looked for an exit strategy; therefore, Turkey recommended a safe zone for Iraqi refugees in Iraq (Aras & Mencütek, 2015). As a result, UNSC Resolution 688 was passed on April

5, 1991; it identified the crisis as a threat to international peace and security, demanding the Iraqi government end the repression of Iraqi civilians and allow international organizations to aid displaced people (Roberts, 2011; Kirişçi & Karaca, 2015; Altıok & Tosun, 2019). Through Operation Provide Comfort, which was enforced by U.S, British and French military forces, a safe area was established, and the displaced Iraqi Kurds could repatriate to their homeland in a short time.

Kirişçi and Ferris (2016) claimed that this experience has undoubtedly influenced Turkey's safe zone attempts. Nonetheless, in the Syrian case, the national and international level of the equation was not similar to the Iraq case. First, Turkey mainly did not take a side or display any explicit intention of intervening against Saddam's regime, contrary to the Syrian matter. In the Iraqi case, the Turkish government underlined "non-interference" in Iraq's internal affairs. President Özal asserted that "If others do not interfere with interior matters of Iraq, Iraq will probably find the best solution" (Milli Gazete, 1991 cited in Altıok, 2019). As the refugee flows continued in 1991, Turkish foreign policy of the period prioritized security issues. In that sense, Turkey followed attentive foreign policy steps to provide humanitarian intervention through international coalition diplomacy to create a safe zone for Iraqi refugees across its borders in Iraq. In contrast to the Iraqi refugee influx case, Turkish decision-makers internalized the civil war in the Syrian example and displayed their side clearly from an early period. Firstly, Turkish decision-makers did not ask for any international assistance for its humanitarian effort in the Syrian case for a while (Kale et al., 2018), as they wanted to prove that Turkey could deal with matters politically and economically on its own. Secondly, in Syria's case, international equations were more complicated in establishing a security zone due to the robust support of Russia and China to the Assad regime. This opposition, in one way, was based on NATO's operation in Libya in 2011, which has resulted in regime change (Ferris & Kirisci, 2016). The strong opposition of Russia and China with a combination of Western hesitation made Turkey's safe zone plan in Syria improbable. Martin Dempsey, the US chief of General Staff, declared that the security zone or no-fly zone would not be possible; in fact, neither NATO nor the US would stimulate this possibility (Yükselen, 2020). In October 2012, the US stated another clear stance about the security zone issue (Kanat, 2015). It announced through its Ankara embassy that the only possibility of a security zone might be based on a UN mandate (Ankara News, 2012); the US

excluded the military option. Nevertheless, due to the intensification of cross-border population movements from Syria to Turkey, Turkey has kept the options such as a no-fly zone or safe zone on the table.

2.4. The US and Western Powers Stance

When the conflict environment and violence in Syria turned into a civil war, the Western powers demonstrated serious hesitation in response to the Assad regime and forced Assad to resign. The lack of robust and compatible European Union (EU) reaction to the Syrian crisis against the Syrian crisis demonstrated that the prioritizes security and stability at the expense of its alleged norms and values. There were several reasons why the EU was hesitant to become directly involved in the Syrian civil war. European Union's hesitations can be examined under three main headings:

1. *The lack of coherence among member states*
2. *The involvement of other international and regional actors*
3. *Finally, the concerns of the EU over the Syrian opposition*

Firstly, the early initiatives to struggle with the Syrian civil war crisis covered imposing economic sanctions on the Assad regime. However, even about this point, the EU members divided among themselves. Meanwhile, France, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom supported the proposition of imposing sanctions on the Assad regime, and Greece, Spain, and Italy were hesitant (Dandashly, 2016). Moreover, except for France and the United Kingdom, almost all E.U. states were against any military intervention option. Secondly, the EU is nearly paralyzed by the Syrian crisis's rapid and effective involvement of different international and regional actors. In reality, some E.U. countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Portugal made several attempts to pass a U.N. resolution that would condemn the ruthless actions and immoderate use of force by the Syrian regime against its citizens (CBC, 2011).

Nonetheless, these approaches were obstructed by Russia and China. Besides, Russia's direct military aid to the Assad regime did not meet with a significant reaction from the E.U. On the other hand, France with US, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar were the prominent supporters of the Syrian opposition; nevertheless, considering the

support Assad's regime received, this was not enough. Additionally, the radicalization of the civil war and the birth of ISIS made the situation even worse. Thirdly, the EU countries had severe concerns about the Syrian opposition forces (Nas, 2018). On the one hand, the Free Syrian Army was highly engaged in Turkey; Western powers were aware that those protests and democratization movements opened a place for political Islam and particularly Muslim Brotherhood. This reality had been crystallized with the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the election of Mohammed Morsi as a president in 2012.

On the other hand, terrorist organizations such as al-Nusra and ISIS gradually gained strength and space. Under this circumstance, Western countries asked themselves this question; Whom should we support here? (Dandashly, 2016). How to ensure that weapons aids do not fall into the wrong hands? With the combination of the fragmentation of the Syrian opposition, these questions limited the ability to act. Herewith, the EU demonstrated hesitation, weakness, and incoherence in the Syrian crisis. Apart from the ineffective Geneva talks, humanitarian assistance, and some fruitless sanctions on the Assad regime, nothing has been done to overthrow or at least stop the Assad regime. In addition to all this, Hasan Yükselen (2020) claims that the 2008 global financial crisis negatively impacted Western democracies and liberal-oriented foreign policies. With the Arab Spring, Western countries' liberal-based and soft power-driven policies transformed into interest-based policies based on foreign policy. However, the Western stance against the mass demonstrations and violence in Syria was ambivalent. This not only stimulated the Assad regime to repress the democratic protests process but also encouraged more violence in Syria.

There was also reluctance and uncertainty on the US side regarding concrete steps toward the Syria crisis. Since the Obama administration came to power in 2009, there has been a shift in US foreign policy. After two periods under the Bush administration, the Obama administration left unilateral overseas military operations to defend its and its allies' benefits due to the financial costs paid. Obama's foreign policy approach and security policy perception were based on a "non-interventionist" notion; the administration of Obama concentrated on domestic affairs (Lindsay, 2011). A new national security strategy document of the US was declared in May 2010, which was underlining diplomacy and private war instead of frontline war and preventive war

(İşyar, 2018). Apparently, the US would prefer "soft" methods after the detrimental experience of two costly wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In this way, Obama embraced the new interventionism methods in US foreign policy, as seen firstly in Libya's case. In this intervention, the US did lead openly, and it primarily provided intelligence support to France and England (İşyar, 2018). In 2012 defense strategy of the US was based located on fundamental principles such as the abonnement of the "war period," which was defined as a strategic turning point by Leon Panetta, the Secretary of Defense of the US (Kanat, 2015). Besides, the US strategy emphasized the belief that absolute power comes from economic capability.

Therefore, the US would solve problems with its allies, not through a unilateral interventionist approach according to the 2012 defense strategy (Lovelace, 2014). In other words, the Obama administration declared that US taxpayers, in the context of austerity, were not going to finance "unnecessary wars," so more elastic and purposive military power was desired. Insomuch as it does not necessarily mean that the US fundamental policy objectives changed in the era of the Obama administration, the tools changed to obtain those targets. As a matter of fact, the critical reason for this transformation in US foreign policy was essentially shaped by the price that was paid in Afghanistan and Iraq, which covers 2 million service members in the field, left 6.000 Americans dead and 40.000 injured, and cost more than 1.5 trillion US dollar (Haas, 2013). Therefore, the essential motivation for implementing proxy warfare by the Obama administration contained significant and necessary elements such as urgency, cost, and capability. In brief, with the 2012 National Defense Doctrine, the US stopped the direct war on terrorism and put forward economic ability as the basis of the power. In this document, a 450-billion-dollar cut was prescribed for the next ten years (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012, p.6). Therefore, the foreign policy approach of the US, which was expressed in the administration of Obama, precluded the direct and effective involvement of the US in the Syrian civil war.

2.4.1. Obama Administration's Approach to Syria in the First Period

The Arab Spring challenged Obama's strategic perception and sharply pushed the Middle East back to the top of the US foreign policy agenda. In this context, after the spread of mass demonstrations and violence in Syria, Obama asserted on May 19,

2011, "The Syrian people have shown their courage in demanding a transition to democracy... Assad can lead that transmission or get out of the way" (The White House, 2011). After intensifying the Syrian Civil War, on April 29, 2011, the US decided to impose sanctions against the Assad regime. Nevertheless, those sanctions concentrated on the inner circle, and they were pretty weak in preventing Assad's suppression. After these ineffective initiatives, Obama took a more decisive step in August 2011. He asserted that "for the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside" (Kanat, 2015, p.11). At that time, this statement was interpreted as the first step toward in-depth action preparation that might cover the use of force against the Assad regime and provide comprehensive support to rebel groups in Syria. However, this expectation instantly proved to be misdirected, as the US administration preferred inaction in Syria policy (Kanat, 2015; Yükselen, 2020).

The Obama administration was condemning the humanitarian crisis in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen; however, none of those events in the Middle East has provided a sufficient mobilization of public pressure in the US to justify direct intervention in the Assad regime. Indeed, the US administration was referencing Turkey and the Arab League to play an active role; for instance, the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asserted that "the mission in Syria belongs to the Arab League and Turkey. Although there is a UN decision there will be no US and NATO intervention" (Habertürk, 2011 cited in İsyar, 2018). The inaction of Western powers caused the process of "questioning the West" in the eyes of the Syrian opposition. Finally, there emerged it turned out to be mistrust between Western powers and Syrian dissidents. Although the US put forth negative expressions toward the regime, eventually, those expressions were not supported by actions. This inaction might be seen as a natural consequence of Obama's foreign policy doctrine that propounds "leading behind" logic. Externalization of the Syrian civil war, the "leading behind" policy of the Obama administration, and the "surrogate warfare" approach have caused mutations in the flow of the Syrian civil war. For starters, the inaction of the US forced Turkey to pursue more comprehensive and interventionist policies in the region. In other words, as Ziya Öniş (2014) claimed, the West and mainly the US pushed Turkey to involve a more active role in the field. This was a natural extension of the "no boots on the grounds" policy of the Obama doctrine (Yükselen, 2020). In this context, on the one hand, Erdoğan gave the initial signals of this interventionist policy by announcing that "we are ready for all scenarios" on the

other hand, Prime Minister Davutoğlu underlined their responsibility for "positioning in the right place in history" (Cumhuriyet, 2012).

There were two main reasons why the U.S. tended to engage with indirect strategies in the Syrian crisis; firstly, according to Barack Obama, the cumulative costs of comprehensive "war against terrorism" was too many, thanks to the Bush administration. In his autobiography, Barack Obama complains about the Bush administration's foreign policy prioritizing extensive military operations. Barack Obama claims, "the three trillion dollars spent, more than three thousand U.S. troops killed and as many as ten times that number wounded "(Obama, 2020). Accordingly, Obama's foreign policy mentality did not embrace comprehensive military operations; instead, he came up with rear support strategies like "leading behind" or "no boots on the ground." Over and above that, the difference between the US and Turkey, Barack Obama and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, were huge in terms of the perception of the opposition actors in the Syrian crisis. To exemplify, Barack Obama (2020, p.346) points out Erdoğan's "vocal sympathy for both the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas." However, according to Obama's perspective, "the Muslim Brotherhood is the Sunni-based Islamic organization whose central objective was to see Egypt – and the entire Arab world- governed by sharia laws (Obama, 2020, pp. 643-644). As it is seen, Obama's definition of the Muslim Brotherhood does not match the concept of moderate Islam exactly; there were severe differences in the perspective of Turkey and the U.S., Erdoğan, and Obama on Syria. The U.S. wanted the fall of Russia's deep-rooted ally with a regime change in Syria, but it had concerns about the coming to power of the Muslim Brotherhood group with which Turkey cooperates and the other Islamic opposition. This separation between the USA and Turkey was further deepened, especially with the establishment of ISIS in 2013. This divergence was also evident both in terms of actors on the field and the methods used in Syria.

2.4.2. Escalation of Civil War and Inaction of U.S

During the intensification of the violence in the Syrian civil war, the US' foreign policy hesitation became much clearer to push for the Assad regime to resign became much clearer. Ankara has also become skeptical of Washington's determination because of the difference between the intensity of Russia's support for Assad and the intensity of

US support for the Syrian opposition. After a certain point, Turkey realized that the US did not see enough vital interests in Syria to justify military intervention, particularly after the bitter memories in Iraq and Afghanistan (Cebeci & Üstün, 2012, p.21). The critical point here is that the process of questioning the West's inaction was eventually replaced by a growing mistrust between Turkey and its Western allies. The inaction of the West also caused disappointment among the Syrian protesters and the moderate opposition that demanded democracy in Syria. Turkey's last ambassador to Syria, Ömer Önhon, verbalized that some protests were called "Your silence is killing us Friday" in Syria after a Friday prayer to protest the West's inaction and hesitation (Önhon, 2021, p. 108).

Despite Obama's well-known foreign policy doctrine and the apparent reluctance of the U.S. and Western powers, the first considerable expectation about military intervention rose after using chemical weapons by the Assad regime in Syria - in November 2012. This event opened a realistic window for U.S. intervention for the first time. In point of fact, Barack Obama had issued his first condemnation against the Assad regime at the beginning of April 2011. Although he condemned the regime due to violence against the protesters, Obama still left an open door for the regime to maintain democratic reform and demonstrated its expectation to end the suppression of protesters. April 22, 2011 which, which was remembered as one of the bloodiest days in Syria, Al Jazeera stated that as some 200 protesters marched towards Clock Square in Homs, some 3,000 security forces opened fire on protesters (Al Jazeera, 2011). This time Obama made a statement, and he condemned the violence and directly accused Iran too as a Syrian regime supporter (The White House, 2011). The violence was escalating in Syria; the uprising was turning into an international formation in the eyes of the US On April 29, 2011, the administration signed Executive Order 13572 and proclaimed, a "continuing escalation of violence against the people" (Kanat, 2016) and imposed sanctions. Those sanctions did not aim at the Assad directly. Instead, it was targeting his relatives. Indeed, despite the intensification of violence, the US administration remained hopeful that the Assad regime could make some reforms with unpredictable optimism. The Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, underlined that the regime still would take some political steps (U.S Department of State, 2011).

Nevertheless, in time, the Syrian civil war has transformed into a bloody and radicalized civil war, and the Obama administration preferred to refrain from involving in due to unforeseen costs. On August 18, 2011, for the first time, Barack Obama explicitly asserted that "there shall not be foreign intervention" (The White House, 2011); in this way, he declared the avoidance of the U.S. in the form of a deepening of the Syrian crisis. The divergence between the US discourses and actions has crystallized in time. Despite rising discursive tension, there was no operational mobility, particularly compared to Russian support for the Assad regime. The dependence only on limited diplomatic initiatives can be attributed to for several reasons: primarily, there were still domestic economic problems to be engaged with, so any military intervention for Syria would have been too costly for Washington. Secondly, having underlined that before, the foreign policy notion of the Obama administration was based on the "leading behind" approach, which fed the reluctance to engage with military actions. Thirdly, according to the Council of Foreign Policy (CFR, 2012), American public opinion was overwhelmingly against any military intervention in Syria. According to CFR research in 2012, 63 percent of American people believed that the U.S. did not have a responsibility to do something to end the civil war in Syria (CFR, 2012). Particularly the memory of the Iraq invasion still impacted politics and civil society.

Finally, the U.S elections in 2012 revealed different priorities for Obama and American politics. Therefore, the aggressive discourse against the Assad regime did not go further than harsh rhetoric. Consequently, the year 2012, as a period of escalation of the Syrian civil war, was characterized by steady condemnation of the Assad regime by Western powers. Herein, Turkey had entirely come as a party to the Syrian civil war through diplomatic, political, and military channels. On the way to 2013, the separation between the West and Turkey regarding the civil war crystallized. Despite the inaction of the West, the Prime-Minister Erdoğan stated that "we hope that a military intervention will never be a necessity... Nevertheless, if the repression continues, Turkey is ready for any scenario" (NTV, 2012). Essentially, the engagement of the Turkish decision-makers to the Syrian civil war was driven by Ankara's major miscalculation about the length and outcome of the Syrian civil war (Yükselen, 2020).

In August 2012, in the second year of the Syrian uprising, the US President Barack Obama made a statement about the chemical weapon stockpiles in Syria by claiming that "a red line for us is when we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus." (Bowen et al. 2020, p. 797). The use of chemical weapons had already been used at low levels by Bashar Assad's Syrian regime in 2012 and continued at the beginning of 2013. On August 21, 2013, President Obama's "red line" statement was challenged by use of chemical weapons by the regime; approximately 1,400 people were killed in Ghouta (Kanat, 2016). The news of this brutal attack circulated the world very rapidly through social media platforms. Those YouTube videos on social media openly demonstrate that victims suffered from exposure to chemical weapons (ABC News, 2013). Considering Obama's famous "red-line" speech, the expectation emerged that the US would take action against Syria after the Ghouta chemical attack. Notwithstanding, the action never came. After circulating the videos of the chemical weapon, the US made a statement requesting access to victims and witnesses to collect physical evidence (Chulov et al., 2013). The international society concentrated on Obama's reaction during this process, mainly due to the "red line" statement.

However, the first statement Obama did not match the red line approach; Obama argued that "Sometimes what we have seen is that folks will call for immediate action, jumping into stuff, that does not turn out well, gets us mired in complicated situations, can result in us being drawn into costly, difficult, costly interventions" (BBC, 2013). This statement was clearly verifying the previously revealed "no boots on the ground" strategy. The White House opted to avoid direct engagement in the Syrian conflict. President Obama did not prefer to take responsibility to make military operations by his own decision; therefore, he claimed that "I think it is important to have congress's support" (Roberts, 2013). On the other hand, Obama's sidestep was also evident in his September 4th assertion that "I did not set a red line; the world set a red line" (Kanat, 2016, p. 154). Thuswise, the Obama administration was underlining the collective responsibility; thence, stopping the chemical attack in Syria or punishing it could not be defined as a burden of the United States alone. Eventually, in September 2013, the Obama administration declared a deal with Russia; for this reason, Obama requested that Congress postpone the vote on the air raid on Syria and wait for a diplomatic solution.

Overall, it might be argued that Turkey and the United States had strategic convergence but tactical divergences on Syria. The use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime and the lack of U.S. retaliation became a turning point in the relationship (Kanat & Üstün, 2015). Because the chemical weapons incident showed that Obama's red lines on Syria could change, which dragged Turkey's Syria policy into a dead end. The fact that Turkey shares a long border with Syria, thus it was feeling the pressure of the civil war more than any other country in the equation, which made Turkey's disappointment more intense. The separation of Turkey with its strongest ally in Syria policy and the deepening of this separation had two important consequences. First of all, as the JDP government had foreseen, the Syrian civil war did not end in an early period, and the Assad regime did not fall with the strong support of Russia and Iran. Secondly, as the Syrian civil war dragged on, Turkey's internal and external security problems emerged due to the Syrian crisis, and these security weaknesses had serious effects on Turkey's Syria policy.

2.5. Kurdish Autonomy in Northern Syria and Turkey's Security Concerns (2012)

The Kurdish political movement in Syria has quite a long history. The first Kurdish political party was founded in 1957; however, it had a fragmented structure within the inner circle due to domestic political divisions (Tejel, 2009, p.48). Most Syrian Kurdish political parties are descended from Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Those Kurdish parties were powerless and broken and were also under the suppression of the Assad regime. More precisely, their existence had been illegal under the Assad regime. Besides, the Kurdish population has been enclosing the most significant non-Arab ethnic minority with approximately 4 million people, in other words, about %15 of the total population of Syrian society (Middle East Report, 2013). In Syria, the Kurdish people are mainly located in the northern Hasake region along the Turkish border and the northwest and Kobane or Ayn Al-Arab in Arabic. When Kurdish protesters made a mass demonstration in Qamishli in March 2004, the Assad regime rapidly replied by impelling many troops with a ruthless crackdown on the local population (Federici, 2015).

Despite the unsuccessful attempts in the past, as a terrorist organization and mortal enemy of Turkey, PKK has increased its impact on Syrian Kurds and established the "Democratic Union Party" (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat - PYD) in 2003 (Carnegie Middle East Center, 2012; Güneş & Bayır, 2020) as a response against the Adana agreement and normalization between Turkey and Syria. However, until the 2011 uprising, Kurdish status maintained unchanged. Before the uprising, due to fear of regime suppression, Kurdish political structures were unwilling to struggle against the regime, maybe with the effect of unpleasant memory in Qamishli recently. After establishing the PYD, hundreds of its members were imprisoned and executed by the Assad regime. When we look at the pre-2011 Syrian civil war, it seemed almost impossible to gather political and geographical power over the Kurdish ethnicity in the region by PYD. However, after the start of the Syrian uprising, when the anti-regime demonstrations intensified, PYD preferred to sustain its moderate stance because the decision-makers in PYD believed that the moderate stance could lead to Kurdish self-regulation in northern Syria. Soon after the 2011 uprising broke out, the PYD, encamped with the PKK in northern Iraq's mountains, returned to Syria. In July 2012, taking advantage of the regime's security forces' partial withdrawal from Kurdish areas, the PYD controlled at least five Kurdish strongholds, replacing Syrian flags with its own (Güneş & Bayır, 2020). The PYD was involved in Kurdish Patriotic Movement in June 2011; however, it denied applying to the Kurdish National Council (KNC), which covers thirteen Kurdish opposition parties founded in October 2011 under the impact of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) Massoud Barzani (Radpey, 2016). Essentially, the Syrian civil war dynamics created a robust opportunity for PYD and its armed extension YPG (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel – "People's Protection Units"), thanks to the Assad's retreat, they found a chance to establish de facto supremacy in the region.

On July 19, 2012, the withdrawal of the Assad regime from northern Syria might be evaluated in two different dimensions in terms of Turkey-Syria relations. Firstly, to protect Damascus and its circumference, the strategic retreat became a necessity in terms of the Assad regime. Briefly, Assad did not want to fight on several fronts simultaneously (Radpey, 2016). Secondly, the regime's withdrawal from northern Syria might be considered a strategic move on the chessboard; giving the north to the PYD meant a massive counterattack against the Turkish influence in the north of Syria.

In brief, the Assad regime created a conscious power vacuum in northern Syria filled by PYD -YPG, the extension of PKK (İşyar, 2018; Yükselen, 2020). Before the Syrian Civil war, the possibility of Kurdish autonomy in the north of Syria was unlikely soon; however, after the mid-2012 PYD captured the strategic location in northern Syria, and by late 2013, "Rojava," which means "Western Kurdistan," was established as local self-governance (Altunışık, 2020), therefore the possibility which had seemed improbable, suddenly has become a tangible reality. The PYD gradually created a system of local governance in northern Syria.

The emergence of the PYD-YPG as a significant actor in the Syrian civil war, particularly from 2012 onward, raised significant concerns in the minds of the Turkish policymakers due to two substantial reasons. Firstly, after the consolidation of the KRG as an autonomous Kurdish entity along the Turkish-Iraqi border, Turkey was concerned about the repercussions of a new Kurdish entity this time along the Turkish-Syrian border. In addition to Turkey's "northern Iraq" problem since the early 1990s, Turkey was now facing a "northern Syria" problem. Secondly, the newly emerging Kurdish de facto autonomous entity in northern Syria and its administration by the PYD/YPG, PKK's Syrian offshoot, have been automatically seen by Ankara as an existential threat to Turkey's national security (Pusane, 2017). Therefore, Turkey instinctively defined the PYD as a terrorist organization and formulated its policies toward the Syrian crisis, primarily aiming at preventing the PYD-YPG from increasing its gains regionally and internationally.

2.5.1. Security Dilemma of Turkey

The PKK terrorist organization, which was established in 1978 regarding a Marxist-Leninist ideology, has operated deadly attacks against the Turkish security forces and civilians since 1984 (Özçelik, 2019). The PKK existed in Syria when the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, had an agreement with Hafız Al-Assad that retained its validity for almost 20 years. When Öcalan was exiled from Syria due to the pressure from Turkey in October 1998, northern Syria continued to be a de facto zone of insurrectionist impact. Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that with the 1998 Adana Agreement, Turkey succeeded in erasing the concrete existence of the PKK from the north of Syria (Balcı, 2016). After the Syrian uprising, the Syrian army voluntarily

withdrew from Northern Syria; in this way, the PYD, as an extension of PKK, took over the "Kurdish region" without confrontation. Although substantially empowering the PKK and its affiliate PYD in northern Syria strengthened the hand of Assad against Turkey, the rise of the PYD with territorialization in the north of Syria worried Turkish decision-makers about the possibility of a separatist state in northern Syria (Dal, 2017). Before the PYD began to gain territory north of Syria in 2012, the meeting between the Vice President of the Arab Republic of Syria, Turkmani, and Turkey's Ambassador to Syria, Önhon, revealed the picture clearly. The Turkish ambassador of the period describes the meeting as follows:

On 20 August 2011, I met with the Vice President of Syria, General Turkmani. he told me that the Kurds are working to gain achievements in line with their agenda by taking advantage of the current crisis. He said that this attitude of the Kurds would create a danger not only for Syria but also for Turkey in the upcoming period. (Önhon, 2021, p. 312).

As seen in the meeting between the representatives of the two countries, Syria clearly stated that the Kurds would create instability for Turkey.

The unexpected rise and territorialization of PYD stemmed from the power vacuum in northern Syria changed the calculus of Turkey paradoxically in 2012. Because Turkey's engagement in the Syrian civil war and Turkey-Syria confrontation had been serving the power vacuum in northern Syria since the beginning, increasing the mobility of the PYD in the north of Syria. In terms of PKK and its affiliate PYD, this was the chance to empower in the context of territorial expansion. Murat Karayılan, the leader of PKK, stated that "to wait for upcoming developments" in Syria, which they perceived as a "historic opportunity" for them (İşyar, 2018). Similarly, Abdullah Öcalan sent a letter to Assad through his lawyers in April 2011, stating that they wanted to cooperate with the regime and they also would take a stand with the regime in the civil war in return for leaving the administration in northern Syria to them (Ünal et al., 2014, p. 282). In response, the regime released all the imprisoned members of the PYD, allowed Salih Muslim and other members of the organization in northern Iraq to return to Syria, and allowed the PYD to engage in political and military activities in the region.

The PYD has increased its mobility in Afrin, Hasakah, Ayn-el Arab regions, and Qamishli (İşyar, 2018). During the first period of the Syrian civil war, the Assad

regime did prefer a separated rebel movement in northern Syria because it had to consolidate its troops against the Arab opposition. When Syrian regime forces withdrew from the large Kurdish cities on 19 July 2012, PYD and its armed extension YPG had operational control of cities solely through crossings roads (Özçelik, 2019). In a short period, PYD captured Kobane, Amuda, and Afrin - by August of 2012, the PYD controlled many cities inhabited by Kurds. In other words, the PYD-YPG components utilized a power vacuum throughout Assad's withdrawal and increased its geographical expansion in northern Syria. Shelly Culbertson (2016) conceptualized this process as the "strengthening and becoming an actor" process for PYD.

Throughout the Qamishli demonstrations in 2012, two narratives were remarkable in terms of Kurdish stance in northern Syria; firstly, "*neither Damascus nor Free Syrian Army*" and secondly, "the regime will fall in Damascus, not in Ras al-Ayn" (Yükselen, 2016). Those strategies displayed the primary purpose of the PYD in Syria regardless of the regime and opposition. Thanks to the power vacuum in northern Syria, PYD had the opportunity to expand, and they utilized the power vacuum in their interest, which Abdullah Öcalan describes as a "third-way strategy". The successful strategy of the PYD enabled the PKK to re-enter Syrian territory which it left since the 1988 Adana Agreement. The strengthening of PYD, aiming to attain strategic leverage for its movement across the Middle East, caused security turbulence for Turkey in the region. Ankara's concerns arise from the connection between PYD/YPG and PKK. Even in interviews, PKK members identify the members of PYD/YPG as the same movements as theirs (Cale, 2015). Initially, Ankara responded with worries about the PYD/YPG's territorial expansion through its traditional Kurdish partner, the KDP in Iraq, to counterbalance the PYD/YPG. This is because KDP and the PKK are historically competitors, and Ankara has already experienced a similar strategy of supporting the KDP as a counterweight element against the PKK. Nevertheless, it cannot be claimed that this strategy stopped the expansion of PYD and YPG in Syria. Indeed, with the increase in violence in the Syrian civil war and the strengthening of non-state radical organizations, a ground has emerged that will further increase Turkey's security concerns.

2.6. Chapter Summary

Turning the demonstrations into a civil war that started in Syria in March 2011 was seen as a window of opportunity for the Turkish government in the first period. In this process, the rhetoric and actions of the Turkish government took an offensive line. In 2011, Prime Minister Erdoğan declared the Syrian civil war directly Turkey's internal issue, and Ankara became aside in the early stages of the civil war. In a short time, Turkey cut off its contacts with the Assad regime and began to support opposition groups. Turkey has also tried to persuade the international community in this direction. Providing more support to the opposition, establishing a buffer zone and, if necessary, a no-fly area, and even a military intervention if the international community agrees and acts together were also on Turkey's agenda. In a nutshell, Turkey has developed a policy based on the idea that there is no place for Assad in Syria's future. Indeed, this policy, which Turkey followed in the first years of the conflict, was also supported by its Western allies. After the diplomatic contacts with the Assad regime were inconclusive, the US administration made similar statements with Turkey. In the first phase of the Syrian civil war, there was a partnership of interest between the West and Turkey. Under these conditions, the JDP government has expressed itself as the leading actor of change in the Middle East. The foreign minister of the period declared Turkey as the pioneer of the wave of change in the Middle East (İşyar, 2013). The Turkish government has supported the Syrian opposition both verbally and in action. The military and political organizations of the Syrian opposition were stationed in Turkey and were directly involved in the civil war in Syria.

Turkey's direct involvement in a civil war in the Middle East is a break from traditional Turkish foreign policy, and it has consequences. In the following periods, the international community was reluctant to take action against Assad as the civil war in Syria radicalized. This essential factor brought Turkey together with "*precious loneliness*", a definition which refers to moral and excluded foreign policy understanding in 2013. The Turkish government made the wrong assumption and thought that the Syrian civil war would soon end in favor of the opposition. Again, within this framework, the Turkish government assumed that the migration movement stemming from the Syrian civil war was a temporary migration wave, just as Kemal Kirişçi underlined (2014, p.1). However, the conflict environment in Syria quickly

spread its effects to the whole region. Turkey is one of the countries that feel these effects the most. First of all, there were significant problems in border security. Achieving complete control of long borders has not been easy. Aside from the damages of the Syrian civil war to Turkey's foreign trade and economy, the most crucial security problem arising from Syria has been terrorism and terrorist groups that utilized the power vacuum in Syria. Despite the Turkish government's miscalculation about the duration and course of the Syrian civil war, Turkey did not face a significant security vulnerability until 2013 - before the establishment of ISIS.

During this period, there were two critical problems in Turkish foreign policy objectives; the first problem was the increasingly divergent goals of the USA and Turkey in Syria. The West has not accepted the safe zone and international intervention thesis that Turkey desires in Syria. In addition, a new radical Islamist power that could arise from the Syrian civil war was met with hesitation in the Western world. The Western uncertainties further fueled the momentum of violence in the Syrian civil war. The specific features of the Syrian Civil War have increased the risks. This war created a Hobbesian state of nature in which refers to war of everyone. To be more specific, the phrase of "*bellum omnium contra omnes*" which means "the war of all against all", especially associated with Thomas Hobbes's description of the state of nature in the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy (Blackburn, p. 193). It is often difficult to even identify which group is fighting against whom. In this respect, it is a highly dynamic, variable, and multi-layered war. The second big problem in Turkey is Assad's withdrawal from the north of Syria with the spread of the Syrian civil war in 2012. The power vacuum in northern Syria filled by Kurdish separatist groups provoked Turkey's security impulse. The gaining ground and power of PKK-supported groups in Syria was the first step toward a severe security weakness for Turkey; however, this security concern was not activated for a while due to the government's negotiation process with the Kurds. While the Syrian civil war was still going on, the security risks stemming from the civil war had not yet directly targeted the Turkish territory at this stage. On the other hand, the coup in Egypt, the tensions in Turkey-EU relations, and other problems between Turkey and the USA have led to the isolation of Turkey in Syria by inches. Turkey's isolation in the Syrian issue and its separation with its allies can be seen as the beginning of a process that will have significant effects on Turkish foreign policy. First of all, in terms of Turkish decision makers, the support

of the West at the point of overthrowing Assad was questioned. Secondly, PYD-YPG, one of the terrorist organizations that filled the power vacuum caused by the civil war in Syria, and its increasing western support negatively affected Turkey's relations with the west, especially Turkey-US relations.

CHAPTER 3

THE POWER VACUUM, CROSS-BORDER TRANSITIVITY AND SECURITY GAP (MARCH 2013- AUGUST 2016)

3.1. Turkish Foreign Policy Analysis; Radicalization in the Region and Vulnerability in the Homeland

Russia has been backing the Assad regime robustly to protect its traditional ally in the Middle East on the global stage. The protection of the Assad regime had immense significance in the sense of Russia's route to the Mediterranean. On the other hand, the US would benefit from a post-Assad regime in Syria by weakening the influence of Iran and Russia in the region. Nevertheless, the US and the West were highly suspicious of the radical Islamic elements which might have gained power in the area in the possible post-Assad scenario. In addition, US President Barack Obama and his administration were prudent about external intervention after the losses in Afghanistan and Iraq. While Syria was being turned into a conflict area for radical sectarian components at the regional level, the content and nature of the civil war also changed; democratic demands have been replaced by religious and sectarian references, which further increased the indecision of the West.

Moreover, Iran and the Gulf countries perceived this sectarian battleground as crucial to their agendas (Cebeci & Üstün, 2012). These dynamics reshaped the distribution of power in the region and had severe effects on the course of the civil war. In April 2013, with the establishment of ISIS and rapid spread through the Iraq-Syria line, the equation in the Syrian civil war began to turn in favor of the Assad regime. The replacement of the masses by increasingly radicalized organizations and elements weakened Western support for the Syrian opposition. Davutoğlu (2020) describes this situation as follows; "with the emergence of ISIS and gaining power in the region, the conflict between the people fighting for democratic demands and Assad transformed

the conflict between the terrorists and Assad," which definitely did not serve Turkey's interests in Syria.

The regime tried to influence Western public opinion by manipulating the West's allergy to Islamic organizations, especially after the September 11 tragedy (Hassan & Weiss, 2015). As part of this strategy, the Syrian regime opened up space for radical groups. The radical Islamists were released from Sedneya prison by the regime in May 2011 (Önhon, 2011). As a result of the Syrian civil war, Western inaction, and Maliki's sectarian policies, thousands of Sunni foreign fighters have been willing to combat in sectarian war in Syria (Celso, 2015). The establishment and the rise of ISIS have played an essential role in the trend of the Syrian civil war and Turkey's foreign policy. Whereas Turkish decision-makers pushed their resources for the anti-Assad regime campaign at the core of their Syrian strategy, Turkey's Western allies, particularly the Obama administration, prioritized defeating the ISIS threat rather than the Assad regime (Dal, 2017).

These radical organizations and brutal events led to divisions among dissidents, and a picture emerged in favor of the regime. Radicalization and violence almost surrounded all of Syria; for this reason, between 2013 and 2015, the number of Syrian refugees increased more than threefold (Kirisci, 2015). The increase in mass migrations to Turkey and the authority vacuum in northern Syria caused profound geopolitical security risks for Turkey. After this point, the violence and terrorism in the Syrian civil war began to affect Turkey's security inside, at the border, and beyond. On the other hand, with the unwillingness of the West to intervene in Syria, Russia's direct landing in Syria as of August 2015, and the radicalization and disintegration of the opposition in Syria hindered Turkey's plan to overthrow Assad (Yükselen, 2020). Since Russia's direct intervention in Syria has completely turned the balance of the civil war in favor of Assad, Turkey's plan and aim to bring down Assad has largely failed.

Besides, the spiral of violence from the Syrian civil war has begun to show its contagious side. Terrorist organizations that took advantage of the power vacuum in Syria turned into a severe national security problem for Turkey. In this process, security weaknesses emerged in the city centers of Turkey, and major terrorist attacks took place in various cities of the country. Moreover, a disintegrated Syria has become

a threat by inducing refugee influx, paving the way emergence of ISIS, leading to the infiltration of radical and terrorist groups into Turkey or vice versa, threatening the security of Turkish people living near the Syrian border via bombardments and missile attacks intentionally or by mistake (Aktürk, 2018). Besides Syrian Kurdish components exploited the absence of the central authority to gain autonomy or more robust political status. The unprecedented political gain of PYD/YPG has been against Turkey's integrity and internal and external security.

3.2. Radicalization and Fragmentation of Syrian Opposition

Violence is the fundamental mechanism of radicalization, processing at society's individual, group, and mass levels (Jones, 2020). In the beginning of Syrian crisis, local people took to the streets, and pervasive demonstrations were held after Friday prayers on March 11 (Leenders, 2012). Two of them were killed by the regime during the protests, which was the beginning of the civil war. The next mass demonstration was held with augmentation of police violence on March 18, and this time another four Syrians were killed (Hürriyet, 2011). Finally, on March 20, after more people had been killed, the content of mass demonstrations completely fronted to businesses belonging to Makhlouf in Syria (Assad's Cousin) and the demolishing statue of Hafez al-Assad, as a result of confrontation with security forces; this time 15 protesters and seven regime forces were killed (Leenders, 2012). It can be seen that the trauma of violence and death which provoked to local people of Dar'a finally erupted in a violent counterreaction to political targets. The spark in Dera turned into fire, and mass demonstrations with violence erupted across the country, from Latakia province on the coast to Deir Ez-Zour.

The first anti-regime demonstrations were held under the influence of a regional wave of political and social mobilizations; it was a response to an authoritarian Assad regime that ruled through clientelism and dictatorship. Despite the violence, at the beginning of the mass demonstrations, one of the Syrian opposition slogans said, "*The Syrian people are one*" (Hallaj, 2017). The focus point of the Syrian opposition was not so much on "sectarian aspirations" but on calls for actual political, social, and economic transformation (Paris & Berti, 2014). Associate Professor Yasin Atlıoğlu, who was in Syria at that time, says the following about the first period demonstrations;

The participants in the civil demonstrations were the urban middle class and they were from different ethnic and religious groups. For example, there were participations from Nusayris, Sunnis and Druze to the demonstrations. However, after April, the demonstrations began to be indexed to Fridays and Friday prayers. In this case, the minority groups in the country began to withdraw themselves. (Atlıoğlu, 13.10.2022, Interview).

Ömer Önhon, the last Syrian ambassador of Turkey, who witnessed the demonstrations at that time, says: "*Demonstrators across Syria were initially chanting "Islah ul nizam" (restore order). After a while, these slogans were replaced by the slogans "Iskat ul nizam" (let the regime go) and "Yallah irhal Bashar" (let's leave Beşar).*" (Önhon, 2021, p.102). As can be seen at the beginning of the uprising, the slogans did not refer to a religious or sectarian source. Nevertheless, the strategy of the Assad regime for dealing with internal democratic demands varied, such as a violent crackdown on protestors and provoking takfiri extremism which references to a "theological declaration that a Muslim has become an apostate or a person is an infidel or an act or idea constitutes a disbelief in Islam" (Hassan, 2017).

The Assad regime concentrated on a clear strategy to stimulate fear in Syria. This fear is twofold. The aim at home was to intimidate the masses and prevent regime change. All sorts of brutal methods, including chemical weapons, were used to feed this fear. The Assad regime's intentional and increasingly violent methods in the country played an important role in provoking the opposition from non-violent to violent protests (Paris & Berti, 2014). Not only in Dera but also in Homs and Hama, the violence was escalating, and the uprising was turning into a civil war - violence in Syria has turned into a self-feeding cycle. Just as Borum Randy (2014) identified, a revelation of both humiliation and trauma can provoke a demand for revenge among local people, which stimulates a justification mechanism for violence and extremism as the only possible way for justice, which can be seen in Syrian civil war case.

The Assad government also used the rise of radical Islam as a political discourse against the West. For instance, Assad's cousin, businessman Rami Mahluf, in an interview with an American newspaper (*New York Times* on May 10, 2011), said that "if there is no stability in Syria, there will be no Israel, and the alternative to the Assad regime would be Salafists" (Önhon, 2021, p.117). The regime pursued an effective policy against the Western powers, "playing on their fears of radicalism" (Yükselen,

2020). For instance, Assad gave a political statement to the French newspaper, *Le Figaro*, in September 2013. He said, "We are fighting terrorists...80-90% belong to al-Qaeda. They are not interested in reform or politics. The only way to deal with them is to annihilate them" (*Le Figaro*, 2013). Against the radical jihadist Islamic terror danger, Assad was presenting itself as the only practical alternative for suppressing radicalism on the ground. During the interview with *Sunday Telegraph*, Assad explicitly threatened the West, expressing that, "Do you want to see another Afghanistan, or tens of Afghanistan?" (*The Journal*, 2011).

As can be seen, the regime was using this radicalization potential as propaganda to smash the Syrian opposition. The Syrian regime has emphasized that "if the Syrian administration is gone, radical Islamists can take over Syria," which was not precisely a bluff – considering the rise of ISIS. Mutation of the Syrian crisis crystallized with the rise of radical Islamist groups through Syrian opposition. As an inevitable outcome of Western hesitance and reluctance, radicalization gained space on the ground that might be perceived as territorialization of terrorist threat in Syria. The inactivity of the Obama administration to support the opposition provided a fertile atmosphere for radicalization and further fear. The 2012 national election in the United States made the situation even more complicated. Evidently, the Obama administration did not prefer to take any risk just before the election in Syria policy. In August 2012, it was apparent that Syria would not experience any military operation similar to Libya (Kanat, 2016). The brutality of civil war, combined with the US' hesitance, provided proper and fertile ground for radical Jihadist groups. The blockade of the United Nations Security Council by Russia and China, and the ineffectiveness of international initiatives, increased the power of the extreme elements in the Syrian opposition.

3.2.1. The Rise of Radicalism: The Establishment of Jabhat al-Nusra (2012)

The Syrian opposition groups were disappointed by the inaction of the Western countries that pushed the opposition groups to seek other and better-equipped warrior elements in the war. Thence, Jihadists had the opportunity to penetrate Syria from all corners of the world, especially from Iraq. The radicalization on the ground, especially with the establishment of Jabhat al-Nusra in January 2012, had a substantial impact on the course of the war. Indeed, the indecision and not supporting the moderate elements

encouraged not only radicals but also the Assad regime too. Khatip and his colleagues identified that the Syrian civil war might be analyzed through chronological order, such as 1) the transformation of the peace process in 2011 to civil war, 2) the hesitation and inaction of the Obama administration, and the “disappearance of red lines” 3) the growth of radical groups and the decrease the effectiveness of moderate rebel groups (Khatip et al., 2017, p.11). The first visible sign of the radicalization was seen with the al-Nusra, a Syrian offshoot of the former al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). According to Associate Professor Yasin Atlıoğlu;

At the end of 2011, the Nusra front started to show itself. The first action of this terrorist organization was in December 2011. He attacked Damascus and Aleppo with explosives. Al-Nusra continued its attacks in major cities in 2012. (Atlıoğlu, 13.10.2022, Interview)

The membership of AQI contains both Syrian and foreign fighters, the resources drawn from the central al-Qaeda. The arrival of the Jihadists into the equation and particularly the involvement of the al-Qaeda affiliated al-Nusra in the Syrian crisis made the United States anxious, and this situation even led to further divergence between US and Turkey.

In December 2012, the Obama administration officially labeled al-Nusra as a terrorist organization. The reaction against the designation of al-Nusra as a terrorist organization was critical in understanding the radicalization process. Twenty-nine Syrian opposition groups signed the condemnation decision against the U.S after naming al-Nusra as a terrorist group; those groups even announced that “*We are all al-Nusra*” and raised al-Nusra’s flags (Roggio, 2012). The penetration of al-Nusra into Syria directly decreased the attempts of the U.S to support moderate opposition against the Assad regime. Al-Nusra precluded into the Syrian war at the beginning of 2012 as a vanguard of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Al-Nusra officially declared its existence in Syria through a video deployed through social media on January 23, 2012 (Cafarella, 2014). Immediately after, ISI leader Abu Bakr-al al-Baghdadi claimed that ISI contained al-Nusra as its organization. However, al-Nusra did not accept this subsuming initiation of ISI; instead of being a subsidiary of ISI, al-Nusra announced its complete loyalty to Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. The establishment of al-Nusra, at first under the ISI control but afterward as an affiliate of central al-Qaeda,

showed the crystallization of radicalization tendency in Syria. The relation between the radicalization process and civil war is explained clearly by the leader of al-Nusra, Joulani, who noted that;

For example, when Damascus was attacked, the regime began to focus its attention on it (rebel groups) and ignored rural areas. Therefore, we started recruiting and developing recruits into bridges and things like that in the rural areas. After that, we enter those cities, one after another (Cafarella, 2014, p.14).

This statement clearly shows how the power vacuum in Syria has been exploited by radical Islamic Jihadist groups.

3.2.2. The origin of ISIS and Its impact on Turkey's Syria Policy

ISIS was born out of Chaotic atmosphere and internal conflicts in Iraq and Syria. However, this game-changer terrorist organization has not come from anything; its early roots had grown in Iraq after the US invasion. Indeed, ISIS is a superior product of spatial-temporal circumstances; it was born out of the first invasion of Iraq (2003-2011), secondly the Arab Spring (2010), and the Syrian civil war (2011-present). After 9/11, the U.S. decided to initiate an all-out military attack against al-Qaeda. Paradoxically, while al-Qaeda was not on the ground in Iraq in 2003, the US invasion provoked the Sunni population and provided a suitable environment for al-Qaeda to increase its influence in Iraq (Oosterveld & Bloem, 2016). In the subsequent phases, the rise of ISI was accelerated due to two vital decisions of the US: the rapid de-Baathification of Iraq and the abolishment of the Iraqi army (Gerges, 2019). That decision fed sectarian power conflicts and provoked minority Sunni's against the majority Shia, which al-Qaeda evidently used in Iraq. In October 2004, as a takfiri Jihadist terrorist, al-Zarqawi declared his commitment to the leader of al-Qaeda, Bin Laden (Weiss & Hassan, 2016; Gerges, 2019). This was the born of ISI (Islamic State of Iraq). After that, Bin Laden declared that he accepted al-Zarqawi's allegiance and assigned him as the leader of Iraqi al-Qaeda. At this point, clarifying the methodological difference between central al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda in Iraq (al-Zarqawi) is necessary to understand the rise of ISIS and radicalization in the region. Either Bin Laden or al-Zawahiri never condemned Iran explicitly and never attacked Iranian Shias in Afghanistan. Because the interest of both sides converged against the U.S.,

central al-Qaeda did not want to provoke any conflict with Tehran (Gerges, 2019). The vast difference between ISI or al-Qaeda or the difference between Bin Laden and al-Zarqawi was about to fight against Shias. Both Bin Laden and Zawahiri concentrated on U.S. targets and called on Muslims to totally resist the US' existence; however, the leader of Iraqi al-Qaeda al-Zarqawi emphasized a full-scale and ruthless sectarian war (Weiss & Hassan, 2016). Such difference is so crucial because this difference was pushed and eventually led to the split between ISIS and al-Qaeda. This difference and radical sectarian ideological perspective also had a massive impact on the course of the Syrian civil war when ISIS penetrated Syria.

Al-Zarqawi had always desired a sectarian civil war between Sunnis and Shias (Hassan & Weiss, 2015). Although he was killed in 2006, his ideological perspective was maintained by his successor Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and eventually, this vision was realized in 2013 in Syria. The French political scientist Oliver Roy, who has studied politics and Islam, explained radicalism that connects Iraq to Syria with the words,

Sunnis who have held power since the 1920s in Iraq, excluded from the politics after the Iraq invasion. Sunnis as the population that all taken away from their hands in Iraq come together with the Sunnis who live with similar feeling in Syria, under the pressure of Nusayri (Alawites) minority (HaberTürk Tv, 2016).

Although ISI suffered from the detrimental assault on 18 April 2010, when its leaders al-Masri and Umar al-Baghdadi were killed in an air raid near the Tikrit, it found an immense opportunity to penetrate and spread in the region after the Syrian uprising.

Having underlined before, the regime did not bring the masses to the fore among the opposition elements, but elements such as Salafis, jihadists, and ISIS, established in April 2013 (Hassan & Weiss, 2015) by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and consolidated its power over specific domains through the Syria-Iraqi border. After its establishment, ISIS showed rapid effectiveness, and it captured Raqqa from al-Nusra in August 2013, and it expanded rapidly toward al-Bab, Deir al-Zor, Abu-Kamal and Azaz in September 2013 (Yükselen, 2016). The spread of ISIS had a detrimental impact on the course of the Syrian civil war. Because the leader of ISIS, Al-Baghdadi, like his mentor extremist sectarian Jihadist al-Zarqawi, was imprisoned at Camp Bucca between 2005 and 2009 (Celso, 2015), accelerated his religious practice fanaticism and also anti-Shia

impulses. The difference between Al Qaeda's "far enemy" strategy and Zarqawi's "near enemy" perspective showed itself as further radicalization, massacre, and blood in Syria. Following their rapid expansion on different fronts, ISIS declared a Caliphate in June 2014. Indeed, this was a clear sign of the will of Takfiri radical Jihadists to transform their territorial expansion into political power in the region. In particular, the invasion of Mosul in a short time in June 2014 showed ISIS's operational effectiveness.

In the interview, Professor Doctor Serhat Erkmen, who is a Syria expert, evaluates the impact of the rise of ISIS on Turkey's Syria policy as follows;

ISIS was proclaimed in 2013 with the transformation into the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. However, there was already a structure called the Islamic State of Iraq, and its rise began in 2010-2011. Many reports were made about this organization at that time, and this structure has risen openly. I am a person who has personally followed and known the rise of this terrorist organization since then. In the event of the collapse of the central authority, it can be predicted that a stronger, more experienced structure with a more concrete agenda than other armed groups will destroy the others. On the one hand, there are fragmented structures, on the other hand, there is a terrorist organization (ISIS) with a certain goal, organization and leadership structure. Like a marten in a coop, ISIS defeated all their opponents one by one.

In order to criminalize the opposition, the Syrian regime released the radical jihadists from prisons, especially in Sednaya. But these radical jihadists dispersed to all opposition groups. The Assad regime did not establish ISIS, but by spreading its dominance, it limited the opposition's range of action. However, the most important problem was that neither Turkey nor the West could produce a political target that would unite the opponents. Thus, ISIS began to control the areas that the opposition could control. Then, the USA's stepping into the field for the elimination of ISIS and supporting the PYD deeply affected Turkey's Syria policy. Until then, for example, the USA supported certain elements within the Free Syrian Army, elements we call MOM. After the establishment and rise of ISIS, this equation started to change. (Interview, 12.10.2022).

Besides, the radicalization of the opposition changed the perspective of the US and Europe, which supported the opposition, on the Syrian civil war. Önhon, the last Syrian ambassador of Turkey and who continued to work with Davutoğlu after leaving office, described a meeting between the US and Turkish foreign ministers in İstanbul as follows: "US Foreign Minister John Kerry and Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu met at the hotel for Four Seasons on the evening of April 20 2013. Kerry stated that

the number one threat to the US in Syria is Al Nusra.” (Önhon, 2021, p.289). In other words, the primary target for the US. in the Syrian issue was not the Assad regime anymore but Islamic radicalism in Syria. Although Turkey was willing to link ISIS with the Assad regime, Western powers sharply turned to a dilemma that put forward “ISIS or Assad,” which definitely did not serve Turkey’s objectives and interest in the Syrian civil war. Retired Ambassador Önhon, who personally participated in that meeting between US Secretary of State Kerry and Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, said the following on the subject.

Priorities changed for the West when ISIS came on the scene, bombs exploded in Europe and people started to die. The entire West focused on the ISIS threat, and this greatly relieved the Assad regime. Even today, when we asked the Americans why you support the YPG, you know that it is an extension of the PKK, we were told, "Our priority is not to revive ISIS. (Interview, 13.10.2022).

Prime Minister Davutoğlu underlined Turkey’s straightforward approach:

We do not want to see ISIS, the Regime, and PKK on our border” (A.A.,2014). To convince the Western power, Davutoğlu claimed a tactical collaboration between the Assad regime and ISIS; he asserted that “When the Assad regime attacked opposition positions, rebel forces had to leave those towns and cities. The ISIS forces then occupied these towns. Therefore, there was no conflict between the Assad regime and ISIS. On the contrary, the existence of ISIS helped Assad stay in power... it helped Assad legitimization in the eyes of the international community (Washington Post, 2015).

The radicalization and violent sectarian war undermined the Syrian opposition, and the Turkish foreign policy aims in Syria. Ahmet Davutoğlu, who had defined the Arab Spring as a Turkish Spring at the beginning of the Syrian civil war, described the rise of ISIS as “*the dead of winter*” in his latest book (Davutoğlu, 2020, p.113). Gaining space by a radical terrorist organization like ISIS by taking advantage of the power vacuum on the Iraqi and Syrian lines has become a tactical advantage for the Assad regime. Thence, the expectation of the fall of the Assad regime was decreasing visibly. At the end of May 2013, “the pointer started to favor the Assad regime” (İsyar, 2018, p.387). Gerhard Schindler, the head of German intelligence BND, asserted that the conditions dramatically changed in favor of the regime (Gbauer, 2013). Meanwhile, Davutoğlu was doing a sort of psychological opening to the Assad, blaming Assad’s mother for the violence in Syria. He claimed that “The problem of Assad is his mother.

His mother reminds Father Assad. She says if I were you, I would behave just as in Hama” (T24, 2013). Davutoğlu’s book analyses the impact of the rise of ISIS as follows,

The development experienced in the summer of 2013 changed the nature and trend of the Arab Spring. Iraq-based ISIS united the chaotic atmospheres of Iraq and Syria, and it controlled critical Aleppo, Raqqah, and Mosul lines which have complicated sectarian and ethnic structures. This development changed the nature of Arab Spring; the tension between the opposition rising with the demand for freedom and The Assad regime transformed the tension between the terrorist organization and the Assad regime (Davutoğlu, 2020, p. 112).

According to Erkmen (2022) The rise of ISIS prevented the opposition from forming a zone against the regime in a holistic way (Interview).

As Davutoğlu puts it; the process of turning the Syrian civil war into a war between the Assad regime and "terrorists" has disrupted Turkey's Syria policy. First of all, the ascension process by taking advantage of the power vacuum of the radical jihadist elements increased Assad's legitimacy against the international community. Bringing the question of "Assad or ISIS" to the agenda in Western societies has seriously damaged Turkey's political goals towards Syria. On the other hand, the rise of ISIS after the summer of 2013 is a process that brings serious weaknesses in Turkey's border security and internal security. After this point, it might be seen that the spiral of violence in Syria started to overflow into Turkey with the effect of "spill over". Davutoğlu considers this process as "the dead of winter" (Davutoğlu, 2020) because it both undermines Turkey's foreign policy objectives to bring down the Assad regime in Syria and creates serious security weaknesses for Turkey.

With the radicalization of the Syrian civil war and the emergence of Jihadist organizations in 2013 and later, the course of the conflict seems to have changed against Turkey. Apart from the rise of radical jihadist organizations, other factors that changed the course of the civil war are expressed by Associate Professor Yasin Atlioğlu as follows;

Iranian military advisers had begun to enter the country in 2012 to support Assad, but at the beginning of 2013 there were important developments. The Syrian army, as a regular army, experienced great difficulties in the city war, in which the opposition attacked with guerrilla tactics. Especially

at the end of 2012, the Syrian army had suffered heavy losses. At the beginning of 2013, Iranian military advisers stepped in and formed a militia group called the National Defense Forces. The purpose of this militia was to intervene where the regular Syrian army could not intervene. While Hezbollah was initially only in the Sayyida Zaynab region in Damascus, it has spread to many areas since April 2013. In the battle of Al Qusayr (Al Qusayr) on the Lebanese border, Hezbollah won a serious victory against the opposition. The opposition's military weakness was that although they could carry out guerrilla attacks, they could not fight defensively. Hezbollah showed in Al Qusayr that it is a much more experienced militia group than the opposition. Iran's direct involvement in the Syrian civil war in 2013 with its militia also affected the course of the civil war in favor of Assad and against the Turkish decision makers.

Besides that, the effect of the coup in Egypt in 2013 on the course of the Syrian civil war is very important. Because as a result of the coup in Egypt, the alliance between Qatar and Saudi Arabia in Syria was disrupted. Thus, the cooperation between Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which was formed during the Syrian civil war, was broken. Saudi Arabia found the Egyptian coup positive. On the other hand, Qatar, along with Turkey, has been a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood since 2010. The breakdown of this alliance against Assad is also an important breaking point. (Atlioğlu, 13.10.2022, Interview).

At this point, it should be noted that, despite all these negative developments, Turkey continued its foreign policy target of overthrowing Assad for a while.

3.3. Internal Security Crisis-Diffusion of Violence

Civil wars and internal conflicts have the propensity to expand into neighboring regions and countries. Civil wars in neighboring states might cause the diffusion of violence into the close circle through cross-border, refugee flows, and ethnic ties (Dal, 2017). Turkey's miscalculation about the course of the Syrian civil war has exacerbated the risk of contagion of the crisis. The contagious nature of the Syrian civil war showed its character in 2013 and produced critical geopolitical consequences when the civil war started to spill over into Turkey. The rise of terrorist organizations due to the power vacuum in northern Syria, namely ISIS and PYD/YPG, with the effect of Turkey's open border policy fed the cross-border diffusion. By diffusion, I mean the spread of something across, violence. When States fail, in other words, when nation states' sovereignty decreases and the monopoly of power erodes, the diffusion of violence emerges and spreads, in some cases not only within that state but beyond. As a natural consequence of the Syrian civil war, the state sovereignty of Syria has been

undermined steadily; it has made the country vulnerable to the growth of non-state actors. Drawing on this retrospective analysis, it might be argued that the Syrian civil war and the power vacuum that resulted from it played a catalyzing role in the diffusion process of the violence into Turkey through non-states armed components, notably ISIS and YPG (Dal, 2017).

As of 2013, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs began to notice the radicalization trend in Syria and the possible security risks for Turkey. The P-3 plus Turkey (P-3 US, France, United Kingdom) meeting was held on September 16, 2013, just before the 2nd Geneva conference. Ömer Önhon, the last ambassador of Turkey to Syria and the head of the Turkish Foreign Affairs Middle East Unit at the time, who attended this meeting with Davutoğlu, said the following about the meeting:

The regime continued its massacres because it did not receive any punishment, and this caused the radicalization of the opposition... Davutoğlu also pointed out that the number of Syrian refugees has increased rapidly, there has been an increase in radicalism, and Turkey's security is under threat (Önhon, 2021, p.271).

In response to Davutoğlu's security concerns, US Secretary of State Kerry said that "Even if the US government supports the safe zone plan, the Congress will not approve" (Önhon, 2021, p.272). Once again, Turkey's safe zone plan had failed. In the absence of a central authority and a safe zone, it was highly probable that any power vacuum would open up space for "unwanted" non-state actors. The inaction of the Western powers and rapid radicalization of the opposition groups on the ground decreased the possibility of regime change. It increased the domain of terrorist organizations even further. The PYD-YPG was the first non-state actor that took advantage of the power vacuum in northern Syria; after the withdrawal of the Assad's military forces, PYD-YPG captured Afrin and Kobani at the beginning of 2012. After the expansion of PYD-YPG, the rapid territorialization of ISIS, mainly in Raqqa, confronted Turkey with a two-sided security threat. On the one hand, a domestic security problem that started with the Hatay-Reyhanlı attack and gradually intensified. On the other hand, the border and external security threat created for Turkey by terrorist organizations that benefit from the power vacuum in northern Syria.

3.3.1. Mass Migration, Border Security and National Security

The structural realist understanding represented by Kenneth Waltz underlines the function of international anarchy and the significance of the balance of power (Donnelly, 2018). In this anarchic and competitive international system, realpolitik perception put forward for states two has vital concepts: national interest and national security. Large flows of people across the border emerge from informal and uncontrolled migration turn calls into question traditional models of national security, which assume a unitary national identity from which national interest can be derived (Adamson, 2006). The ability to control the border is a crucial dimension of what Stephen Krasner refers to as a state's interdependence. The nation-states have a vital interest in their territorial boundaries for sovereignty (Krasner, 1996) – controlling populations, limiting access, and maintaining internal security. On the other hand, Gill Loescher (1994) emphasizes that refugee problems are incredibly political; for this reason, it is necessary to see refugees not only as a humanitarian problem but a political problem in a particular security problem. Therefore, the cross-border population movement of people is a vital subject in the sphere of security studies (Loescher, 1992). It is difficult to ignore the mass migration that affects the states, particularly in three areas: state sovereignty or the total capability of the state, the balance of power among states, and the internal security problems within the state. The decision-makers in the U.S., Europe, and around the globe are making linkages between mass migration policy and national security (Adamson, 2006). Since the September 11 terrorist attack, academic debates relating to mass migration and security have increasingly been analyzed through the context of international terrorism. After September 11, Nixon Centre published a report that declared immigration and terrorism are linked not because all immigrants are terrorists but because almost all major terrorist organizations used migration as a tool (Nixon Center, 2004). Robert Leiken (2003) argues that states tend to approach immigration from an economic aspect due to the massive burden; nevertheless, terrorist organizations view immigration from a strategic outlook that utilizes all aspects of the immigration system to acquire access to target states. Even before September 11 attacks, the relationship between migration and security had arisen both in world politics and in some fields of security studies. The concerns about the massive refugee flows and the roles that mobilized diasporas to take action in violent conflicts were being raised before September 11 (Loescher,

1993, Weiner, 1996, Collier, 2000). The threat of security exposure by migration took a tremendous amount of consideration after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, because migration policies and migration networks might provide paths for terrorist organizations and other non-state actors to sustain their interests (Adamson, 2006).

The Arab Spring, which spread to many Middle Eastern countries with oppressive political structures, has induced social uprisings and internal conflicts and displaced millions of Syrians from their homeland. As of March 31, 2021, the number of registered Syrians in different countries is 5.593.304; however, 3.665.946 of them are registered in Turkey (UNCHR, 2020). It means that %65.5 of total registered Syrian refugees came to Turkey (UNCHR). Interestingly, on February 5, 2012, Davutoğlu stated, "I am announcing from here; we can accept all Syrian people if necessary" at Munich Security Conference (Sabah, 2012). According to Turkish decision-makers, the Assad regime was about to fall; based on this prospect, Turkey announced a full-scale open-door policy (Kirişici, 2014) for refugees who do not have to present an official document.

With the involvement of global actors in local and regional conflicts, Turkey's open-door policy transformed from a demonstration of confidence to the cause of security weaknesses. Within a short time, Syrian refugees increased from thousand to millions. In the meeting held in 2013 between Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and US Foreign Minister John Kerry, Davutoğlu emphasized the following situation for his country; "the number of Syrian refugees has increased rapidly, there has been an increase in radicalism, and Turkey's security is under threat" (Önhon, 2021, p.271). This statement went down in history as a late determination for Turkey because a "security threat" was already at Turkey's door. As the cross-border mobilization of people due to the Syrian civil war intensified and the dominance of terrorist organizations due to the power vacuum in Syria expanded, a ground of security weakness emerged both on the border and in Turkey's homeland. This danger of security weakness was also voiced by the then Turkish Foreign Minister himself in 2013.

3.3.2. Internal Security Crisis of Turkey; Border Security Deficiencies, Infiltration of Terrorism and Security Challenges of Turkey

In the most general sense of the term, the concept of security refers to the "absence of threat." It might be said that the concept of security (protection against violent assault or coercion) is central to a realist tradition. According to Realist perception, the definition of security stresses protecting the nation state's territorial unity and the citizens' physical safety (Walt, 1991). Therefore, security has long been about either survival or physical safety for nation-states and their people. Adamson (2006) underlines those states have a vital interest in controlling their territorial borders for some reasons, such as control over their populations and sustaining internal security. Similarly, Jeremy Hein and Niazi (2012) claim that mass migration flows might jeopardize the basis of security. Thence, nation-states perceive their authority to figure out who enters and stays through their borders as a vital component of sovereignty. In this way, borders have always been an integral part of national security.

After the Syrian civil war, millions of refugees migrated to Turkey or transited through Turkey to reach Europe. Turkey's open-door policy started in 2011 and de facto ended in 2016, the transformation might be described from openness to constraints (Dora, 2020). This transformation in Turkey's border policy can be understood with security problems originating from Syria. The power vacuum in northern Syria provided area dominance to terrorist organizations, especially ISIS and YPG. In 2012, the Assad regime withdrew from the northeast region, mostly populated by Kurds, in order to focus on the FSA in Damascus. Afterward, the PYD-YPG took control of Afrin, Jazira, Kobane, Derik and Jindires (Oztig, 2019). On the other hand, the power vacuum also created convenient conditions for ISIS, in this way, its rapid spread in the region was achieved. Long Turkey-Syrian border, the rise of armed non-state actors, increase in terrorism and violence with the combination of open-door policy created the proper ground for terrorist infiltration from Syria to Turkey (Dal, 2016; Dora, 2020). Following the Cilvegözü border-gate attack in 2013 which resulted 14 deaths, Turkey deployed NATO Patriot-missile batteries in its southeastern provinces to deter possible violence from Syria (Hürriyet Daily News 2013; Oztig, 2019).

According to data given by the Turkish General Staff, from January 1, 2011, to June 9, 2016, 78,011 border incidents (smuggling, illegal entry/exit) happened, and 397.216 non-refugee people were captured by security forces (Uzman, 2016, p.156). The border incidents recorded in official records on the Turkey-Syria border from January 1, 2011 to June 9, 2016 and their distribution by years are shown in the Graph (Turkish Republic General Staff, 10 June 2016)

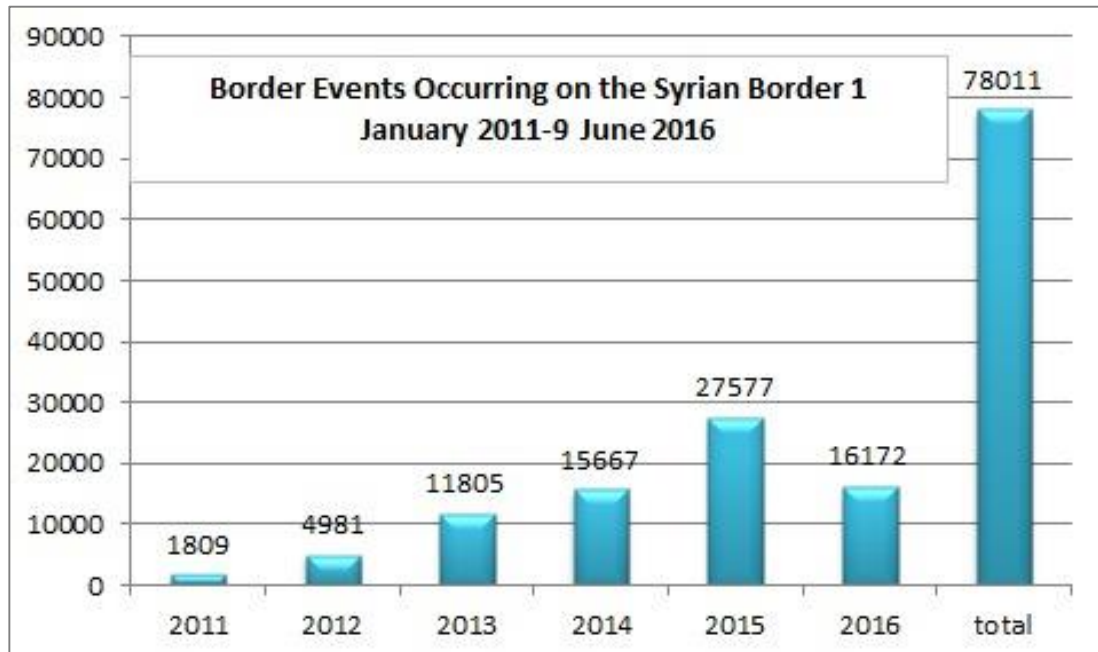


Figure 1. Border Events Occurring on the Syrian Border 1 January 2011 - 9 June 2016

During this process, many ISIS members from different nationalities have been detected by Turkey while crossing the border from Syria to Turkey (Dora, 2020). "The Syrian civil war's conflict spillover effects and consequences have rapidly spread to the country with high security threats, coming mainly from ISIS and the PYD-YPG" (Dal, 2016, p.6). Particularly after the rise of ISIS, the intensification of cross-border population activities sharply increased; in this way, the infiltration of terrorist components has become more possible.

As seen in the graphic, the summer of 2013 (the establishment of ISIS) is the start of momentum.

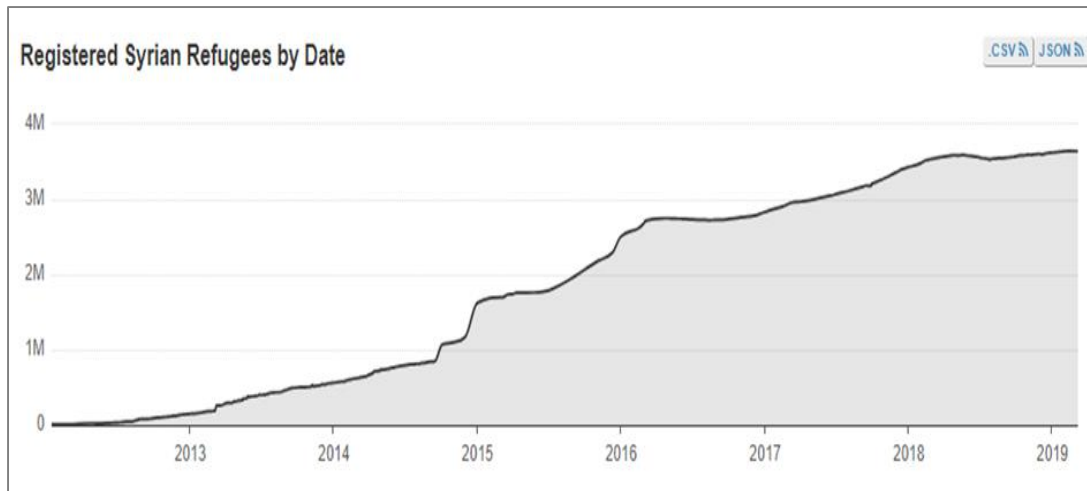


Figure 2. Chart of Syrian Refugees Registered in Turkey (UNCHR, 2019)

Between 2013 and 2015, Syrian refugees increased more than threefold (Kirisci, 2015). According to Murat Erdoğan's latest research, the number of Syrian refugees was only 14.237 at the beginning of 2012. However, the number of refugees sharply increased, and it has become 224.655 in January 2013, 1.519.286 in January 2014, and finally reached 2.503.549 in January 2015 (Erdoğan, 2019). Uncontrolled mass migration and open-door policy led to infiltration of terrorist elements from the terrorist "free-zone" in northern Syria to Turkey. This vulnerability was clearly expressed by the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu in 2017:

Our biggest challenge both regionally and at the international level, however, is likely to remain the conflict in Syria. It creates instability for the region, causes security problems for Turkey, and prevents cooperative relations in the region... if we fail to solve them, the spillover effect of these problems will dramatically affect our domestic societies. (Çavuşoğlu, 2017, p.15).

The war caused a power vacuum in Syria, filled by terrorist organizations, notably ISIS and PYD-YPG. Turkey's miscalculation about the length of the civil war increased the risk of contagion of the violence. During the second period of the Syrian civil war crisis (2013-2016), Turkey was exposed to severe security problems, particularly in city centers, due to the natural consequence of uncontrolled intensive cross-border activities. Following the power vacuum in Syria in 2012, the expansion of PYD-YPG, and the establishment and rapid spread of ISIS in 2013, Turkey's security vulnerabilities have increased. The terrorist actions in Turkey became visible

in 2013 and 2014; those activities hit the highest point, especially in 2015 and 2016 (as seen in the chart).

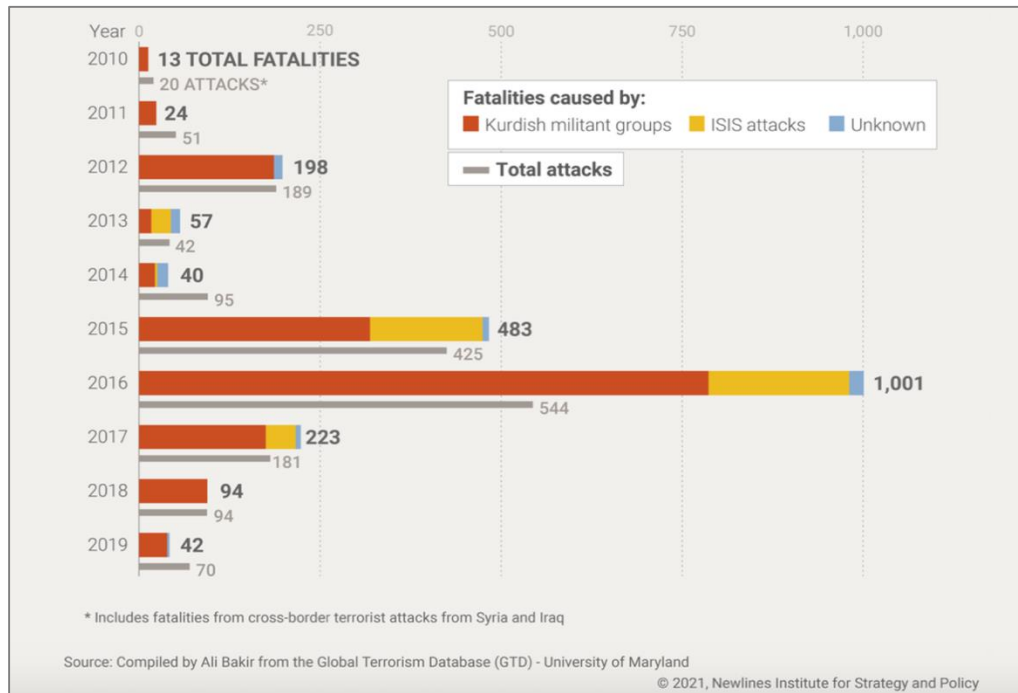


Figure 3. Graph of death in terrorist attacks in Turkey 2010-2019 (Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 2021)

2013 has been an important turning point in terms of both the establishment of ISIS and the transfer of the spiral of violence in Syria to Turkey. It can be assumed that Turkey's open border policy and uncontrolled border crossings contribute significantly to the vulnerability of internal security. Until 2016, when Turkey de facto ended its open-door policy, many terrorist attacks occurred by both ISIS and PKK and PYD/YPG due to illegal border crossings across the country, and many missiles were fired from the Syrian border to Turkey (Karakoç Dora, 2020, pp. 517-18). Whereas, in the statement made after the National Security Council (MGK) Meeting dated March 29, 2017, the military operation was explained with these words "in order to ensure the border security of our country, to prevent the threats and attacks of the ISIS terrorist organization against our country..." (MGK, 2017)

A senior commander of the Special Forces in Turkish army, who served in the region, says the following about the security weakness.

Due to my duty, I have been in various parts of Syria from time to time. There have been many attempts to infiltrate by taking advantage of the open border policy of terrorist structures, especially ISIS. The data of the Police Department will also reveal the Syrian connection of the captured terrorists. At this point, statements of the top government officials about Idlib are important. Authorities openly state that if Idlib falls, a large migration wave may occur, and radical elements may infiltrate Turkey with this migration wave. This is something that has been thought as a result of previous experiences.

Another senior commander, who has served across the border for a long time, especially in Afrin, says the following about border security and border crossings;

Although the intensity of border crossings of terrorist elements over the Syrian border changes from time to time, it has a long history. PKK and Hezbollah trained in the same area, in Yasser Arafat's camps. Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, was also in Beqaa Valley. Here the terrorists, who received armed training, were passing from there to the Syria-Afrin region and from Afrin to Turkey. In other words, there was a long time for terrorist elements to cross the Syrian borders. However the Syrian civil war and especially the increase of ISIS's influence in the region caused a much more intense border crossing. What is ISIS called in that region? Broomfish. In order to create a homogeneous structure in the region, all various ethnic and religious groups were pushed out of the region by ISIS. Some of the ISIS militants came from northern Syria, but some were recruited from within Turkey. There were terrorists who went to Syria from various provinces of Turkey, received training and then returned to Turkey and took action. Let me just give you some additional information. During the trench operations in Mardin Nusaybin, (2015) large explosives were brought to Turkey from Syria by terrorist groups.

In summary, before 2016, border crossings from Syria to Turkey were extremely easy. There were only soldiers waiting in the towers and there was no control mechanism at the border crossings. Although there is currently a military line drawn across the border, the passage of terrorist elements continues, albeit to a small extent. Because it is not possible to completely stop the passage through illegal means in such a long and large region. however, when compared to the period before 2016, the border security is much better. (Interview, 10.11.2022).

In fact, the last ambassador of Turkey, Ömer Önhon (2021), emphasizes that the border crossing is two-way in the pre-2016 period. In other words, it is stated that there are transitions not only from Syria to Turkey, but also from Turkey to Syria. And the international community was also uncomfortable in this situation with an axis. Önhon (2021, p.291) asserted that " A senior American official I met in September 2013 said that there was a negative atmosphere towards Turkey regarding radical groups in the

US Congress. Although they did not think that Turkey was directly collaborating with the radicals, they thought that its borders were not sealed to prevent them". In addition, a senior bureaucrat who was found in Syria stated the following about mass migration, open border policy and internal security problems;

Although it was said that everything was under control at the border, the reality was not. It is not possible to control the 911 km border. This is out of the question. Also, it should not be forgotten that the people living on that border line have been making a living by smuggling for years. It is not possible to control everything in a place where smuggling is so active. And at a time when tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people passed through, these borders could not be controlled. This mass movement of people has led to a very serious security weakness in Turkey. This is a fact. The open-door policy is a human-sounding concept. However, the problems that this open-door policy would create in the future also needed to be analyzed. This calculation has not been made. More precisely, someone made this calculation (he means bureaucracy), but it was not taken into account. This dimension should not be overlooked when evaluating the Syrian crisis. (Interview, 13.11.2022).

The parallelism between the vulnerabilities in border security and the security vulnerabilities in Turkey has started to show itself since 2013. Before Erdogan's Washington visit, Turkey experienced the first massive terrorist attack on 11 May 2013, in Hatay- Reyhanlı. This was the most significant terrorist act ever, and it was necessary for the infectiousness of violence process from Syria to Turkey. As a result of the explosions, 52 people died, 146 people were injured, and 1200 workplaces were damaged (A.A., 2021). On 17 May 2013, the General Command of Gendarmery in Turkey published a report and explicitly blamed al-Nusra for this terrorist attack. According to this report, just like MIT (National Intelligence Service - NIS), gendarmery intelligence claimed that three vehicles came from Syria to strike targets in Turkey. Whoever was the perpetrator of the terrorist attack, the Hatay-Reyhanlı assault was a signal of a new era in terms of Turkey, the violence and terror created by the civil war in Syria were now clearly on Turkish soil. On 20 March 2014, in Niğde-Ulukışla, members of ISIS attacked the Gendarmery and security forces; as a result, three people lost their lives, and seven officials from security forces were injured (Cumhuriyet, 2014). On the other hand, the ISIS threat had already become visible to Turkey after a video uploaded on Youtube in 2014 declared that ISIS would assault the Suleyman Sah tomb. The rapid expansion of ISIS and the caliphate declaration increased Turkey's anxiety. ISIS activated the operational components of former

Ba'thist insurgents, many of whom had been intelligence and military officers in the Saddam Hussein regime. For this reason, the functional aspect of ISIS militants was vital, and the terrorist threat they created was frightening.

In 2014, it was crystalized that the Syrian uprising transformed its character into a ruthless multisided war with the territorialization of ISIS in the field. The advance expansion of ISIS with its unrivaled brutality changed the calculus of the US and pushed for the eventual military operation against ISIS. After the ISIS attack on Ayn al-Arab in September 2014, the US finally enlarged its airstrikes to Ayn al-Arab on September 27 (Kanat, 2016; Yükselen, 2020). The divergence between Turkey and US became much more visible when ISIS surrounded Ayn al-Arab. The destabilization of Syria created a hub for radical components just like Pakistan, "*exporting radicalism to neighboring states*" (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020, p.19).

Both the civil war in Syria and migration wave to Turkey have affected Turkey's border security (Uzman, 2016 p.135). An uncontrolled migration crisis or an uncontrolled open-door policy might lead to terrorist infiltration from Syria to Turkey. The rise of terrorist organizations in Syria well conforms to the Turkish case in which the Syrian civil war's conflict spillover effects and consequences have rapidly spread to the country with high security threats, coming mainly from ISIS and the PYD-YPG (Dal, 2016, p.6). Due to open door policy and uncontrolled border policy, Turkey has become highly vulnerable to Jihadist radical and ethnic terrorism. The correlation between the border permeability that Turkey has been exposed to and the increasing number of terrorist incidents supports this argument.

The increase of mass migration wave to Turkey as graphic;

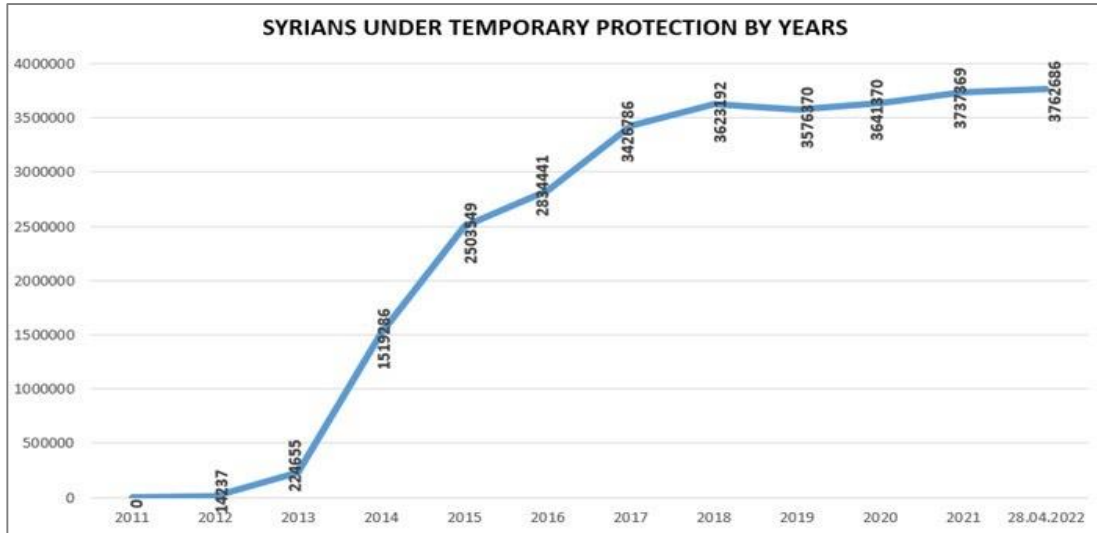


Figure 4. Syrians Under Temporary Protection by Years (The Republic of Turkey - Presidency of Migration Management, 2022)

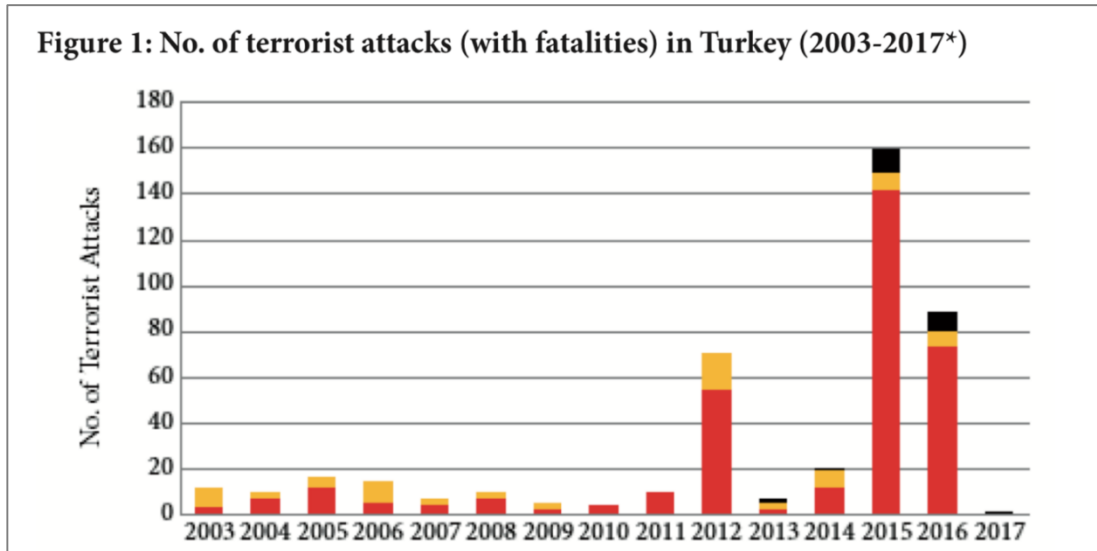


Figure 5. Terrorist Attacks with Fatalities in Turkey 2003-2017 (PRI, 2016)

The spread of terrorism and organized crime in the field; unlawful border crossing of the ISIS fighters have created a security deficiency, particularly between 2015 and 2016. The acceleration of mass migration and increase in terrorist actions demonstrates the correlation between the two.

The year 2015 started with a suicide bomb attack in front of the İstanbul Police Department in the Sultanahmet district of Fatih, the perpetrator of this attack was ISIS (Milliyet, 2015). In June 2015, just before the general election, Turkey witnessed a

terrifying terrorist attack in its history in the Diyarbakır district. This attack happened at the HDP's Diyarbakır rally; five people died, and more than 400 were injured (The Guardian, 2016). In July 2015, the Suruç bombing was one of the deadliest terrorist attacks on Turkish soil, 33 people were killed, and more than 100 people were injured (Hürriyet, 2015). It was not the first time ISIS aimed at civilians in Turkey. ISIS's terrorist acts had already begun with the March 2014 Niğde attack; however, the impact and quantity of terrorist attacks increased gradually. Meanwhile, ISIS published intimidation via video message in June 2015, which was titled "The Conquest of İstanbul". After the Suruç attack, Turkey tried to engage simultaneously with all terrorist organizations, notably ISIS and PKK and its affiliates PYD-YPG. Therefore, Turkish decision-makers decided to allow U.S forces to utilize Incirlik Air Base in July 2015 (Washington Post, 2015); it tried to secure its southern border through counterterrorism endeavors.

It can be clearly said that the spiral of violence in Syria was threatening Turkey as never before in 2015. In October 2015, at 10.04 local time, Turkey witnessed the most significant terrorist attack in Ankara Train Station. With a death toll of 109 civilians, this attack surpassed the 2013 Hatay Reyhanlı bombings as the deadliest attack in modern Turkish history (The Guardian, 2016). Among other things, the Diyarbakır rally bombings happened just two days before the January 2015 general election, and the Ankara Train Station attack occurred just one month before the November 2015 general election. Shortly after the november 2015 general election, PKK escalated the fighting against the Turkish security forces. The top-level terrorists in PKK announced the end of "the resolution process" between Turkey and PKK. Terrorist activities hit the highest point between January and November 2015; apart from terrorist attacks against civilians, ISIS and PKK killed more than 130 security forces as of September 2015 (Kanat & Üstün, 2015). The spiral of violence in Turkey increased with the PKK's entry into the equation; PKK organized a bomb attack on Sabiha Gökçen Airport in December 2015. Security weakness has reached a point where it cannot be denied (The Guardian, 2016)

On the other hand, ISIS continued its intense terrorist attack in Turkey. On 12 January 2016, 13 civilians were killed by ISIS in another suicide bomb attack again in İstanbul's historic Sultanahmet district (Dora, 2020). The Prime Minister Ahmet

Davutoğlu decided to convene the security summit after the second Sultanahmet attack. However, Turkish decision-makers could not stop the terrorist attacks originating cross-border. In February 2016, just next to the Chief of General Staff campus and the Turkish Grand National Assembly, another terrorist bomb attack was carried out by PKK against the military convoys, and 28 people were killed (The Guardian, 2016) This terrorist attack was followed by İstanbul / İstiklal Street attack, this time by ISIS in March 2016. The terrorist attack in Turkey's most important cities and the most central places clarified Turkey's internal security vulnerabilities more than ever. Violence and terrorism in Turkey have reached such a point that the Nationalistic Movement Party (MHP), Devlet Bahçeli, showed unusual behavior and visited a shopping mall in Ankara to encourage people against the terrorist attacks. Bahçeli has stated, "Come to shopping malls, stroll on the streets. Sit in Parks. God will protect you, do not be afraid" (NTV, 2016). Even this explanation alone demonstrates the dimension of anxiety due to terrorist attacks in Turkey.

On 13th March 2016, another severe terrorist attack took place in Ankara. A car laden with explosives was used for the attack on Atatürk boulevard; as a result, 37 people were killed and 125 people injured (Wikipedia 2016). This terrorist attack was the third major attack in the capital city of Turkey only in six months. In the following months, terrorist attacks continued in different cities of Turkey, such as Bursa, Gaziantep and Mardin, and Diyarbakır. On 7 June 2016, a terrorist bomb attack occurred in İstanbul Vezneciler district, killing 12 people and injuring 51 others (İstanbul had already been the subject of two destructive bombings in January and March 2016, both carried out by the ISIS) (Hürriyet, 2016). On 28 June 2016, İstanbul experienced another massive terrorist action in İstanbul Atatürk Airport again by ISIS. Thus, İstanbul was the target of three terrorist assaults in the first half of 2016. The losses were much more significant; 45 people were killed, and more than 230 people were injured (Wikipedia, 2016). This was the first major terrorist attack in İstanbul but not the last one; on 10 December 2016, two explosions in the İstanbul Besiktas municipality next to the Besiktaş stadium killed 48 people and injured 166 others (Daily Sabah, 2016).

The security weakness experienced especially in the *cities* of Turkey in 2016 can be clearly seen in the graph, published by the International Crisis Group (2022):

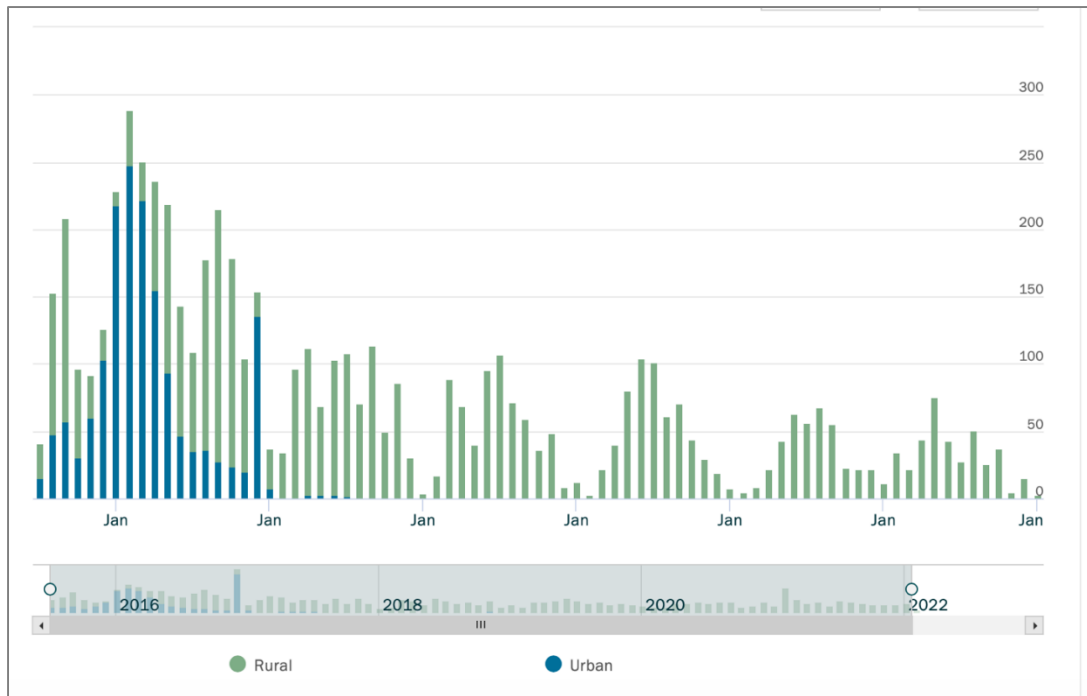


Figure 6. Rural/Urban Distribution of Terrorist Attacks in Turkey

Apart from these cases, many other attacks were held in Ankara, İstanbul, Adana, Kilis, Mersin, and many other cities, leaving hundreds of people and security forces killed by the ISIS or other terrorists originating from Syria (Dora, 2020, p.513), as seen in the table. According to the International Crisis Group's report, which is based on open sources, at least 2034 people were killed between July 2015 and July 2016 because of PKK attacks that included many suicide bombings in Turkey's city centers (Aktürk, 2019). Gaining territory of terrorist organizations just beyond the Turkish border, increasing the spiral of violence and mass migration from Syria to Turkey, and Turkey's ongoing open-door policy prepared the ground for a significant internal security vulnerability. Particularly, ISIS and PYD-YPG occupied border cross points as a non-state actor, became Turkey's new neighbor in the process. In the rise of ISIS, radical elements from all over the world were called in to support ISIS. These jihadists were active in the war are suspected of penetrating Turkey by taking advantage of the open border policy (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020). When the evaluation is done in this regard, the internal security crisis has a significant impact on Turkey's Syria policy because the security crisis as a trigger factor pushed Turkey to cross-border military operations and critical security measures within the offensive realist paradigm.

3.4. External Security Crisis of Turkey

In this section, the security problems faced by Turkey in the north of Syria and on the border line due to the Syrian crisis will be discussed. The effects of terrorist organizations gaining strength in northern Syria on Turkey's Syria policy must be elaborated. The external security crisis has a significant impact on the paradigm shift in Turkey's Syria policy.

3.4.1. A New External Threat; The Rise of ISIS (2013-2015)

In 2013, Baghdadi declared ISIS and its integration with Jabhat al-Nusra. Baghdadi also announced that he was the only leader of ISIS. Nonetheless, both the leader of Al-Qaeda, Zawahiri and the leader of Al-Nusra, Julani, rejected Baghdadi's influence and leadership claims. Essential differences between Al Nusra and ISIS should be underlined. Unlike ISIS, in some cases, al-Nusra protected even churches from showcasing Syria's social and religious mosaic (Gerges, 2019). According to Weiss and Hassan (2016), this shows the harmony between the new leader of al Qaeda, Zawahiri, and Julani. ISIS perpetuated Zarqawi's deviant ideology, which put forward sectarian war and extreme violence on the Iraq Syrian line (Gerges, 2019). On April 8, 2013, the leader of ISIS released a voice recording declaring its establishment and involvement in the Syrian civil war;

When the Syrian people called for help, everyone abandoned them. We had no choice but to help them, and we assigned Julani (the leader of al-Nusra) and some of our brothers. We send them from Iraq to Syria to reach some of our organizations in Syria... We also provided experienced domestic and foreign soldiers (Weiss & Hassan, 2016, pp.173-174).

ISIS's direct involvement in the Syrian civil war has posed serious geopolitical risks. This deviant extreme sectarian takfiri ideology metastasized rapidly in Syria after the occupation of Raqqa by ISIS in January 2014 (Gerges, 2019). Taking control of Raqqa and its the surrounding areas was significant; Raqqa was declared the capital city of ISIS. In April 2014, ISIS launched an all-out attack against the rebel forces in Deir Ez-Zor province and the city they captured in July 2014. Deir Ez-Zor provided a significant political and logistical opportunity for ISIS due to its geographical position as a gateway near Iraq. The progress towards Deir Ez-Zor, which was an oil-rich region at the same time, fed the ISIS war machine not only strategically but also financially

too. In January 2014, ISIS captured Fallujah in Iraq, and in the same year, Baghdadi declared himself as the new caliph. The rapid expansion of ISIS could not be stopped; in June 2014, an estimated 1500 militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria seized control of Mosul, Iraq's second-biggest city (Lafta et al., 2018). It means that almost all the Sunni regions were under the control of ISIS in Iraq. Mosul was vital in terms of ISIS, with a two million Sunni population. On August 13, 2014, a shocking video was released on Youtube that showed the ISIS militants bulldozing the border between Iraq and Syria (Vice News, 2014), which means that ISIS was quick and very successful in expanding between Iraq and Syria.

The unexpected victories of ISIS in Iraq were causing turbulences in Syria. After the endless invasions of ISIS, either in Iraq or in Syria, the US decided to use its air force to block the further growing expansion of ISIS. Although the US-backed Iraqi army had a significant military capacity and finance, it did not put forward a critical resistance. Just as Ahmet Davutoğlu underlined in his latest book, *Systemic Earthquake and the Struggle for World Order*, the equation of the Syrian civil war dramatically changed after ISIS entered the equation. In the words of Davutoglu,

The Arab Spring has transformed the dead of winter in summer 2013.” He also underlined that "the rapid expansion of ISIS through the integration of the chaotic atmosphere in Iraq and Syria via complex ethnic and sectarian structure, capturing the strategic line of Aleppo-Raqqa- Mosul changed the flow of Arab Spring radically (Davutoğlu, 2020, pp. 112-113).

Entering the equation and strengthening ISIS rapidly changed the nature of the civil war and provided unprecedented legitimacy in terms of the Assad regime, particularly in the eyes of Western powers. In the words of Ahmet Davutoğlu,

The rise of ISIS changed the nature of the civil war. The struggle between the opposition, which emerged with the demand for freedom against the Assad regime, suddenly turned into a struggle between Assad and terrorists (Davutoğlu, 2020, p. 112).

ISIS has not only played an essential role in the miscalculation process of Turkish decision-makers about the fall of the Assad regime but also contributed to the security gap period in terms of Turkey directly and indirectly. The direct impact of the rise of ISIS might be seen in the summer of 2013. The rapid expansion and strengthening of ISIS caused radicalization and fragmentation of the Syrian opposition. More

importantly, the Assad regime has found legitimate ground in the perspective of the Western powers; in other words, the Western powers prioritized the ISIS threat, and the fall of the Assad regime has become a secondary issue. This was the crucial point regarding Turkish foreign policy in Syria; after all, the divergence between the US and Turkey had become much more visible. The indirect impact might be seen during the regression process of ISIS because this regression with the full-scale support of the US, filled by PYD-YPG, has been a very problematic move in terms of the Turkish national security perspective. The US "leading behind policy" put forward the "no boots on the ground" logic because Barack Obama was utterly against the military's human and financial resources losses based on land power. Barack Obama, in his autobiography, said that "the cumulative cost of what both the Bush administration and the media described as a single, comprehensive "war against terrorism" had been staggering: almost a trillion-dollar spent, more than three thousand US troops killed, as many as ten times that number wounded" (Obama, 2020 p.314). Besides the complaint about the cost of land-based military operations and Barack Obama believed that "*their options were painfully limited*" in Syria (Obama, 2020, p. 652). Therefore, the Obama administration was looking for a dependable partner on the ground against ISIS, which is found in the Kurdish partnership with PYD-YPG. When the divergence became extremely visible between Washington and Ankara on September 12, 2014, the United States' significant decision to transfer weapons to PYD-YPG militants initiated another security challenge in Turkey (Yükselen, 2020). The decision to arm PYD-YPG disrupted relations between the US and its NATO ally Turkey. Another indirect result of the ISIS expansion; the establishment of ISIS in 2013 and the rapid territorial conquest in 2014, set off a "massive human migration" from Syria to Turkey; in this way, ISIS used the wave of refugees to utilize to track their terrorist movements (Bicer & Casin, 2018, p.32). Because ISIS was declared a terrorist organization by Turkey in 2013 and was shot down from the air in 2014 (İşyar, 2018) The acceleration of Mass migration, border security deficiencies and the open-door policy of Turkey affected internal security weaknesses. In contrast, the terrorist organization almost surrounded the southern border of Turkey during this period.

In June 2014, Turkey's Mosul consulate was attacked by ISIS; as a result, 49 hostages were seized from the Turkish consulate. The 46 Turkish staff of the consulate were imprisoned, in the meantime three Iraqi employees were released because they did not

meet the "mission purpose" (Uludağ, 2014, p. 15). The 46 Turkish hostages were detained by ruthless ISIS for more than three months (102 days) on September 20, 2014. The hostage crisis that emerged between Turkey and ISIS added a new dimension to the rising ISIS threat. The government in Ankara came under heavy criticism domestically for failing to organize its diplomatic staff's repatriation in time. The hostage crisis thus became yet another milestone in Turkey's security deficiencies. On the hand, the hostage crisis prevented Turkey from participating in the unfolding anti-ISIS coalition process. Therefore, Turkey pursued a very sensible policy against ISIS not to provoke ISIS and endanger the lives of Turkish nationals. As Henri Barkey argued, hostages are just one dimension of the current crisis alongside the real threat posed by the deepening of the Syrian civil war and ISIS's invasion of Iraq's second-largest city (Mosul) (Barkey 2014).

3.4.2. The Downfall of ISIS and the New Launchpad for PYD-YPG

The fall of Mosul to ISIS in June 2014 shook the Obama administration's policy on Syria profoundly. The fall of Mosul demonstrated that the Obama administration underestimated ISIS and its capabilities. In August 2014, thousands of Yazidi were trapped on a mountain, and ISIS slaughtered them. There was a strong possibility that ISIS would have captured and plundered Erbil, the capital city of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq (Weiss & Hassan, 2016). These detrimental developments drew attention to ISIS, and they also changed the calculus of the Obama administration in the Middle East. Just after the fall of Mosul, President Obama went to the Congress and demanded 500 million dollars for a military program to train and arm vetted moderate Syrian rebels (DW, 2016). Meanwhile, Secretary of States John Kerry and the leader of the Syrian Opposition Coalition Ahmad al-Jabra came together in Saudi Arabia (Kanat, 2015). The new military campaign of the U.S in the region began in August 2014. To slow down the ISIS expansion and provide emergency protection for Erbil. Obama asserted,

To stop the advance on Erbil, I have directed our military to take targeted strikes against ISIS terrorist convoys should they move toward city.... We are also providing urgent assistance to the Iraqi government and Kurdish forces so they can more effectively wage the fight against ISIS. (White House, 07.08.2014).

On September 10, 2014, President Obama put forward four main targets of the new strategy against ISIS.

- 1) Airstrikes against the ISIS
- 2) Increasing support for forces against the ISIS
- 3) Maintaining “substantial counter-terrorism capabilities.”
- 4) Providing humanitarian assistance to civilians (Kanat, 2015).

The strategy of the U.S entirely concentrated on the ISIS fight rather than the quarrel with the Assad regime. In this way, on September 22, the U.S and its allies Bahrain and UAE initiated the first airstrikes against ISIS forces in Syria. Between September 18th and 22nd, ISIS components progressed rapidly and began a siege on the overwhelmingly Kurdish city Kobani. Although the Pentagon responded against the siege through airstrikes, the result was ineffective. Due to this ineffectiveness, the eyes turned to Turkey; the Obama administration put more substantial pressure on Turkey to act in assisting Kobani. In October 2014, Turkey collaborated with the U.S and KRG to defeat the Kobani siege. Despite this cooperation, the difference between U.S and Turkey should be emphasized; unlike the Obama administration, Turkish decision-makers were concentrating on the train and equipping forces to promote Syrian opposition against the Assad regime. Conversely, the U.S fundamental strategic aim was to exterminate ISIS capabilities. Another significant point is that the U.S government has perceived PYD-YPG as single-acting land power against ISIS. Nonetheless, the U.S backed the YPG, an extension of the PKK terrorist organization (Bicer & Casin, 2018; Weiss & Hassan, 2016), creating the landmark conflict of interest between the U.S and Turkey in the Middle East.

The airstrike authorization of the US in August 2014 and the ammunition support to YPG during the Kobani siege turned out to be a collective war of the international society against ISIS. On September 10, 2014, the U.S announced the formation of a broad international coalition to defeat ISIS (BBC, 2014). Mainly three game-changing developments pushed the U.S to involve in the equation in Syria and Iraq; 1) ISIS occupation in Mosul (June 2014), 2) ISIS threat against the KRG and Erbil (August 2014), 3) The Kobani Siege of the ISIS (September 2014). The rapid spread of ISIS towards significant Kurdish power points in Iraq and Syria was the primary motivation

for the U.S action, which shows that even the Ghouta chemical attack or other Assad regime violations were not as significant as the ISIS threat in terms of American’s ranking of importance. On October 20, 2014, The Secretary of State John Kerry asserted that about the siege of Kobani by ISIS, “We cannot take our eyes off the target. Especially in such a period, turning our back to the people who fight against the ISIS would be irresponsibility and immorality” (BBC, 2014). In those days, the AK-47 machine guns bought from Albania were sent to the Kobani through C-130 cargo planes by the US (Hassan & Weiss, 2016). After the 112-day siege, ISIS was repelled by Peshmerga and YPG, and it was a significant turning point in terms of ISIS’s expansion. Tell ab-yad was captured by YPG in June 2015, and in a short time, Ayn Issah has been captured too. This tow was only 50 km away from the “capital city” of ISIS. According to Hassan and Weiss (2016), the US delivered 50 tons of Ammunition to PYD-YPG in October 2015 to support its only land power in front of ISIS. Later on, comprehensive ammunition assistance of the US to the YPG was also expressed by the President of Turkey (Euronews, 2019). PKK terror organization and its extension of PYD-YPG in Syria was not just getting military support from the US. YPG also had the opportunity to fill the power gap in northern Syria, and through geographic expansion - it was taking over the north of Syria, including Ayn Issah, Raqqa, Menbic... In addition, Operation Wrath of Euphrates was launched by PYD-YPG with the full-scale support of the US in November 2016.

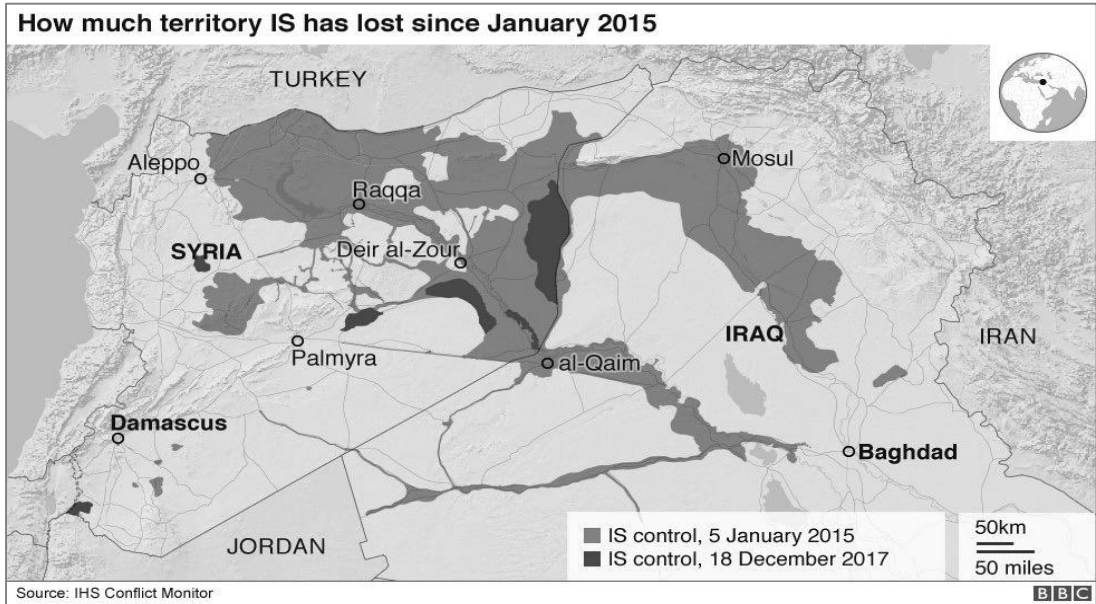


Figure 7. Land lost by ISIS (BBC, 2017 cited in Bicer & Casin, 2018, p.32)

According to Prof. Dr. Serhat Erkmen;

The defeat and withdrawal of ISIS as well as its emergence had serious effects on Turkish foreign policy. If ISIS were successful, Turkey would have another security problem. In this scenario, radical jihadists would pose a security risk across the border. With the withdrawal of ISIS, this time an ethnic separatist group began to dominate our borders. Whether the rise of ISIS or PYD-YPG, in any case, the collapse of the Syrian central authority has created serious security risks for Turkey. In this process, Turkey has repeatedly called on the United States to defeat ISIS and enter Raqqa together. However, The US preferred to carry out these operations directly with its own extensions. Because the PYD-YPG would be under the full control of the Americans. However, Turkey was an actor with its own agenda and agenda and its influence on the US was limited. (Interview, 12.10.2022)

As a result of these geopolitical developments, regions controlled by ISIS started to be controlled by YPG. YPG, the Syrian extension of the PKK terrorist organization, which Turkey has been fighting since 1984, has captured almost one-third of Syria.

3.4.3. The Old Enemy of Turkey with a New Name; The Rise of YPG in Syria

The rise of PYD/YPG started in 2012 with the territorialization in northern Syria thanks to a power vacuum. It does not necessarily mean that the rise of ISIS did not create anxiety in terms of Turkey; however the violent past of PKK in Turkey and its sociological ties made the extension of PKK in Syria the top priority issue. The rapid and advanced territorialization of PYD-YPG with the combination of the continuity of the Assad regime had a significant impact on the policy alteration of Turkey. The first security threat appeared with the withdrawal of the regime forces from Kurdish regions, leaving the territory to the PYD and its armed wing, the YPG (Acun & Keskin, 2016). As a natural consequence of this withdrawal, YPG captured Ayn al-Arab (Kobani) and other regions in July 2012 (Hürriyet, 2012). Indeed, PKK leader Murat Karayılan had warned his followers before these developments to be ready for upcoming opportunities for PYD/YPG (İsyar, 2018).

On the one hand, PYD-YPG was trying to seize the opportunity from the beginning as a winning agency and become an actor (Yükselen, 2020); nonetheless, PYD/YPG-opponent Kurds created a bloc in the Northern Iraqi city of Arbil on October 27, 2011. They established Kurdish National Council (KNC) (Acun & Keskin, 2016). PYD did not prefer to move together with KNC, close to the Kurdish Regional Government

(KRG) and Barzani and chose a unilateral strategy in Northern Syria. PYD-YPG fully aligned with PKK and followed another method such as “neither regime nor opposition.” PYD-YPG started to increase its legitimacy thanks to the threats caused by ISIS and its territorialization. The rising process of PYD had become possible, particularly after the Obama administration decided to limit its “Syria” intervention only against ISIS in August 2014.

During the withdrawal of the regime forces in 2012, the PYD had already begun to declare the establishment of cantons in Afrin, Kobani, and Jazira. Nevertheless, the Syrian civil war dynamics have presented further opportunities for PYD-YPG to establish de facto autonomy in Syria (Federici, 2015). In this context, the most crucial development was the declaration of the Autonomous Administration of North-East Syria (NES), also named “Rojava,” in November 2013 (İşyar, 2016; Yükselen, 2020). NES was the most remarkable part of the PYD-YPG expansion thanks to the power vacuum in northern Syria, which has boosted Ankara’s anxiety despite the “resolution process” between the Turkish government and PKK at that time. Genuinely, the regional developments had presented an unprecedented chance for PYD-YPG expansion. Before the uprising of Syria in March 2011, the projection of Kurdish autonomy in Northern Syria would have seen almost impossible; however, by late 2013, NES by PYD-YPG had become a physical reality.

The fight against ISIS has provided greater legitimacy and led to greater coordination between the United States and PYD-YPG (İşyar, 2018). This also led to critical support from the US and Western European countries for PYD and its “Rojava” at that time; PYD-YPG was able to present itself as a key Western ally with territorial influence. It can be clearly said that regional opportunities for PYD-YPG were not only about territorial and military expansion, but it was also covering political power and international legitimacy. This equation has clearly been described by the leader of PKK, Murat Karayılan, with the words,

The developments in the Middle East and Syria are creating some facilities and our people utilizing those developments. The revolution of Rojava will not only save Western Kurdistan, but also it will empower the Kurdish strategy in Syria and Iraq (ANF, 2013 cited in İşyar 2018).

The establishment of “Rojava” has allowed the PYD to put PKK leader Öcalan’s theories of democratic autonomy and confederalism into practice (Öcalan, 2015). PYD has been moving like a state in the region by establishing councils just as ministries and building public institutions such as government offices, schools, and prisons. Under these circumstances, Turkish decision-makers thought that it might be helpful to meet the PYD leader Salih Muslim. The Minister of Foreign affairs Davutoglu put forward three fundamental conditions to maintain possible cooperation with PYD; 1) not taking part on the side of the regime, 2) not creating an actual situation in the region by itself, 3) not supporting terror in Turkey (A.A., 2013). After the Salih Muslim and Davutoglu meeting, both sides asserted constructive statements. Davutoğlu underlined that the messages of Salih Muslim are compatible with Turkish principles (A.A., 2013). Nevertheless, this was an unrealistic and extremely fragile coloration effort.

On July 19, 2013, after severe conflicts, PYD-YPG captured Ras al-Ayn from al-Nusra, the strategic district on the Turkey-Syria border. When PYD captured the Ras al-Ayn, firstly, they hung their flags in a place that could be seen appeared from Turkey. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Davutoğlu reacted that he claimed, “we would respond that tit for tat” (İsyar, 2016, p.417). Nevertheless, with the impact of “the resolution process,” the tension between Turkey and PYD did not transform into a hot conflict for a while. Meanwhile, PYD-YPG was gaining military power and Western support against ISIS, and also it was changing the military power and regional advantages to political establishments such as “Rojava.” Therefore, Turkey experienced unprecedented internal and external security challenges later in the Syrian Civil War. By 2016 nearly one-third of Syria's territory fell under the control of the YPG, which is seen as the extension of the PKK terrorist organization by Turkey. According to Hasan Yükselen (2020), the PYD-YPG managed to control 632 km out of the 911 km long border by the end of 2015. The declaration of Rojava in October 2013, which was the cantonization process, hit the highest point at the end of 2016. After PYD increased spatial, political, and military superiority in 2016, the newly declared “extended autonomous administration,” revealed of March 2016 that included Arab cities such as Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ayn, shifted Turkish policy to militarized and security oriented offensive policy.

3.4.3.1. Domestic Drivers; “The Resolution Process” and Cooperation Efforts of Turkey with PYD-YPG

There is no doubt that the long-standing conflict between Turkey and the PKK terror organization had a meaningful impact on the Syria policy of Turkey. In December 2012, the Turkish government announced to the public that Turkish intelligence had started negotiations with the leader of PKK, Abdullah Öcalan. This process is called a "resolution process." It aims to end long-standing bloody conflicts and terrorist acts by PKK in Turkey. While Öcalan was eventually expelled from Syria in 1998 in the context of a Turkish–Syrian rapprochement, in 2003, the Party of Democratic Union (PYD) was founded in northern Syria by former members of the PKK (Rodi Hevian, 2013 cited in Savran, 2020, p.7). Having underlined before, when the mass demonstrations turned out to be a brutal civil war in Syria, the Assad regime retreated due to a lack of resources and strategic necessity; therefore, the offshoot of PKK occupied significant areas in northern Syria from 2012 onwards. The domestic politics of Turkey and the "resolution process" between the Turkish government and PKK intertwined with Turkey's Syria policy, particularly between 2013 and 2016. The "resolution process" not only had an impact on the domestic politics of Turkey, but at the same time, it was essential to push forward the PYD to the anti-Assad front. During this period, PKK militants' transitions to Syria increased to reinforce PYD (İsyar, 2018).

With the effect of the "resolution" process," the collaboration between the Turkish government and PYD had become possible. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoglu put forward three conditions for cooperation from PYD 1) not siding with the Assad regime, 2) not creating an autonomous on its own, and 3) not supporting terrorism in Turkey (Yeni Safak, 2013). In July 2013, Salih Muslim, the leader of PYD, came to Turkey to negotiate the conditions of cooperation in Syria against the Assad regime. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutloğlu directly explained the purpose of the visit as follows; "Paralleled the resolution process, we are in intense contact with all Kurdish sections in Syria. Our expectation from PYD is to enter an organic relationship with the Syrian opposition. We will also meet with the Syrian opposition. We will make the necessary contribution for Kurdish groups to take part in Syria opposition" (A.A., 30.07.2013). As it can be seen clearly from Davutoğlu's

words, Turkish decision-makers were trying to turn the "resolution process" into an advantage in Syria policy because adding PYD to the Syrian opposition would have been highly effective for the overthrow of Assad. Nevertheless, the collaboration efforts of Turkey did not necessarily mean that the Turkish government completely ignored security concerns about PKK and its existence in Syria. PYD violated the three conditions of Turkish decision-makers for cooperation between PYD and Turkey in October 2013 through the declaration of autonomous regions (cantons) by PYD, also known as Rojava - so potential collaboration between Turkey and PYD was stillborn.

In January 2014, YPG captured two critical cities, Afrin and Kobane, next to the Turkish border, and Turkey has become a border neighbor with its mortal enemy in northern Syria. Due to the rise of ISIS, the US was looking for a dependable partner on the ground in order to fight ISIS and its derivatives. After this point, YPG became legitimate power in the eyes of Western societies and increased its territorial impact area gradually. The rise of the YPG in the region caused another fundamental threat perception for Turkey. In late 2014, the ISIS components surrounded the Kurdish town of Ayn al-Arab (Kobane) on the Turkish border. During this time, the "Kurdish" nationalist project in Syria has gathered additional legitimacy and support through the YPG's struggle against the Islamic State group (ISIS), particularly during the invasion of the of Kobane in early 2015. YPG, as a terrorist organization, struggled with other terrorist groups for weeks in order to block ISIS militants from entering Ayn al-Arab. Under those circumstances, international intervention on the premise of the US as airstrikes against ISIS, the powerful weapon and ammunition assistance to the YPG became possible.

The most significant blow to the "resolution" process came during the siege of Kobani by ISIS. This case is one of the notable examples of how domestic and foreign politics are intertwined. The battle of Kobani might be identified as a game-changer in terms of the "resolution process" in Turkey. Regardless of the pressure of international society, Turkish decision-makers showed hesitance in being on the side of the PYD against ISIS at the begging of the siege. Moreover, the President Erdoğan at the beginning of October 2014, called the public as; "this job cannot be finished through airstrikes (ISIS operations). Months passed, and there were results. At this moment,

Ayn al-Arab, with the other name Kobane, is about the fall" (07.10.2014) (BBC News, 2014). Again, in October 2014, after this statement, President Erdogan underlined that "the PYD is equal with PKK," and he asserted that "it would be so incorrect for US to wait from us to say "yes" in order to support a terrorist organization (YPG)" (Yükselen, 2020).

During the siege process, Turkish decision-makers faced an unexpected internal uprising, particularly in Southeast cities of Turkey. On 6-8 October, which pursued a call by the People's Democratic Party (HDP), turned the resolution process "upside-down" (Coskun, 2015, p. 5). On 6-8 October, some Kurdish people went to the streets as a reaction to the Turkish government about the "unresponsiveness" of Turkish decision-makers (Gerim, 2020). During the mass demonstrations and violent incidents, more than forty civilians were killed. Although the "peace process" was harmed, the meeting of the HDP parliamentarians with Öcalan in December 2014 demonstrated the process was still going on (Yeğen, 2015). However, the October 6-8 incidents showed the fragility of "the peace process" between PKK and the Turkish government and their limits. On 29 October 2014, the JDP Government made an unprecedented decision in Turkish political history - Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga militants crossed the Turkish border to help the PYD-YPG against the ISIS attack (BBC, 2014). The growing pressure both by the US and international society and media campaigns that blamed Turkey for supporting ISIS pushed Turkish decision-makers to permit the crossing of Peshmerga of the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq (Yükselen, 2020).

By January 2015, these combined efforts resulted in the YPG militia's successful defense of the city and expulsion of the ISIS militants. Turkey opened the Incirlik airbase and participated in the anti-ISIS coalition in July 2015. Turkey had made an essential contribution to the neutralization of ISIS; however, ironically, the neutralization of ISIS contributed to the territorial expansion of PYD-YPG, which is another detrimental terrorist organization in the eyes of Ankara. At this point, the chronological linkage between internal and external security threats draws attention; first, the end of the "Resolution Process" and PKK's decision to initiate a compressive attack in July 2015 which is called the "Revolutionary People's War," at almost the same time, PYD-YPG captured Tal Abyad in June 2015 consolidate and deepen the

internal/external security gap of Turkey. Within a month, the PKK-YPG's occupation of Tal Abyad made the east of the Euphrates River under YPG a controlled zone (Öztiğ, 2019). After the international coalition's airstrikes against ISIS, the power vacuum was filled by PYD-YPG. Essentially, the declaration of Rojava in October 2013, which was the cantonization process, hit the highest point at the end of 2016. Most of north Syria had already been captured by PYD-YPG, such as Tel- Abyad, Ras al-Ayn, Qamishli, and Ayn Issah. However, when PYD-YPG entered the west of the Euphrates River and captured the predominantly Arab populated city of Manbij (Just as Tal Abyad) in June 2016, alarm bells rang in Ankara. Because long before the capture of Manbij, Turkish decision-makers draw a red line about the PYD-YPG enlargement to the western Euphrates. Prime Minister Davutoğlu had warned that "Turkey's position toward the issue has been clear to all for a long time. YPG will not cross to the West of Euphrates" (A.A., 2015). It can be said that the occupation of Manbij and crossing the Euphrates River was the last drop before the transition to security policies in terms of the external security crisis of Turkey - this was the eve of a significant paradigm shift in Turkish foreign policy.

3.4.4. PYD-YPG Domination in Northern Syria; More Vulnerability Less Security for Turkey (2015-2016)

Thanks to the Syrian civil war and power vacuum in northern Syria, with the military and political support of the US, PYD-YPG unilaterally declared the "Democratic Federation of Northern Syria" in three regions: Afrin and Kobane in northern Aleppo and Jazira in Hassakeh (Özçelik, 2019). PYD's presence in the north of Syria and the demographic engineering that it implemented there in the north of Syria constituted another dimension of the security crisis for Turkey. Turkish foreign minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu asserted that "PYD-PKK seize certain regions and force people living there to migrate (Pamuk & Bektaş, 2015). Turkey repeatedly accused the PYD-YPG of ethnic cleansing in northern Syria, particularly against the Turkmen and Arab populations. Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu accused the YPG of ethnic cleansing in northern Syria, and he asserted that "they were trying to put their people in areas captured from Islamic State" (Reuters, 2016).

In a similar line, President Erdoğan accused the PYD-YPG of carrying out ethnic cleansing in northern Syria, and he stated that “If we try to change the demographic structure, we would have done that in Cerablus before, in Afrin or El-bab. However, the terror organization (YPG) is doing ethnic cleansing right now” (A.A., 13.10.2019). In point of fact, the YPG’s policy of forced displacement of Arab and Turkmen from Syria was documented by impartial international organizations. Amnesty International released a detailed report in October 2015 that underlined the policy of deliberate displacement and demographic engineering by PYD-YPG in northern Syria. Amnesty International identified explicit abuses that include “forced displacement, demolition of homes, and the seizure and destruction of property” by the autonomous administration (PYD) in areas of northern Syria under their control (2015, p.5).

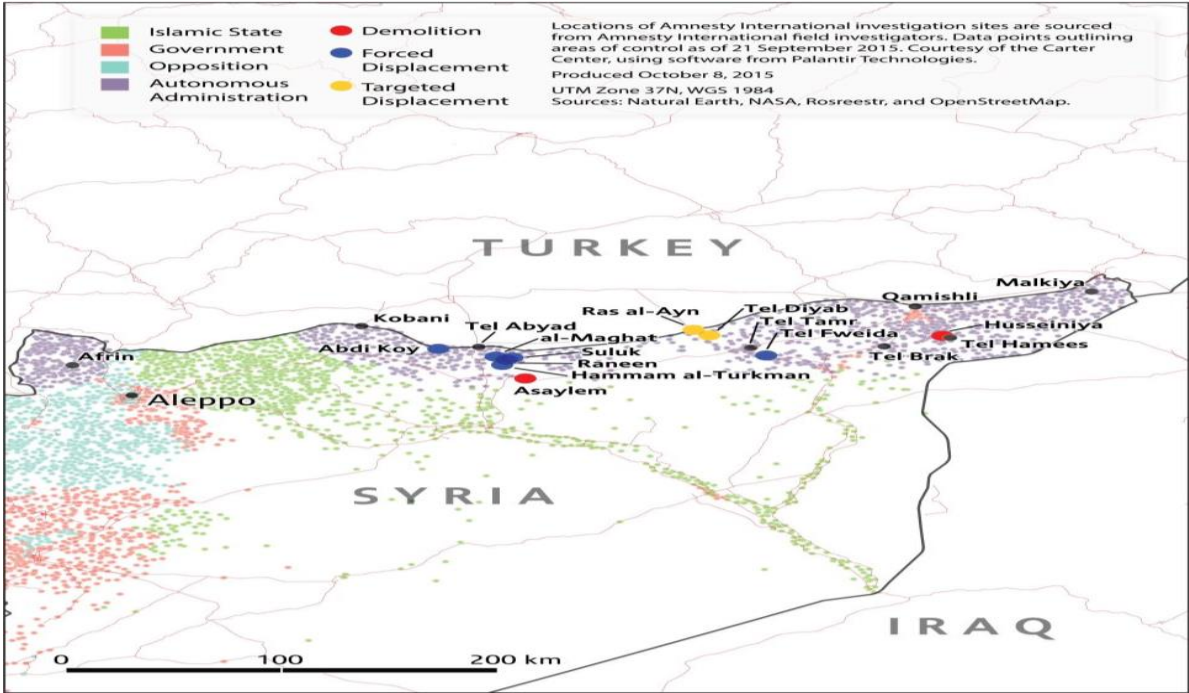


Figure 8. Report of forced migration in northern Syria (The Amnesty International, 2015)

Another report published in January 2016 by the London-based Syrian Network for Human rights (SNHR) underlined that since the retreat of Syrian regime military units in 2012, forces of the YPG/PKK have committed substantial human rights violations in areas of northern Syrian that compasses “ethnic cleansing massacres” (2016, p. 10). According to SNHR, YPG forces violated the International Human Rights Law when they “threatened, assaulted, attacked, arrested, killed and robbed civilians who live

under its military authority” (2016, p. 21). This report also revealed that the PYD-YPG wanted a demographic and ethnic change in the region by using the method of forced migration.

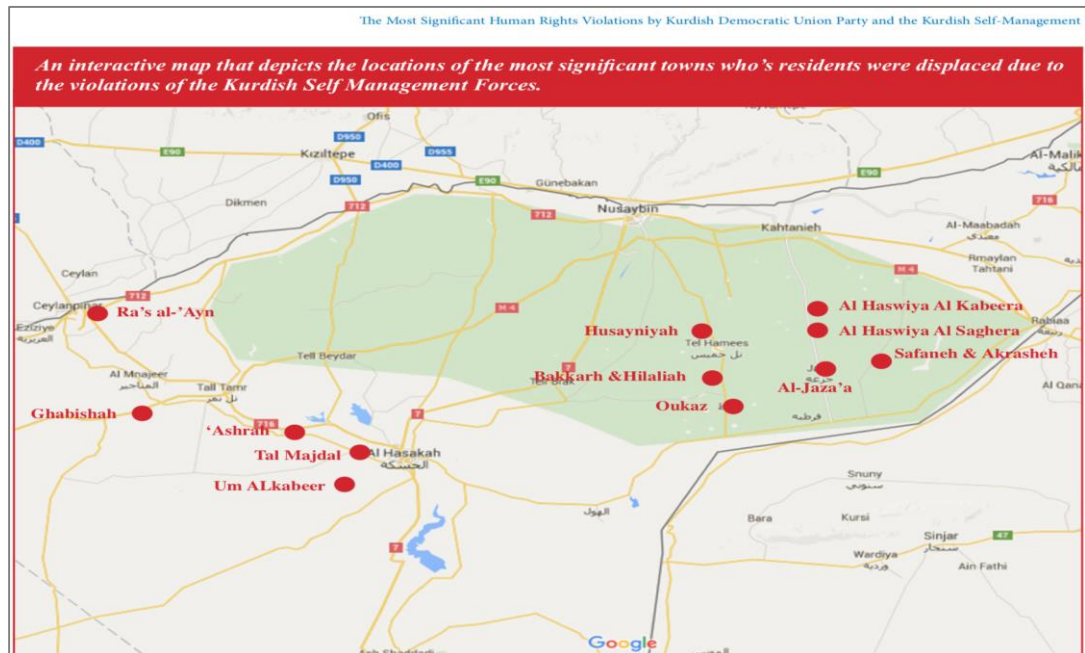


Figure 9. The map of Settlements Subjected to Forced Migration by Violence (SNHR, 2016)

The Kurd Watch, an online portal, a part of the European Centre for Kurdish Studies project based in Berlin, revealed human rights violations and ethnic cleansing report in January 2016 by PYD-YPG in Tal-Abyad, which mostly has an Arab population. Both the Amnesty International and the Kurd Watch reports accused YPG/PKK of systematically expelling Arabic and Turkmen villagers in the area of Tall Abyad and of destroying their homes. Those villagers stated that they had systematically been accused of supporting ISIS even if several supporters were solely in the village and even if those supporters had left the town before the YPK/PKK captured Tall-Abyad (Kurd Watch, 2016, p.5). The Satellite image published by Amnesty International (2016) demonstrates the scale of the demolitions in Huseeiniya village, where most Arabs live in the Tel Hamees countryside. The images show 225 buildings that existed in June 2014; however, only 14 remained in June 2015, the drop rate is %93,7. Both the increase in the power of PYD-YPG in the north of Syria and the demographic

change realized by PYD-YPG in the same region created an important perception of foreign security and border security vulnerability for Turkey.

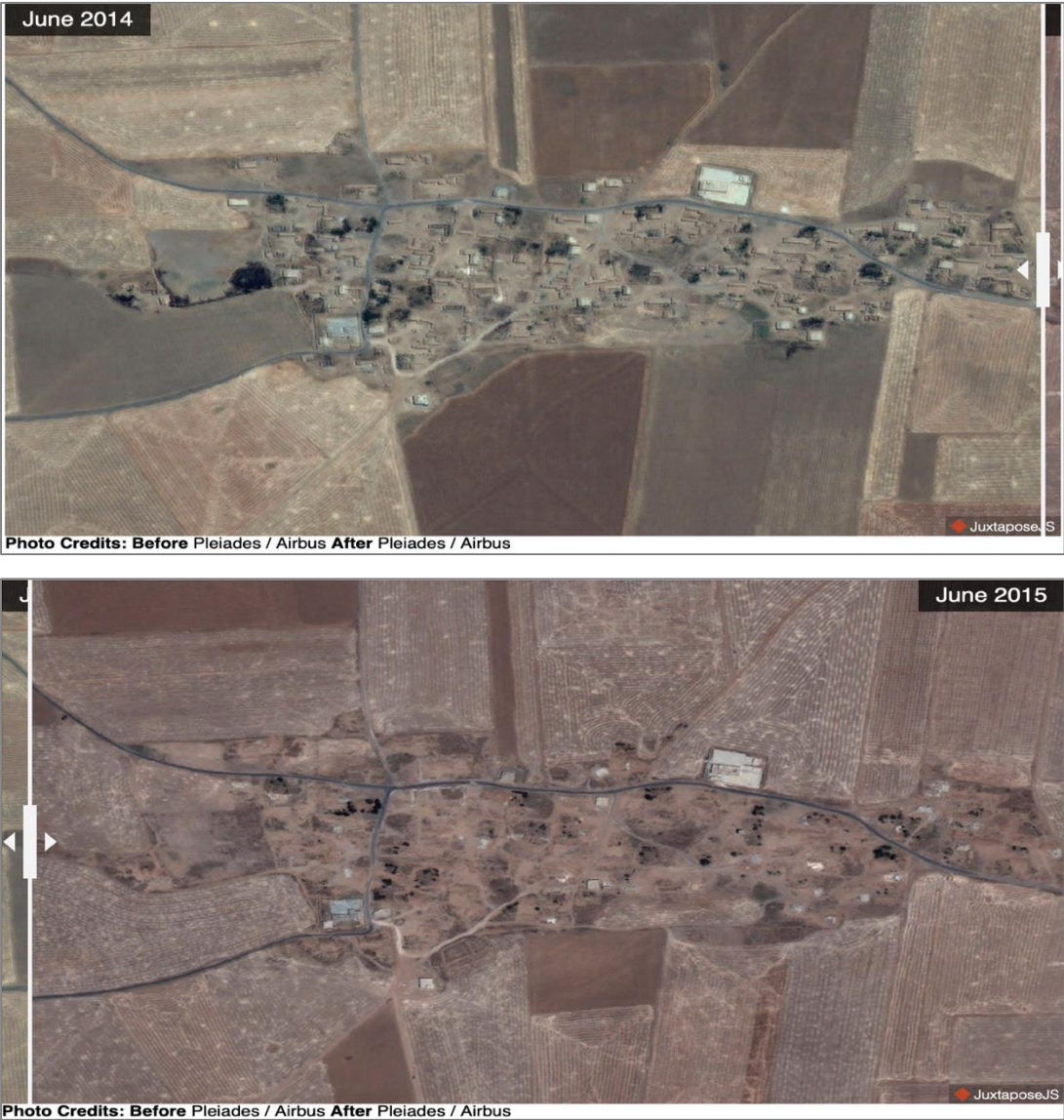


Figure 10. The Demolition of Huseeiniya village as an Arabic Location (The Amnesty International, 2016)

In epitome, the PYD and its armed militia, the YPG, have established one-party rule in the region and have committed violence against the civilians, which is demonstrated by reports in the Arab-populated areas documented by Human Rights Watch and other human rights organizations -including Assyrian and Turcoman communities and political opponents – and forced deportation (Özçelik, 2019). PYD's strategic migration move towards Arabs and Turkmen and its effort to change the region's

demographics posed a severe security risk for Turkey. The separation of Arabs and Turkmen from the area could have led to the dominance of the demographic Kurdish presence in the north of Syria. This would form the infrastructure of an independent Kurdish state led by PKK and PYD cooperation in northern Syria. This demographic change in the north of Syria and the possibility of PKK-linked groups becoming a state poses a significant threat to the Turkish security architecture.

3.4. The Russian Military Intervention in Syria

First, it is helpful to emphasize the critical points that should be known about Russian Syrian relations. Syria is the most strategically the best ally for Russia in the Middle East. Historically the relationship between two countries is rooted. Diplomatic relations between Soviet Russia and Syria were established in July 1944. The friendship and cooperation agreement signed between the two countries in 1980 is still valid (Novosti, 2015). Besides, the relationship between Russia and Syria arisen to some points when Egypt decided the to move away from the Russian alliance and develop close policies with the West. Because of this, Syria has become the only nation state in the Middle East that has pulled more attention from Soviet Union (Yıldız, 2021).

Mr. Hüseyin Diriöz, who is a retired Turkish ambassador, most notably serving as Ambassador to Moscow and as former Assistant Secretary General of NATO for Defense Policy and Planning, evaluates Russia foreign policy stance, especially on the axis of Syria as follows;

During the cold war there were two superpowers in the bipolar world. How did Putin describe the collapse of the Soviet Union? He said it was the biggest strategic disaster of the 20th century. Why? Because when Russia was a superpower, it has now turned into a unipolar world. Even W. Bush used the term "regional power" as if making fun of Russia. The new post-Soviet conditions offended Russia. As a result of these developments, Russia's presence in the Middle East was weakened. The claim "I exist in the Middle East" and its return was partly due to the Syrian civil war. And it turned the existing logistics bases in Syria into full military bases. Syria has been a country under the influence of Russia since then. Russia had a base in Tartus on the Mediterranean coast. That logistics base has now completely turned into a military base. And they added an air base to it in Khmeimem. And from there, of course, it started to support the Syrian regime. (Interview, 14.10.2022).

In this context, it is of great strategic importance that Russia's only preserved base in the Middle East region is located in the ports of Tartus and Latakia in Syria. Moscow thinks that the Arab Spring events were provoked by some Gulf monarchies such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Şumilin, 2014). Under these circumstances, Russia's engagement in Syria has become visible since 2011. In this context, Russia sent three battleships to Tartus in November 2011. Since 2012, Russia has increased its presence in Syria more than ever before. In addition to the naval base in Tartus, Russia had new opportunities in Haseke, Palmira, and Deir Ez-Zor and transformed its military bases (Ömer Önhon, 2021). Since 2013, Russia has supported Iran's responsibility to advise and logistically support the Syrian regime. Meanwhile, Iran has begun to increase its presence on the land (Bassiri et al., 2016). Developments in Ukraine in 2013 fueled the power struggle between Russia and the Western bloc. The coming to power of the government close to the US in Kyiv in 2013 caused tension in the relations between the USA - Russia and Russia - Europe. After the occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, further problems arose in Russia's relations with the European Union and the US. Like Ukraine, Libya and Syria were areas of the power struggle between the West and Russia (Novosti, 2015).

As a matter of fact, from the beginning, Russia was very skeptical about the democratic movements in the Middle East and supported the Assad regime in the context of Russia's geopolitical interest in the region. The regime's deterritorialization became possible; the subsequent Russian strategy used military means. Because Russia concluded that the possible regime collapse would lead to a grave and irreversible result for Russia (Charap, 2019), on the other hand, the emergence and rapid expansion of ISIS in Iraq and Syria boosted Russia's threat perceptions. ISIS "caliphate" was a kind of extremist religious structure re-echoed in some of Russia's periphery; thousands of Russian-speaking militants from both Russia and Central Asia and the Caucasus participated in ISIS and other Jihadi groups. Russia viewed the crisis in Syria as a conflict between religious groups and a secular state. The emergence of ISIS in Syria and Iraq and the declaration of the caliphate by ISIS further increased the concerns of Russia.

A senior bureaucrat had the following to say about Russia's reaction to the rise of radicalism in Syria;

Russia's soft belly can be radical Islam. Because there are Chechens or radical religious movements that can come from the Caucasus and Central Asia. The great powers saw that when the center weakens in Syria, centrifugal forces emerge. For the US, one of these centrifugal forces was positive, the PYD-YPG. Because it could make them fight against radical religionists. There were also negative consequences; the rise of radical Islam such as Al-Nusra. Russia has moved forward against this radical Islam threat. (14.10.2022, Interview)

However, the Russian involvement in Syria and the main target of airstrikes was not only about ISIS but rather Syrian opposition forces that fought against the Assad regime. Like Assad's, Putin's strategy is based on reducing the civil war to a dilemma between the regime and "terrorists". Parallel to Assad, Putin has also been underlying that "as soon as Syrian State was destroyed, the resulting vacuum was filled by whom? Terrorists. (Charap, 2019 et al.). In this way, it can be clearly said that Putin's plan put a binary choice between the regime and takfiri extremists such as ISIS or Al-Nusra forwards. According to Moscow, restoring Syrian statehood was the only possible long-term counterterrorism strategy. Throughout the first four years of the Syrian civil war, despite Moscow's financial, diplomatic, and military assistance. In mid-2015, the ISIS threat had become fully apparent; while the ISIS was proclaimed a caliphate in June 2014, the capture of Palmyra in May 2015 displayed the capacity of this terrorist organization (Charap, 2019 et al.). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lavrov has defined ISIS as a "primary threat" in Syria. In the summer of 2015, Assad conceded that the regime was experiencing significant difficulties, and the regime appeared close to falling due to a lack of human resources (Coghlan, 2015).

In September 2015, Russia's direct landing in Syria added a new dimension to the Syrian civil war and Turkey's Foreign policy. Later, according to a document revealed by the Russian government, Russian military forces "made an open-ended commitment to its military deployment in Syria" (Kanat, 2016, p.199). Bashar al-Assad requested military assistance from Russia, based on the friendship and cooperation agreement between the USSR and Syria signed in 1980. On the same day, Russian President Putin authorized the armed forces of the Russian Federation to be used in the Syrian Arab Republic. After this secret agreement, the Russian military intervention in the Syrian civil war began in September 2015, which meant the active involvement of the Russian military in the conflict and protection opportunity for Russia against its allied Assad regime. Thirty-two warplanes were initially deployed

in Syria: 12 SU-24m, 12 SU-25SM, SU25-UB, 4 SU-34, 4 SU-30SM (Puhov, 2016). In the following periods, the number of warplanes increased. Russian air force unit with 1500-3000 personnel was sent to Syria and equipped with T-90 A tanks, various wheeled track armored vehicles, and Msta-B type howitzers (Puhov, 2016). Thus, the regime's air superiority in Syria utterly captured the regime and gained a significant tactical advantage. The Russian intervention first covered aircraft airstrikes deployed to the Khmeimim airbase against the Syrian opposition militant elements, including the Syrian National Coalition, ISIS, and al-Nusra (U.S News, 2015). In addition, Russian military special forces and also military advisors were deployed to Syria. Russia could no longer be ignored in Syria. The expanded port in Tartus and the Khmeimim Air Base in Latakia passed entirely under Russian control. Advanced air defense systems, especially the S-300, S-400, Panther, and various warplanes, including the Su-25, Su-30, Su-35, and Mig-25, were deployed at these bases (Önhon, 2021, p.299). Turkey's last ambassador to Syria, Ömer Önhon, has the following to say about Russia's direct military intervention;

It is obvious that Russia's direct landing on the field has completely changed the course, including Turkey's policies. Turkey and Russia faced off militarily. Turkey saw that; I will not receive 100% of my requests in this field against Russia. The basis of a forced cooperation is laid at this point. This was also in Russia's interest, because they ruled out the opposing camp (Interview, 13.11.2022).

Therefore, Russia's abandonment of the proxy war in Syria and its direct landing on the field is one of the fundamental reasons affecting the change in Turkish policy in the context of Syria. The visit of Assad to Russia to thank Putin for direct military support in October 2015 and the full-scale collaboration between Russia and Assad had a significant impact in terms of Turkish Foreign Policy targets in Syria because the possibility of Assad's removal was even weaker now. Ankara was disturbed by the lack of balance of power in the Syrian civil war.

Turkey's reaction to Russia's operation in Syria was remarkable. Erdoğan, the Prime Minister of the time, sent offensive messages to Russia one after another at that time, such as; "If the Russians don't make Mersin Akkuyu, someone else will. They invested three billion dollars there. therefore, the party that should be sensitive about it is Russia" or "We are Russia's number one natural gas consumer. Losing Turkey would

be a serious loss for Russia. Turkey can obtain natural gas from multi-rack locations if necessary." (Aleksandrov, 2015). The reasons behind these reactions rising from Turkey can be listed as follows: 1) Russia's aerial bombardments in Syria hindered Turkey's plans in northern Syria and increased the influence of the regime forces in the region 2) Russian intervention had affected Turkey's air engagement. From 2012, Turkey had military and strategic superiority over Syria. In 2013 and 2014, the regime's military helicopters were shot down by Turkey. However, it is unlikely that the same treatment would be done against Russia. 3) Russian air forces attacked not only ISIS but also Turkish-backed opposition forces. With the intervention of Russia, the Syrian opponents who were stood on the doors of Damascus suddenly turned into dissidents trying to protect themselves (Erkmen, 2022, Interview). 4) Russia's increasing military presence in Tartus limited the Turkish Navy's possibilities in the eastern Mediterranean (Samoylov, 2018).

Russia's direct involvement in that civil war has ensued in a reversal of the balance of power, back in favor of the pro-Assad front which also includes Iran. Assad also utilized the US President Barack Obama's reluctance to further involve the US in the Middle East and of divisions within Sunni Arab countries. In the next process, Turkey has decreased the regime-change rhetoric and mainly involved in the conflict against ISIS and YPG militias and has agreed to participate in coordination meetings with Russia and Iran to find a political solution.

3.4.1. Turkey's Downing of Russia Warplane and its Consequences

The change in Russian strategy that put forward military means severely reflected the relationship between Turkey and Russia. As a result of this, the growing mistrust between the two countries. Meanwhile, Turkey began to express military options in Syria, which means the take-over of hard power components due to boosted threat perception. In such a process, the increasing air space violations and expanding aggression had become visible. On October 3, 2015, Turkey noticed Russia after the air violation of a Russian warplane. Nevertheless, one day later, another case took place upon the radar lock of a MIG-29 on Turkish aero patrolling along the borders (Yükselen, 2020). In response to this, Turkey carried the case to NATO in order to discourage the Russian airspace violations. Despite the discursive support of NATO,

the airspace violations continued. A further problematic issue was revealed with the airstrike of Russia that aimed at Turkmen in the Bayırbucak region, bordering the south of Turkey (NTV, 2015 cited in Yükselen, 2020).

According to the official news agency of the Turkish Republic, Turkmen are known for their commitment to Turkey in the region, and they were defined as a strategic point for the Syrian opposition and Turkey. Because Bayırbucak Turkmen are not only a pillar against the regime but also, they have also been seen as a natural barrier to the PYD-YPG's spread and endeavors to approach the Mediterranean Sea. On November 24, 2015, Turkey downed the Russian Sukhoi Su-24 military plane.

The Russian plane flying on the Turkish border crashed over Bayırbucak. it had a strategic meaning beyond being symbolic. Because the opponents' loss of Bayırbucak would mean losing the important road to Idlib. All the pressure created by the opposition on Latakia would disappear with the fall of the Bayırbucak region. that region had the potential to hit the heart of the Assad regime with its elevation (Erkmen, Interview, 12.10.2022).

It was the first time that a NATO country shot down a Russian aircraft upon airspace violations. The US supported Turkey without hesitation, and Barack Obama asserted that "Turkey has the right to defend its airspace" (BBC, 2015). On November 28, 2015, Putin signed the order containing economic sanctions against Turkey (CNN Turk, 2015). According to the Turkish Economic Social and Political Research Foundation, the annual cost of the plane crash in Turkey was 11 billion dollars (Tüses, 2016). However, apart from the economic dimension, the most crucial impact occurred in strategic and security dimensions in terms of Turkey. Immediately after the incident, Russia accused Turkey of illegal oil trade with ISIS, claiming that Turkey supports ISIS economically and logistically and they claimed that Turkey let ISIS cross its borders (BBC, 2015). Nevertheless, more importantly, the YPG, as the offshoot of PKK, opened an office in Russia in February 2016, declaring that it represents territories under its control in Syria (A.A., 2016). The US had already broad support the PYD-YPG to stop ISIS's rapid expansion in Syria and Iraq, particularly after 2015. However, now Russia, another superpower, gave open and direct support to PYD-YPG in retaliation for Turkey. As relations between Ankara and Moscow declined to the lowest level, the territorialization of PYD-YPG increased even more by taking advantage of the substantial divergence between Turkey and Russia (Kanat, 2015).

Especially in the process of the fall of Aleppo, the cooperation between Russia and YPG stands out.

The Syrian regime could not take Aleppo under siege due to the support from the north. The main logistics point of the Syrian opposition in Aleppo at that time was the Castello Road. The closest ones were the PYD-YPG in Aleppo's Sheikh Maksud district. The siege of Aleppo was completed when YPG elements in Afrin and Aleppo closed the logistics lines in cooperation with the Russians (Serhat Erkmen, Interview, 12.10.2022).

Russia was openly applying for a Kurdish card to constrain Turkey's political and military range of motion. Insomuch as, when the Raqqa operation was discussed, Lavrov put forward the proposal that the UN envoy includes PYD-YPG in Syria talks, which made PYD-YPG an actor in the equation, defined as a terrorist organization by Ankara. At this point, seeing the powerful dual support to the PYD-YPG is essential to understand why Turkey's security concerns hit the highest point in 2016.

The PYD-YPG had the opportunity to cross the West of Euphrates thanks to Russian air support; on the other hand, the US armed the PYD-YPG with heavy weapons, and it also announced Operation Euphrates Wrath for Raqqa with PYD-YPG (Yükselen, 2020). It should also be noted that Turkey's nearing the brink of war with Russia after the warplane crisis limited its mobility considerably. Lavrov's effort to make YPG an actor as an ultimatum was a vital problem for Turkey. Russian General Staff spokesman Sergey Luskov announced the three-step decision text, saying that they will continue their activities in Syria after the incident. He also stated that from now on, all air attacks would be carried out under the protection of warplanes, and the cruiser Moscow would be sent offshore of Latakia. Luskov underlined that "they can hit all potential threats "in any time of danger" (Sputnik International, 2015). Therefore, Russia's air superiority in Syria was the biggest obstacle to Turkey's military operation against PYD-YPG. Under these circumstances, normalization and cooperation with Russia had become a necessity rather than a choice for Turkey. Aydın Adnan Sezgin, the former ambassador of Turkey to Moscow and the 27th term Aydın deputy from İyi Party, said the following;

Turkey could not read Russia during the Syria crisis, not at all. The ruling party had long thought it could persuade Russia to withdraw from Syria. Russia warned Turkey about possible problems from 2012-to 2013. It was

delusional to assume that Russia's attitude would change. Ankara did not foresee that Russia could intervene directly in the war in 2015. Russia would not have left Syria as it was after the annexation of Ukraine and Crimea, and Moscow would not have been defeated in Syria. The government in Turkey should have taken an approach according to this fact... Turkey changed its rules of engagement before the plane crisis with Russia. After the plane crisis, that is, between November 2015 and June 2016, Turkey failed to take any action regarding the Syrian crisis. Russia's landing on the field and all these developments made it necessary for Turkey to get closer to Russia. Russia was now on the ground, and cooperation was imperative (Interview, 12.10.2021).

The crisis with Russia in late 2015 revealed the drawbacks of Turkey having problems with two great powers simultaneously. Turkey has almost violated the golden rule of balance policy by entering into a conflict of interest with both the Western alliance and Russia at the same time. The deterioration of relations with Russia, when various disagreements with the USA and the EU continued, especially in the Syria policy and the fight against terrorism, where sufficient support could not be received from the Western allies, has narrowed Turkey's range of action.

According to the information given by a senior Turkish bureaucrat, who did not want to be named, it is as follows;

After the plane was shot down, it became very difficult for Turkey to enter Syrian airspace. An agreement was made for Idlib and Turkey could enter some places, but in other parts there was a situation like "You can't even stick your nose out without the approval of the Russians. Air operation was not possible. And I think this process is still going on (14.10.2022, Interview).

3.5. Chapter Summary

Turkey's Syria policy has been defined as an offensive foreign policy since it aims at regime change from an early period and supports this goal with concrete steps. One of the motivations of this offensive foreign policy goal is the false expectation of Turkish decision makers that Assad will soon fall. Miscalculation in the Syrian policy has caused serious security vulnerabilities for Turkey. Turkey has an unprecedented security vulnerability in terms of city security after 2013, and this security vulnerability hit its highest point in 2015 and 2016. As Syria's largest neighbor, Turkey has been particularly affected by the Syrian mass migration. The Syrian mass migration has pressured Turkey's financial capacity and has also paved the way for

major terrorist attacks in Turkey. Long Turkey-Syrian border, the rise of armed non-state actors, and increased intensity of severity with the combination of open-door policy created the proper ground for terrorist infiltration. For instance, ISIS has conducted many deadly terrorist attacks in Turkey during this process; 211 Turkish citizens have been killed since 2014 due to ISIS terrorism (D'alema, 2017). The rise of ISIS stemmed from the Syrian crisis to affect Turkey's internal and external security primarily through suicidal attacks and cross-border missiles. The rise of ISIS also distracted the international focus from Assad's regime to Salafi's radical terrorism in both Syria and Iraq. In the post-2013 period, it was seen that the most crucial security problem arising from Syria was terrorism. The emergence of ISIS and its increasing attacks on Turkey, the terrorist activities of the PKK, and its affiliated organizations, which are trying to pave the way for themselves in the chaotic environment in Syria, have created significant problems in Turkey's national security.

The offensive policy of Turkey, which was labeled as neo-Ottomanism, failed due to serious calculation errors in Syria. While the problems in the field of security were increasing, Western countries that followed a Syria policy in a similar line to Turkey began to change their attitudes. The emergence of radical organizations and terrorist organizations among the opposition groups and, finally, the strengthening of ISIS pushed the regime change in Syria into the background for Western countries. On the other hand, the coup in Egypt, the tensions in Turkey-EU relations, and other problems between Turkey and the USA have led to the isolation of Turkey in Syria. JDP's foreign policy strategy has failed. As a matter of fact, the US administration stopped its non-arms aid to moderate opposition in November 2013 (Tanış, 2013). Thus, the differentiation of interests and targets between Turkey and its Western allies gradually came to light. The emergence of ISIS and the declaration of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's caliphate in June 2014 deepened the differentiation. Contrarily, thanks to Russia and Iran's backing, the Assad regime has regained control of most of the country. However, the civil war has been even more destructive for the Syrian people, which hundreds of thousands dead and millions displaced. Escalating the civil war has posed severe internal and external security risks for Turkey: power vacuum in northern Syria and mass migration. Thanks to the power vacuum in the north of Syria, the jihadist groups in the region and particularly the Islamic State (ISIS), which was first able to control large areas in Syria and Iraq, were underlined. However, the process of

expansion and strengthening of ISIS in the region has replaced the strengthening of the YPG, creating another and much more detrimental strategic disaster for Turkey. YPG has seized the opportunity to expand itself geographically through a power vacuum and has also enjoyed support from the US, as they prove to be the only land power against ISIS. Furthermore, Syrian Kurds have tried to establish a Kurdish zone in northern Syria called "Rojava" next to Turkey's Mediterranean Sea border. This has become the most prominent and top priority threat to Turkey's security perspective.

Considering all the above, the Turkish security system has exposed severe challenges, and it is heavily affected by the Syrian crisis. The Syrian crisis has broken into pieces the middle East Security Complex, shaped after the First World War. Russia's involvement in the war was much more decisive in the balance of the civil war. The last major blow to Turkey's offensive Syria policy was Russia's direct intervention in Syria in August 2015 and the significant security risks. Even though Western actors supported the anti-regime opponents in Syria, they were reluctant to make moves to overthrow the regime and especially to take military initiatives. Russia probably calculated that the Westerners, who avoided military attempts to overthrow the Assad regime, would also refrain from stopping it in Syria. Russia became involved in the Syrian Civil War on the regime's side in September 2015. Although Russia claimed to be fighting terrorist organizations, it fortified the regime forces. In November 2015, a Turkish F-16 fighter jet shot down a Russian Sukhoi Su-24M fighter aircraft near the Syria–Turkey border. This led to a sharp confrontation between President Erdoğan and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin. This situation significantly restricted Turkey's mobility in Syria.

The crisis with Russia in late 2015 revealed the drawbacks of Turkey having problems with two great powers simultaneously. Turkey has almost violated the vital rule of balance policy by entering into a conflict of interest with both the Western alliance and Russia at the same time. This situation has narrowed Turkey's field of action. Turkey has had difficulties finding actors with whom it can cooperate, and its foreign policy has come to a dead end. In addition, to face serious internal security problems and being left alone by its allies, Turkey had to cope with developments against the policies it followed on the battlefield. The change in the balance in the war has revealed the problem of the sustainability of Turkey's Syria policy. Internal, external, and

regional security threats have come to an intolerable point for Turkey, defined as Security Gap in the thesis. Paradigm change in foreign policy has become inevitable for Turkey, which has not made any gains in the field despite the security risks. The intensification of security risks without gains constitutes the driving reason for Turkey's foreign policy paradigm shift in 2016. False assumptions about the life of the Assad regime and the increasing security risks originating from Syria have caused a new page to be opened in Turkish foreign policy and Turkey's Syria policy. Turkey's exposure to security vulnerabilities stemming from Syria emerged as a result of a miscalculated offensive policy. These security problems did not change Turkey's offensive strategy but formed a suitable basis for the emergence of tactical security measures.

CHAPTER 4

PARADIGM SHIFT AND TRANSITION TO SECURITY ORIENTED POLICIES

4.1. Turkish Foreign Policy Analysis: Increased Security Risks and Strategic "Self-Correction"

One of the main arguments of this thesis is that there has been a paradigm shift in Turkey's Syria policy after 2016 due to growing internal and external security problems, namely the Security Gap process. As stated earlier, JDP'S main target was the toppling of the Assad regime from the very beginning; therefore, Turkey directly promoted Syrian opposition, politically and militarily. Turkish decision makers' direct involvement in the Syrian civil war and openly supporting regime change in Syria have been evaluated within the offensive realist paradigm. Turkey waged a proxy war through Syria's political and military opposition elements, namely Free Syrian Army and Syrian National Council. However, particularly after 2016, Turkey's geostrategic and security priorities have changed. As a concrete example, the declaration of an extended "federal system" called Rojava by the Syrian Kurdish entities, namely PYD, in March 2016 led to a transformation in Turkish policy (Altunışık, 2020). Indeed, Turkey had already been concerned about the power accumulation of the PYD and YPG in the region as early as 2012, but the security challenges of Turkey increased with the power vacuum in Syria in time. What made the equation even more complicated for Turkey was that the PYD and its armed extension, YPG, had become the most fundamental ally of the West in the fight against ISIS. Turkey had already experienced security challenges due to terrorist incidents in its homeland after 2013; however, internal and external security risks originating from Syria, especially the process of autonomy of PYD in the north of Syria, made security risks the priority agenda of Turkey. These incidents, which seemed to specify the growing movement on the Kurdish political "autonomy," triggered unilateral military operations in Syria

and re-securitization of the Kurdish issue in Turkey's politics. Turkish decision makers' wrong assumptions about the life of the Assad government and increasing security problems based in Syria have caused Turkey to change its foreign policy goals. As of the paradigm shift in 2016, Turkey's main foreign policy target has largely been the elimination of terrorist elements in the border region, not the overthrow of the Assad regime. With the change in Turkey's foreign policy set, the methods applied have changed, and the proxy war carried out in the previous period has left its place to the direct intervention of the Turkish armed forces.

As Keyman argues (2017), Turkish foreign policy in 2016 has not only been reset but a new form of foreign policy has emerged. The Turkish foreign policy's assertive nature and main principles are shaped by the desire to become a pioneer in the change wave transformed. From the beginning of the Syrian war in 2011 until August 2016, Turkey was occupied by the fall of the Assad target, which as a result, had set the priorities of Turkey's foreign policy objectives. The risks brought by regional instability, power vacuum, and the development of regional and international balances against Turkey undermined this policy of Turkey. Turkey needed to make self-correction in the route of foreign policy strategy and establish a new and robust policy against instability and security deficiencies. Ankara has a stab at doing this during the second phase (*post-2016 period*). The overthrow of the Assad regime and the desire to be the pioneer of the Arab Spring objective is no longer considered a top priority. As an alternative, the threat posed by the PYD/YPG and ISIS became an upper priority for Turkey, and all other objectives, such as materializing the fall of the Assad regime, supporting opposition forces, and extending a proxy war with Iran, became secondary priorities.

Since 2016, Turkey has progressively begun to utilize military power to eliminate security threats originating from Syria. Developments, after President Erdogan's apology letter between Turkey and Russia relations allowed Turkey to conduct its first military operation in August 2016, the target was stated as "to push back PYD/YPG and ISIS forces from the border" within the framework of article 51 of the United Nations treaty. At the global policy level, Turkey's new paradigm in the Middle East has been implemented in the context of a growing problematic relationship with its traditional allies. In this period, a shift in Turkey's central foreign policy axis has been

observed. While Syria-based security problems are creating growing areas of conflict between Turkey and the US, the areas of cooperation between Russia and Turkey have started to increase gradually. Two reasons can be counted on the basis of the foreign policy divergence between Turkey and the US first; the US supported PYD/YPG tremendously; thus, Turkey faces off with a US-supported Kurdish entity with a connection to the PKK along its southern borders. Secondly, the JDP was highly annoyed by what they saw as US indifference to Turkey's fight against the Gülenist network, which they accused of staging the coup attempt in July 2016. Therefore, with awareness of Russia's critical role in Syria, Turkey has developed close cooperation with Moscow to balance against the US and its partners in Syria. The divergence window between Russia and Turkey in the context of Syria provided an opportunity for Moscow to ruin the relationship between Turkey and its NATO allies, primarily the US, and balance its alliance with Iran in Syria.

4.2. Paradigm Shift in Turkey's Syria Policy

The discourse of JDP government such as "*protector of oppressed peoples*" reveals the desire for political, cultural, and economic hegemony in the region. In this line, not only discursively but also operationally, the government fulfilled the requirements of offensive policy primarily in 2016. Contrary to traditional Turkish foreign policy, the Turkish government has become a direct party to the war in the Middle East in the Syrian case. In this process, Turkey engaged with the military and diplomatic actions simultaneously; it hosted the headquarters of FSA in Hatay and the headquarters of SNC in İstanbul. Turkey was the primary geographical and political patron of the military and political wing of the Syrian opposition. Nonetheless, Turkey's foreign policy goal to change the Assad regime has failed. Firstly, as Ahmet Davutoğlu emphasized (2020), with the rise of ISIS in the summer of 2013, the course of the Syrian civil war mutated in favor of Assad. This process fueled the separation of Turkey and the US in terms of targets in Syria. While US focuses on Al-Qaeda and related terrorist groups in Syria, it does not match Turkey's concerns about the PKK insurgency and Kurdish expansionism.

With Russia's direct landing in Syria in September 2015, Turkey's maneuverability in the region was greatly restricted. Furthermore, the disintegration - radicalization of the

Syrian opposition, parallel to this, the loss of Western support of the Syrian opposition reduced the foreign policy area of anti-Assad Turkey remarkably. Besides, the calculation error of the JDP government regarding the duration and outcome of the Syrian civil war has left Turkey facing serious security risks originating from Syria. Notably, in 2015 and 2016, the Security Gap process hit the highest point; Turkey suffered from instability on and within its borders, including mass migration and large-scale terrorist attacks. At the same time, due to the power vacuum caused by the Syrian civil war, YPG maximized its geographical, political, and military power in northern Syria.

To be more specific,

YPG entered Manbij on 14 June 2016. At that time, YPG branches coming out of Afrin were advancing over Tel-Rifaat to the north of Aleppo and from there to the east. The YPG's branches, which emerged from Ayn el Arab, also aimed to go to Al-Bab via Manbij and create an integrated region. This is the development that made the alarm bells ring in Turkey. The possibility of YPG to establish an integrated region in the north of Syria and take it under control has prompted Turkey to act. As a matter of fact, Turkey's post-2016 military operations were carried out to prevent an integrated YPG region (Serhat Erkmen, 12.10. 2022, Interview).

In order to respond more efficiently to the unprecedented security challenges and risks, Turkish foreign policy has been fundamentally reset after 2016 (Keyman, 2018). Herrmann (1990, p.5) calls such changes in foreign policy "self-correcting change" when those policymakers move in an alternative foreign policy course. In other words, the security gap process stemming from the Syrian civil war has caused a paradigm shift in Turkey's Syria policy. Due to internal and external security threats, the Turkish government has adopted more security-oriented policies as of 2016.

Ending the open border policy, construction of the world's third-largest border wall on the Syrian border, closure of border crossing points between Turkey and Syria, and initiation of three unilateral military operations to ensure border security are the results of the new security-oriented policy. Thus, Turkey's desire "to be the pioneer of change in the Middle East" was replaced by enhancing border security measures and conducting direct cross-border military operations. The new paradigm in Turkish foreign policy is based on militarization of foreign policy and security-oriented measures. Therefore, although Turkey overwhelmingly adopted indirect aggressive

policies in Syria from the beginning, however it switched to a direct aggressive paradigm after 2016 due to the Security Gap period. In the post-2016 period, Turkey had more critical problems than regime change in Syria because the power vacuum in northern Syria created convenient conditions for jihadists and other terrorist components in terms of their expansion and infiltration into Turkey. The internal and external security vulnerabilities indicated by the Security Gap process have led to the opening a new page in Turkish foreign policy since 2016. In the post-2016 period, although security policies come to the fore, it also includes offensive elements, particularly from the perspective of extraterritorial military operations.

With the establishment of ISIS and YPG on Turkey's borderline, Turkey's southern provinces began to be exposed to rocket attacks, and Turkey faced a genuine border security problem. Throughout 2016, ISIS hit Turkish cities, especially Kilis, with Katyusha rockets (Kelleher et al., 2017). In 2016, 95 missiles were fired by ISIS between January and October alone, 25 people died, and 367 buildings were damaged, according to official numbers (Cumhuriyet, 2017). The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey accepted the security deficiencies and expressed that "Turkey's national security was under threat" by tweeting just before the Olive Branch Operation (tcbestepe, 2018). In the same statement, Turkey announced that 317 Turkish citizens lost their lives in terrorist attacks originating from Syria between 2015 and 2017 (tcbestepe, 2018). In this context, Turkey has justified its military operations under Article 51 of the UN Charter, which covers an individual or collective right to self-defense against armed attack. Despite this, it would be controversial to evaluate Turkey's military operations against Syria purely through a security paradigm. Turkey has taken under control of 8.835 thousand km² area in Syria with three military operations carried out in the post-2016 period, including towns Afrin, al-Bab, Azaz, Jarabulus, Tal Abyad, Ras al-Ayn. In addition, Turkey has established local administrative administrations, health systems, education systems, trade chambers, and local security systems in the regions it controls in Syria. For instance, Turkey organized a new law enforcement authority in the zone in early 2017, the "Free Police," divided into the National Police and Public Security Forces. It is trained, equipped, and paid for by Turkish authorities and consequently loyal to the Turkish state (Al Monitor, 2017). According to Turkey's official news agency, Turkey also established

faculties in Syria's al-Bab, Azaz, Afrin, and Jarabulus provinces to enable Syrian students to continue their higher education (A.A., 2019).

Turkey's control of more than eight thousand square meters with three military operations and building its education, health, security, and trade systems in the region (Aslan, 2019) demonstrates that Turkey's Syrian military operations are beyond self-defense. This shows that the JDP government in Turkey still has the desire to shape the future of Syria. Although the government's predictions regarding the Syrian civil war turned out to be wrong, and there were security risks due to miscalculations, there is still some room for offensive impulses and goals. Even though Turkey's military operations go partly beyond the concept of self-defense, it is seen that security risks have generally shaped Turkey's policy preferences after 2016. The Security Gap process has turned the indirect offensive realist policies carried out by Turkey into direct offensive realist policies through cross-border military operations. Again, after 2016, it is seen that a security paradigm has gained strength in a realistic framework.

4.1.1. Security Gap and Paradigm Shift in Turkish Politics; Learning From Failure

Based on the traditional view of national security, the *raison d'être* of the nation-state is the insurance of security through professional units such as border security forces and military forces. In order to maintain compressive security measures, it is ideal to avert threats before they cross the physical line of the state: the borders (Dora, 2021). When the Syrian crisis is examined, it is seen that Turkey suffered the tremendous migration wave in the recent history of humanity which caused internal security vulnerabilities in the Turkish homeland. As the country with the most extensive land border with Syria, Turkey permitted the Syrians to pass the border in masses in the first place in harmony with the open-door policy. Due to the Syrian civil war crisis, Turkey has become a target and a transition country for refugees fleeing persecution. The escalating cycle of violence in Syria, especially the presence of a brutal radical terrorist organization like ISIS in the region, accelerated the Syrian migration to Turkey, particularly after 2013, as seen in the chart below;

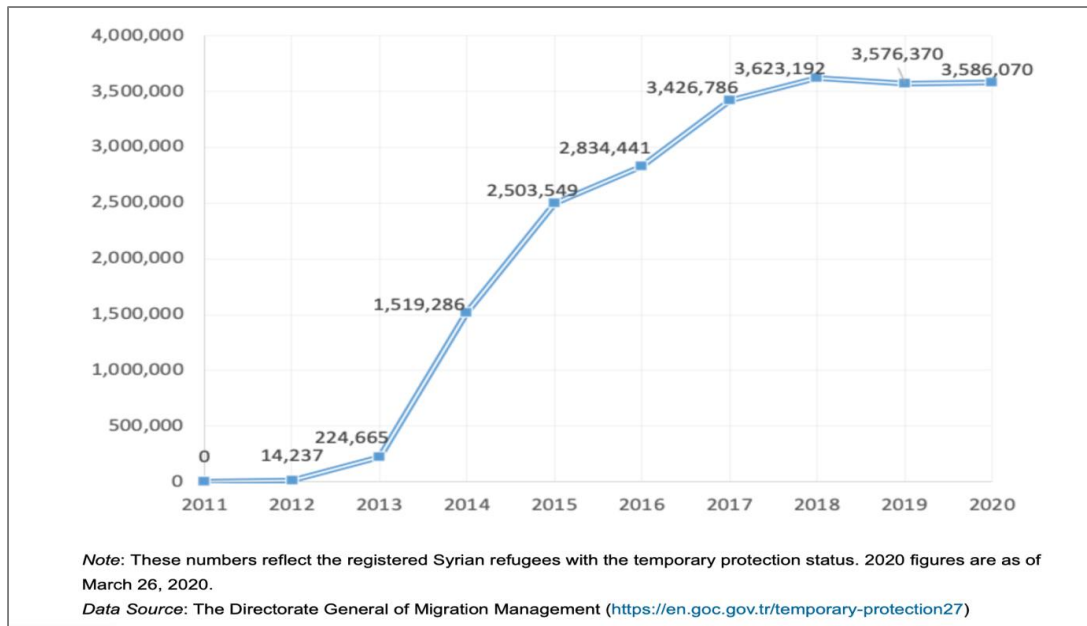


Figure 11. The Number of Registered Syrian Refugee

With the open-door policy, more specifically by lifting barriers, the masses who had no official document and identification have entered Turkey by crossing the Syrian border. Some got through to various countries illegally in the next period (Dora, 2020). Since 2012, northern Syria has become the epicenter of terrorist organizations such as al Nusra, YPG, and ISIS. Hence, Turkey's open border policy lays the groundwork for a security vulnerability over time. With the different terrorist groups gaining strength and space in northern Syria, the uncontrolled migration crisis has led to ease in the illegal entrance of the members of the terrorist organizations into Turkey. As a result, the open-door policy was perceived as an opportunity by terrorist organizations, more by ISIS and YPG, and terrorist attacks besieged Turkey rapidly. The statistics published on terrorist attacks in Turkey by Global Terrorism Database (2021) clearly reveal the internal security axis of the *Security Gap* process:

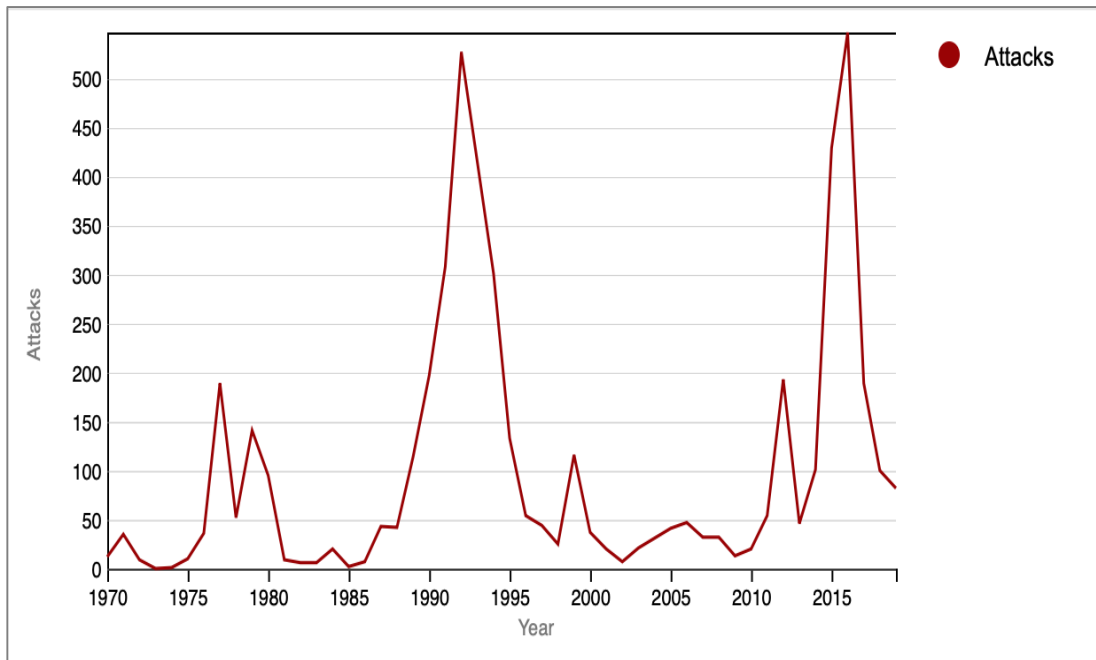


Figure 12. Global Terrorism Database (2021)

Turkish Security Forces have caught many ISIS militants from different nationalities crossing the border from Syria to Turkey (Dora, 2021). However, as highlighted, ISIS was not the only group posing a risk to Turkey. Armed groups linked to the pro-Assad regime's secret service el-Mukhabarat, and other terrorist organizations, including al-Nusra or PYD/YPG, have been threats to Turkey's security. In 2015, over 400 terror attack attempts were registered in Turkey, where at least 40 were carried out in tourist destinations (Berg, 2020). In addition, in 2016, the UN changed the level of security in the cities of Ankara and İstanbul from minimal to moderate (IMF 2017, p.37). As a result, Turkey had severe problems in ensuring the safety of its cities and citizens in 2015 and 2016, as it is seen clearly in the figure:

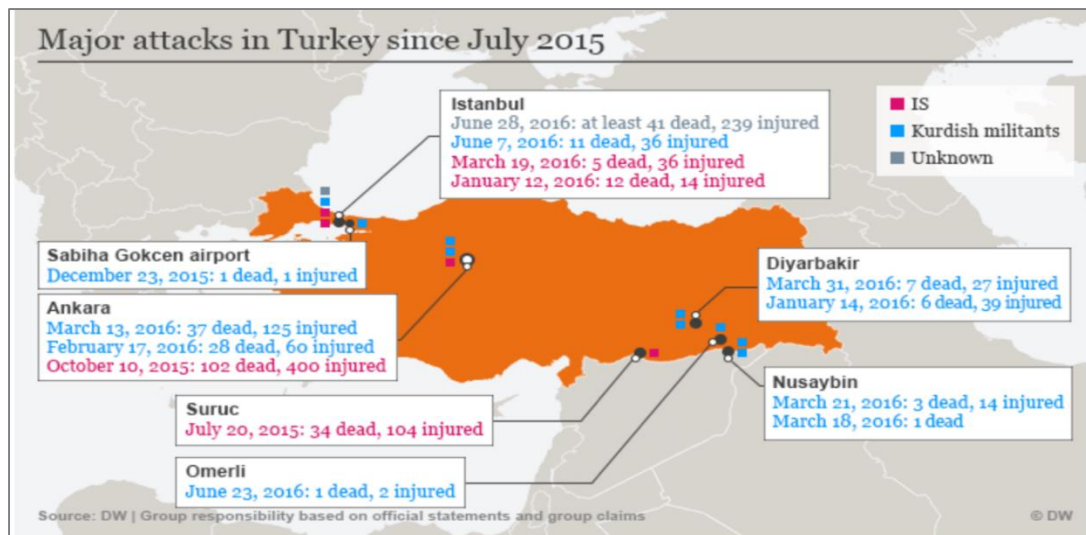


Figure 13. Major Attacks in Turkey since 2015 (DW, 2016)

Following the terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016, Turkey increasingly began to associate refugees with violence, not because refugees themselves were perpetrators but because the refugee flow seemingly demonstrated that Turkey had lost control of its southern border (Makovsky, 2019).

In March 2015, Turkey decided to close Öncüpınar and Cilvegözü border gates to prevent potential terrorist attacks (Öztiğ, 2019). Nevertheless, this measure did not prevent ISIS from killing 32 people in Suruç in July 2015.

Although a weakening process of ISIS under the influence of the international coalition was a positive development for Turkey's security problem, the withdrawal of ISIS opened an excellent opportunity for area domination for YPG, which is a more serious threat to Turkey. Beyond the external security crisis, in August 2015, with the landing of Russia on the field, the falling probability of the Assad regime decreased. The deep divergence between Turkey and U. S in Syria policy, the West's reluctance at the point of direct intervention, and the fragmentation and radicalization of Syrian opposition made the possibility of Assad falling even more impossible. This fact was starting to show itself on the field, too; the most dramatic change was the gaining of the Assad regime to Aleppo in December 2016, which simultaneously demonstrated that not only psychological and material, but also spatial superiority had passed into the Assad control. Therefore, Turkey's main objective, the toppling of the Assad regime, seems to have failed as of 2016.

Whereas, what made all this more complicated for Turkey was that the PYD and its armed extension YPG had become the central US and European ally in the war against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, as a part of US President Obama's "surrogate war doctrine" (Altunışık, 2020). In this manner, YPG has taken a severe area in the north of Syria. By 2016, nearly one-third of Syria's territory fell under the control of the YPG, which is seen as the extension of the PKK terrorist organization by Turkey. The gaining of territory in northern Syria, first by ISIS than by the YPG, was an essential dimension of the Security Gap process externally. Bilateral security weakness has become the priority item on the agenda for Ankara.

As a result of this collaboration between Western powers and PYD, the YPG has expanded its territorial control even beyond Kurdish residential areas in Northern Syria. Namely, Afrin and Kobane in the Aleppo province and Jazire in the Hassakeh Province had already been declared "autonomous administration" by PYD in 2013. After PYD increased spatial, political, and military superiority as of 2016, the newly proclaimed "extended autonomous administration," revealed which announced in March 2016, included Arab cities such as Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ayn, which was one of the most important reasons for the change in Turkey's Syria policy. In the post-2016 period, instead of prioritizing the fall of the Assad regime, Turkey has focused mainly on security-oriented strategies with the combination of direct hard power elements on the field.

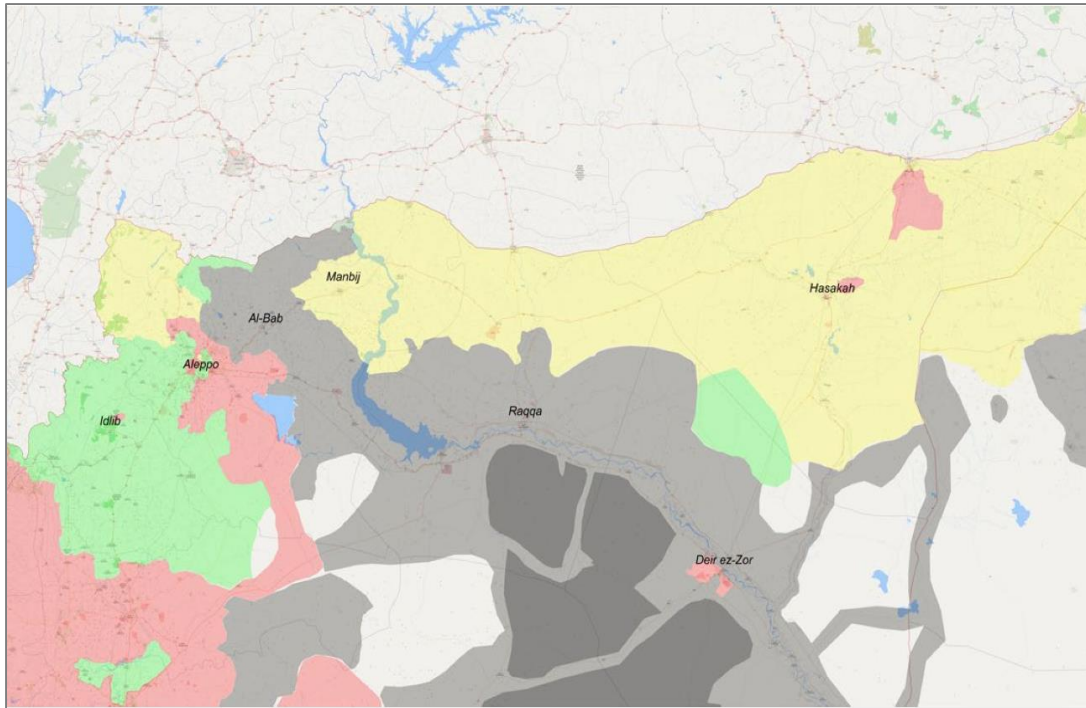
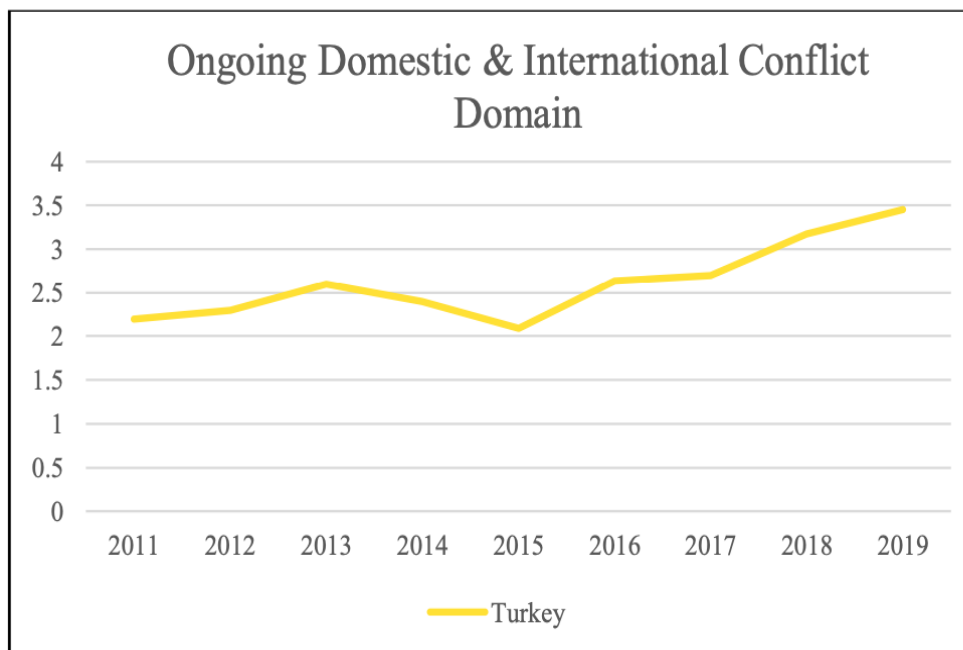


Figure 14. The Map of PYD's Control in Northern Syria as of 23 August 2016 (PYD/YPG-dominated areas are presented in yellow) (Holland & McCowan, 2017)

The concept of the Security Gap emphasizes the existential threats that Turkey faces inside and across borders due to the Syrian civil war. The security gap refers to the intense internal and external security problems that Turkey was exposed to due to Syria and peaked in 2015-2016 which has a transformative impact on Turkey's foreign policy choices and implementations. The internal security crisis is based on border security violations and intensifying terrorist attacks, while the external security crisis is based on terrorist organizations that are gaining strength and power on Turkey's southern border. Due to Security Gap, a paradigm shift took place in Turkey's Syria Policy in 2016. Hermann (1990, p. 5) calls this "self-correcting change," making foreign policymakers move to an alternative policy course. Hermann (1990, p.12) asserts that the foreign policy change might result from dramatic cross-border events, calling this situation an external shock. Turkey has experienced two external shocks in this sense. First of all, the priority goals of Turkish foreign policy at the beginning of the Syrian civil war, such as the fall of the Assad regime and the re-construction of Syria under a pro-Turkish government, had totally failed. The second external shock in Turkey was about the evolving threats from the Syrian civil war, namely ISIS, as growing power on Turkish borders and gaining more territory of PYD-YPG in

northern Syria pushed Turkey to use hard power along with security measures. Turkey's collapse to assist the Syrian opposition sufficiently has forced a remarkable transformation in the list of Turkish foreign policy priorities, mainly because of the unforeseen rise and capability of both PYD and ISIS, which presented unprecedented security challenges to Turkey. Turkey committed a series of miscalculations about the duration and consequences of the Syrian civil war, for instance, believing that the Assad regime would collapse within a few months, as Davutoğlu underlined in 2012, dragged Turkey's Syria policy into a stalemate. In this way, 2016 appears as a year in which offensive political targets predominantly shifted to defensive elements. As can be seen in the table below, security risks and instability in and around Turkey have gradually increased in the post-2015 period;

Figure 1. Ongoing Domestic and International Conflicts of Turkey 2011-2019



Graph showing increasing instability and deterioration of peacefulness regarding Ongoing Domestic & International Conflict, where 0 = most peaceful and 5=least peaceful within and around Turkey 2011-2019 (Global Peace Index 2011-2019).

Figure 15. The Graph of Instability in Turkey

To prevent internal security weakness and restore border security, Turkey introduced a new visa policy for Syrians entering Turkish territory in January 2016. At the beginning of 2016, Turkey reversed its 2009 agreement that permitted visa-free entry of Syrian to Turkey and put forward visa requirements for Syrians coming to Turkey from other countries. On the other hand, most of the border crossing points at the Turkey-Syria borders have been closed as a security measure (Olejarova, 2018). According to The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs report (OCHA, 2016), as of 2016, only 2 of the 19 border crossing points between Turkey and Syria were open. Moreover, the Syrian parts of the border gates are generally controlled by terrorist organizations such as YPG and ISIS.

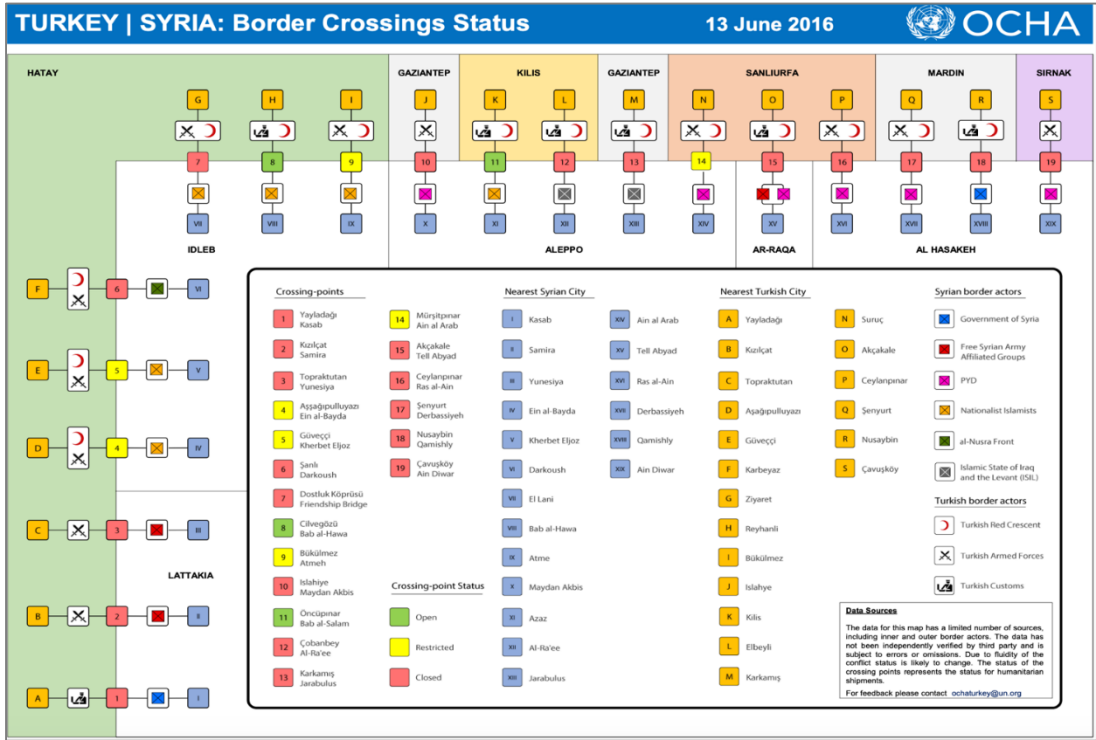


Figure 16. Border Crossing Status (OCHA, 2016).

"The risk of spillover has proved to be a real threat demonstrated by the terrorist incidents in Turkey" (Kale, 2018, p.23). Due to security challenges, Turkish decision-makers adopted a tighter border crossing policy, and they also decided to build a 900 km border wall along the border to filter the crossing (Reuters, 2016 cited in Kale, 2018). Ironically, the discourse of JDP's open-arms discourses and the action of the full-scale open-door policy at the beginning of the Syrian civil war evolved to the

closure of crossing points and the construction of one of the longest border walls in the world.

In addition to internal security challenges, the presence of PYD-YPG in the north of Syria was another dimension of Turkey's security crisis. Ankara has increasingly begun to use military methods to sustain its targets in the region to eliminate military superiority and control of the YPG. Because the new paradigm of Turkey's Syria Policy which is characterized by advanced zero-sum rivalry with other regional powers, made the use of unilateral military force the primary element of foreign policy, in this context, Turkey took action in August 2016 unilaterally, the Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) was initiated on 24th August 2016 to push back ISIS and YPG forces from the border. The OES demonstrated the changing strategy in Ankara's approach to Syria due to the Security Gap process. The territorialization of the security threats, namely ISIS and PYD-YPG, and their spillover into Turkey displayed itself with an increasing terrorist incident. According to Hasan Yükselen (2020), the PYD-YPG managed to control 632 km out of the 911 km long border by the end of 2015. The main logic and purpose of the OES were lying in this de facto situation, cutting off the corridor and manifestation the YPG's crossing west of Euphrates as a red line. The OES was followed by Operation Olive Branch (OOB) in 2018 and Operation Peace Spring (OPS) in 2019 to sustain border security and eliminate terrorist components beyond the border (Aktürk, 2018).



Figure 17. Turkish Military Operation Zones

4.1.2. Domestic Drivers of the Paradigm Shift (2016)

Domestic politics in power struggles in Turkey had a particular impact on Turkish foreign policy and vice versa. The year 2016 was not only the year that Turkey experienced a paradigm shift in its Syria policy but also the year that the entire Turkish political equation has changed. The first political earthquake in domestic politics took place in May 2016; the Prime-Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who was the architect of a particular period in Turkish foreign policy, was forced to resign from the position of Prime Minister in May 2016. Ahmet Davutoğlu had been the pioneer of the JDP's foreign policy construction during his tenure of office as a chief foreign policy adviser to Prime Minister Erdoğan between 2003-2009 and then as foreign minister between 2009-2014 (Dalacoura, 2017), finally as the Prime Minister of Turkey between 2014-2016. The eight years of Turkish foreign policy (between 2008 and 2016) have been dominated by Ahmet Davutoğlu's vision, produced in his famous book *Strategic Depth* (2000). Davutoğlu has explicitly argued that Turkey needed to alter the foreign policy notion with which it was locked in the region with the status quo. Through remembering a glorious past, he refers to "Turkey's renewed influence on the former imperial territories" and restoring an Ottoman-like "multiculturalism within the border of Turkey" in the post-Cold War atmosphere" (Furlanetto, 2015, p. 176). Nevertheless, conducting an ahistorical approach to the past that slid toward

anachronism created a big gap between reality and the neo-Ottomanist hyper-real interpretation, which derived from the "peace-bringing ethos of the Ottoman Empire" (Ataç, 2018). According to Ahmet Davutoğlu's point of view, the "mission of the Ottoman legacy to Turkey" brought a sense of responsibility to Turkey. In Davutoğlu's perspective, Turkey was capable of affecting the course of affairs in the region and beyond unilaterally. He basically presents Turkey as the pioneer of the wave of change in the middle east after the Arab Spring process (İşyar, 2018). However, particularly in 2015 and 2016, the Syrian question caused an undeniable disenchantment with Davutoğlu's vision for a new Turkish policy, both nationally and internationally (Ataç, 2018).

The failure was evident; on August 17, 2016, Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmuş confessed that "much of what has befallen us is the result of the situation in Syria and our Syria policy" (İdiz, 2016). Considering the impact of Davutoğlu on Turkey's Syria policy, both as foreign minister and Prime Minister, it can be stated that his resignation was a turning point. The elimination of Davutoğlu opened the path for decision-makers around Erdoğan to criminate their foreign policy mistakes on him and reset the doctrine of Turkish foreign policy (Altunışık, 2020). As of 2016, the emphasis on the "*We have responsibilities*" has decreased, and there has been accompanying distancing from the ambitious presentation of Turkey as a "great power" (Dalacoura, 2017). In addition, after Davutoğlu resigned from the Prime Ministry, the process of monopolizing power in Erdoğan's hands accelerated. This was an important milestone for the centralization of political power in Turkey. The ongoing state of emergency after coup attempt of 15 July 2016 provided further convenient ground to open the way for the bypass of the parliament by the executive controlled by a powerful and partisan president.

4.1.2.1. July 15 Coup Attempt and Security Anxiety

Besides the forced departure of Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in May 2016, the military coup attempt in July 2016 against the JDP government in Turkey was another crucial turning point and catalyst for a new phase not only for Turkey's foreign policy but also entire Turkish politics. The July 15 coup attempt raised the security anxiety of the JDP government to the highest point and, at the same time, prepared the

appropriate environment for a repressive administration in domestic politics. On July 20, 2016, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced a state of emergency in response to the attempted coup. According to the Activity Report of the State of Emergency Procedures Investigation Commission published in January 2020 by the Turkish Presidency, after the State of emergency, at least 125,678 public officials were dismissed. (TCCB, 2020). The State of emergency paved the way for dismissals from the public sector only by decree, without a judicial decision. This has been an indicator of the oppressive regime established after 2016 in Turkey. The JDP government decided to end the State of emergency on July 18, 2018; technically, however, the incumbent party adopted Law No. 7145 Amending Certain Laws and Decrees on July 25, 2018. The State's emergency powers have been largely maintained. In other words, the State of emergency is over technically, but the laws that meet the conditions of the State of emergency have been extended. Under normal circumstances, the extended version of the State of emergency would expire on July 31, 2021. However, the State of emergency powers were extended two years again to cover the next general election planned to be held in 2023. With the new law, the period of dismissal from public office and confiscation of assets without a judicial decision has been extended. It does mean that the coup attempt in 2016 paved the way for an 8-year state of emergency for the government.

The military coup attempt in 2016 changed the system of alliances in domestic politics. The leader of the ultra-nationalist party (MHP), Devlet Bahçeli, known for its fierce opposition to Erdoğan, started an alliance process with Erdoğan after the coup attempt. In October 2016, the leader of the Nationalistic Movement Party proposed the presidential system for Turkey (NTV, 2016) so-called People's Alliance, which consists of the incumbent party with the ultra-nationalist Nationalistic Movement Party established in the post-2016 period in Turkish politics. This means that the foundations of the new political alliance and the new administrative system were laid in 2016. These developments have provided suitable ground to consolidate the new nationalist alliance between President Erdoğan and MHP and push Turkey to a more militaristic, securitized, and zero-sum foreign policy. On the other hand, the JDP no longer holds parliamentary majority to carry out legislative activities alone therefore the new election coalition between JDP and the "nationalist" MHP in order to assist Erdoğan cross the 50 percent threshold line was functional in terms of both sides in

domestic politics (Kösebalaban, 2020). In 2017, a referendum for the new presidential was held and a new structure of Turkish political camps began to emerge. In the majority, there was an alliance between the jdp and the MHP, supported by smaller nationalist parties.

4.1.2.2. The Construction of the Repressive Regime and Impact of Post-2016 “Nationalism” on Turkish Foreign Policy in the Syrian Crisis

Schmitt (2004) argues that the notion of an "executive commissar" who targets to renovate the normal state of affairs during a state of emergency is totally dissimilar from an executive commissar in ordinary times. In such a case, the decision-maker might consolidate the legislative and executive in his or her person. The transformation of political applications conducted by them into executive decrees unlocks the way to impose a new alphabet and notion into the legal system. His/her acts as an architect of the law might destroy the legal and parliamentary system (Yılmaz, 2020). By uniting the legislation with the implementation of laws, executive commissars directly fulfill their legislated norms. Therefore, a state of emergency fades the rule of law. As discussed above, the extended state of emergency has maintained legal and political infrastructure for the transmutation of the regime by positioning it at the center of the legal system in Turkey. On July 9, 2018, Turkey adopted the presidential system over the parliamentary upon the plebiscite held on April 16, 2017. Thanks to a presidential system, the amended constitution enabled the president to issue decree-laws and allowed him to become a party member. Appointing a majority of the judiciary directly or indirectly, rectors to universities, and bureaucrats also belonged to the president's authority in the new political system. With the Turkish-style presidential system, the executive has taken over the legislative functions of the parliament.

The July 15 coup attempt and the 2017 constitutional referendum have been two significant turning points in the construction process of the suppressive regime in Turkey, which is principally structured around a one-person regime and party state. With the changing paradigm of Turkish politics after 2016, political alliances have also changed in Turkey. President Erdoğan established a new "nationalist" political coalition with MHP, which displaced the old partnership between JDP and the Gülenist organization (Akkoyunlu & Öktem, 2016). This paradigm change (JDP - MHP

alliance) in Turkish politics after 2016 has also profoundly affected Turkey's Syria policy. As a result of this, the discourse of an "isolated Turkey surrounded by enemies," "unreliable western alliance and international forces targeting Erdoğan" emerged as the main anchor of Turkey's new foreign policy paradigm. Bringing security and military elements to the fore in foreign policy and preparing the infrastructure for an oppressive political atmosphere at home, the government arrested Selahhatin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, the leaders of the pro-Kurdish HDP, on allegations of supporting terrorism in November 2016 (Kösebasalan, 2020). The political interlocutors, whose were parties to the resolution process between 2013 and 2015, became "banned persons" after the transformation in 2016 in terms of the incumbent party.

The security anxiety experienced by the JDP after 2016 and its alliance with an ultra-nationalist party deeply affected Syria's politics. The JDP had held close contact with PYD until the summer of 2015 in parallel with the "resolution process" with the PKK terrorist organization; at that time, the PYD was not seen as a priority issue, insomuch that PYD leader Salih Muslim visited Turkey several times (Kösebasalan, 2020). With the end of the resolution process in 2015, the PYD was named as a terrorist organization, as a result, Turkey's domestic policy had on considerable impact on its Syria policy.

4.2. Paradigm Shift and Transformation to Security Oriented Policies

4.2.1. From Open-Door Policy to “The Great Wall” of Turkey 2016

According to Weber, the states are the legitimate representative of the people's will, so they have the right to enforce power within their domain of sovereignty; anarchy cannot exist inside of state borders. Due to a lack of legitimate supranational authority, the state must seek its protection in this "self-help" system. This fact brings us to the realist notion that "anarchy encourages states to adopt defensive, moderate and restrained strategies" (Jervis, 1979; Gaddis, 1987; Synder, 1991, Taliaferro, 2000, cited in Lobell, 2010). Therefore, Realists believe that securing borders is necessary to preserve against threats posed to sovereign power (Özçelik, 2019). In order to protect the sovereignty, 26,000 km of border walls have been created throughout the world (Roche 2014 p. 105), between, for example, the US and Mexico, Israel and the

Occupied Territories, India and Pakistan, Botswana and Zimbabwe since 1989 (Özçelik, 2019). It has been argued that the events with a global impact, such as 9/11, the Arab Spring, the Syrian war, transboundary ISIS terror, and similar cases, deeply provoked the border security policies in many countries worldwide. Currently, many European countries from the south (Greece) to the north (Norway) have also stitched up barbed wire fences and walls on their borders to obstruct and control the flow of refugees and illegal immigrants. (Aras, 2020).

In particular, after the 9/11 attack, the perception that the "nation-state was under the attack" boosted, and this caused a significant resurgence in border security concerns. When evaluated within the framework of this realist paradigm, the Syrian civil war, power vacuum, and mass migration profoundly threatened Turkey's border security. In other words, The Syrian war changed almost all dynamics of the region and therefore re-structured the Turkish security anxiety about its political borders and, in particular, the Turkish-Syrian border. Since the eruption of demonstrations against the oppressive Syrian regime in March 2011, Turkey implemented an open-door policy for Syrian refugees, and the flow of refugees gradually increased and reached 2.834.441 at the beginning of 2016. As the size of the mass migration increased, The Turkish public began to express its frustration, and the perception also "has shifted from perceiving Turkish open-border policy as a manifestation of solidarity and Turkish dominance in the region to seeing Syrian refugees as a threat to social order, economic growth and security (Olejárová, 2019, p.118). Bloody terrorist attacks, such as the Diyarbakır attack on June 5, 2015, Suruç attack on July 20, 2015, Ankara Train Station attack on October 10, 2015, İstanbul Sultan Ahmet attack on January 12, 2016, Ankara Kızılay attack on March 13, 2016, and many other similar terrorist attacks in this period showed that Turkey was experiencing an internal security vulnerability. The internal security crisis, which constitutes a dimension of the Security Gap concept, has been one of the factors pushing Turkish decision-makers to security policies.

The actual plan of walling almost the whole Syrian border with a more innovative mechanism was initiated in 2016 and completed in 2018 (Aras, 2020). The Turkish security wall has gained the status of being the third-longest wall in the world after the Great Wall of China and the fences on the US-Mexico border (Hurriyetdailynews, 2017). Turkish decision-makers, who implemented an open border policy between

2011 and 2016, unofficially ended the open border policy in 2016. Turkey's abandonment of its open border policy and building a border wall on the Syrian border is the first and most concrete example of the transition to security-centered policies. In this context, one of the essential elements of Turkey's security policies after 2016 is the border wall on the Turkish-Syrian border. Meanwhile, Turkey had already introduced a new visa policy for Syrian entering Turkish territory from other states in January 2016, one of the first signs of the end of this open border policy.

The construction of the border wall process was led by TOKI (The Management of Housing Estate), which was part of the premiership. TOKI invited offers for the border wall construction, and the construction process was initiated in 2016 by the contractor (Şimsek & Dogus, 2017), and the construction was finished in June 2018. Turkey's border wall is composed of 2-meter-wide and 3-meter-high blocks with razor blade wires, and also there are 15-meter-high patrol towers that are strengthened with electricity and lighting system (Arslan et al., 2020). The wall touches the southern provinces of Hatay, Sanliurfa, Kilis, Gaziantep, and Mardin.

What is the exact reason for walls and fences on political borders? According to Aras (2020), the fundamental reason for the existence of security fences and the wall is related to basic instincts of human beings' fear and need for security. According to defensive realist logic, defense of the country, the citizens, and their property is mandated as an essential function of the nation-state in the international system. Realist paradigms conceptualize territorial logic through having an interest in maintaining and controlling national borders as an aspect of sovereignty (Adamson, 2006). The open border policy, which was a natural extension of Turkey's offensive policy after 2011, along with the wave of migration from Syria to Turkey, serious internal security weaknesses are also associated with it. In other words, the full-scale open-door policy approach triggered an increase in organized crime activities, infiltration of terrorist components, and radical fighters due to the ongoing war in Syria against the Turkish homeland (Olejárová, 2018).

Turkey has implemented a security-oriented policies with the construction of a large border wall. Besides, the close border policy was also reflected in the border crossing points and most of the border crossing points were closed. The United Nations Office

for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs report demonstrated that out of 19 crossing points between Syria and Turkey, 16 of them were not open anymore (OCHA, 2017).

Table 1. OCHA Turkey/Syria Border Crossing Status

Table 1: Turkey/Syria Border Crossings Status (1 November 2017)

Name	Status	Province in Turkey	Province in Syria
Yayladağı/Kasab	Closed	Hatay	Lattakia
Kızılçat/Samira	Closed	Hatay	Lattakia
Topraktutan/Yunesiya	Closed	Hatay	Lattakia
Aşşağıpulluyazı/Einal-Bayda	Restricted	Hatay	Idleb
Güveççi/Kherbet Eljoz	Restricted	Hatay	Idleb
Şanlı/Darkoush	Closed	Hatay	Idleb
Dostluk Köprüsü/Friendship Bridge	Closed	Hatay	Idleb
Cilvegözü/Bab al-Hawa	Opened	Hatay	Idleb
Bükülmez/Atmeh	Restricted	Hatay	Idleb
Islahiye/MaydanAkbis	Closed	Gaziantep	Aleppo
Öncüpınar/Bab al-Salam	Opened	Kilis	Aleppo
Çobanbey/Al-Ra'ee	Closed	Kilis	Aleppo
Karkamış/Jarabulus	Opened	Gaziantep	Aleppo
Mürşitpınar/Ainal Arab	Closed	Sanliurfa	Aleppo
Akçakale/Tell Abyad	Closed	Sanliurfa	Ar-Raqa
Ceylanpınar/Rasal-Ain	Closed	Sanliurfa	Al Hasakeh
Şenyurt/Derbassiyeh	Closed	Mardin	Al Hasakeh
Nusaybin/Qamishly	Closed	Mardin	Al Hasakeh
Çavuşköy/AinDiwar	Closed	Sirnak	Al Hasakeh

Source: (OCHA 2017: 1).

Besides that, the senior Turkish Armed Forces Commander, who worked in the field in the Euphrates Shield region for 2 years, stated the following regarding the border wall and border security:

I cannot share official information directly, but as a commander in the field, I can share some of my observations. When I was responsible for the Azez Jarabulus line, the wall on the Gaziantep line was completely built. There is no wall before it. In previous periods, everyone was passing easily. Later, the open places on the Hatay side were also walled up. After that, they continued towards Urfa to build the wall. It was not clear where

the border crossed even before. now there are border walls and integrated security systems. Border crossings are under tight control after 2016. When I was there, right after the border wall was built, border crossings decreased by %70-80 (Interview, 3.11.2022).

4.2.2. New Strategic Partner Against Security Vulnerability; Turkey-Russia Relations

4.2.2.1. Step One: Normalization

The Turkey-Russia relationship was fractured in November 2015, just after Ankara shot down a Russian combat plane. Approximately seven months after the crisis, Ankara took a step to normalize the relations between Turkey and Russia. After an apology by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, both sides decided to open a new page, and they started a multi-dimensional interlocution in the summer of 2016 by stimulating their policies over Syria (Özterem, 2017). After Davutoğlu's resignation process, the new Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım made a clear statement about his desire for "more friends, fewer enemies" (Milliyet, 2016). This discourse is vital because it shows Turkey's break with its post-2011 offensive foreign policy and the beginning of a new security-oriented realist paradigm. Normalization process with Russia demonstrates the paradigm shift of Turkey, which is in search of a balance against the USA. At this point, the relationship between Turkey and Russia's rapprochement and the internal and external security threats that Turkey is exposed to should be emphasized. Turkey's convergence towards the Russian axis is closely related to the security weaknesses of Turkey and the feeding of these weaknesses by the United States. Security problems faced by Turkey in the post-2013 period have accumulated. Firstly, the solution process that started in 2013 ended in the summer of 2015, and the PKK had increased its actions inside Turkey. Secondly, Turkey has become an easy target of ISIS terror because of its permeable borders. Thirdly, as of 2016, much of Syria's northern border was in the hands of the YPG. The escalation of all the security risks and the failed coup attempt of the Gülenists in July 2016 motivated Turkey to look for closer relations with Russia, as the U.S became an increasingly untrustworthy actor in the context of Turkey's struggle against PKK and PYD-YPG (Aktürk, 2019).

The failed coup of 2016 seems to have created a new opportunity for improving bilateral collaboration between Russia and Turkey. The US and the European leaders behaved reluctant and hesitant to support President Erdoğan for downing the coup planners and supporters. Indeed, the US Secretary of State John Kerry directly warned the Turkish government to avoid mass arrests and purges (Çoşkun, 2019). In response, President Erdoğan blamed the US for being a part of the failed military coup by referring to Fethullah Gülen, the leading actor of the coup who resides in Pennsylvania. Contrary to the prudent Western approach, President Putin supported President Erdoğan and the JDP government. President Putin underlined his reinforcement: "We categorically reject the use of unconstitutional and violent methods against states. We offer our condolences for the losses and the wish to restore constitutional order and stability in Turkey as soon as possible" (Department of Corporate Communication of the Presidency 2016: 29 cited in Aktürk, 2019 p.43). The failed coup attempt on July 15 had a multifaceted effect on improving Turkish-Russian relations. President Erdoğan blamed the coup plotters who wanted to harm Turkish-Russian relations by shooting down a Russian plane in November 2015. Consequently, on August 9, 2016, President Erdoğan and President Putin met in Moscow; the meeting was perceived as the end of hostility between the two parties. This trip was significant as Erdogan's first foreign visit after the coup attempt on July 15. In St. Petersburg, President Erdoğan asserted that President Putin's call immediately after the coup attempt "meant a lot psychologically," and the collaboration between the two countries would be repaired soon (Aktürk, 2019). The meeting was not just a symbolic gesture. After a long pause, meetings took place at the presidential and ministerial levels to reinvigorate ties, and the parties agreed to return to the pre-crisis level in bilateral relations. Putin declared that the restrictions placed on Turkish companies would be removed, which was seen as a relief for the Turkish private sector. The leaders also agreed to work on reinstating visa-free travel and charter flights. Most interestingly, the parties also expressed their interest in deepening cooperation in the defense industry (Özterem, 2017). In this manner, Turkey and Russia started a normalization process at the point of their anti-US reactions.

4.2.2.2. Step Two: Coordination

The two countries' rapprochement cannot be described as full cooperation; there was still a severe disagreement between Turkey and Russia throughout the Syrian civil war. However, both Russia and Ankara chose to compartmentalize the areas of conflict and cooperation (Köstem, 2021). Rather than defining the Arab Spring as a democratic movement, Russia skeptically perceived uprising movements as a Pro-Western plot. Conversely, Turkey's position explicitly favored the uprising movements; however, this concrete disintegration lost its effect as the Assad regime consolidated its power. Turkey was balancing the tremendous military power in the world, namely the US, by seeking closer collaboration with Russia. Turkey's rapprochement with Russia, within the framework of the security crisis, was a kind of crisis exit strategy. For Turkey, the primary security issue was PYD-YPG, which took control of one-third of Syria rather than the Assad regime. In February 2016, President Erdoğan questioned the alliance of the USA because it supported the YPG on the one hand; on the other hand, he was saying that the artillery shots against YPG would never stop (BBC, 2016). President Erdoğan asserted,

Are not we together in NATO with the United States? Are we your ally, or PYD or YPG? We want to know that too... We have no intention of stopping artillery fire against the PYD and YPG... We will never allow a new Qandil to form in northern Syria (BBC, 2016).

In the same period, Erdoğan also expressed that his patience was running out; it was the footsteps of a military operation.

While President Erdoğan was giving these offensive messages to the USA one after another, the areas of cooperation with Russia were expanding. In August 2016, representatives of Ankara and Moscow agreed to improve the cooperation between intelligence agencies, foreign ministries, and chiefs of staff (Ersen, 2017). From then onwards, military units of Turkey and Russia in Syria shared information and coordinated their actions; for example, army chiefs, heads of intelligence agencies, and defense ministers have strengthened coordination with regular joint meetings (Erşen & Köstem, 2020). This coordination was crucial in terms of Turkey because this allowed the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) to initiate its first military operation in Syria. After the normalization and coordination process, Moscow gave the green light for

Turkey to use military force in Syria (Aktürk, 2019). The primary exterior outcome of the normalization was seen with the initiation of Operation Euphrates Shield in August 2016, when Turkey became military entangled in Syria to eliminate YPG components, particularly from the Azaz-Jerablus strip (Yükselen, 2020). Russia provided support in military and intelligence to the operation launched by Turkey (Koçak, 2016, p.16). This support can be interpreted as meaning that the relations between the two countries gained momentum after the jet crisis. The bilateral relations, which were improved after the jet crisis, relieved Turkey's regional policy in Syria. In the post-2016 period, Turkey has become part of a challenging balancing game between two great powers, namely Russia and the US. This balancing game allowed Turkey to initiate a military operation in northern Syria to create a safe zone. Simultaneously Turkey has been in the dangerous pincer of being used by both parties in their clash against each other (Altunışık, 2020). The security gap process did not shift Turkish foreign policy to a security-only axis; it also turned the axis of Turkish foreign policy from a strategic partnership with the US to a strategic partnership with Russia, just as Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu underlined. The resurgence of the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant project, the purchase of S-400 air defense systems, and the Turk Stream project that was signed in 2016 were illustrations of new foreign policy rotation (Güler et al., 2021).

4.2.2.3. Step Three: Alignment

Russian-Turkey collaboration has quickly become an informal geopolitical alignment after 2016 (Köstem, 2020). According to Snyder (1997, p.6), alignment definition is based on “expectations of nation-states about whether they will be supported or opposed by other states in future interactions.” The concept of alignment with other states contains reciprocal expectations of various policy cooperation and coordination in the security field under specific conditions (Walt, 1987). Cooperation between Turkey and Russia has expanded from nuclear energy to natural gas pipelines and even the defense industry after 2016. In terms of Turkey, the fight against the PKK and its Syria offshoot YPG became the most critical factor as their attacks on the Turkish security forces and civilians intensified during the 2015-2016 period (Erşen, 2017). When viewed from this angle, the reconciliation process with Russia became an obligation for Turkey to deal with cross-border threats. On the other hand, Russia

desired cooperation with Turkey to secure its long-term benefits in the Middle East and the Black Sea after the costly Ukraine and Syria interventions. Turkey and U.S. disagreements due to the growing U.S. support for the YPG in Syria also allowed Russia to exploit the increasing divergence between two NATO allies.

During this period, cooperation was made between Turkey and Russia in many fields, from nuclear energy to natural gas pipeline projects and even to the defense industry. For instance, Akkuyu nuclear project, which was suspended after the 2015 jet crisis, was reactivated with the Turkey-Russia rapprochement. The Turkish government even agreed to assign “strategic investment” status to the Akkuyu project. Moreover, President Putin arrived in Turkey one month after President Erdogan visited Russia in August; in October 2016, they also signed the Turkish Stream natural gas pipeline (Ersen, 2017). Turkey-Russia cooperation had moved to a much more problematic point for the US when President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced the signing of the S-400 agreement in his speech at the JDP Parliamentary Group Meeting on July 25, 2017 (BBC Türkçe, 2017). A senior foreign ministry official, who did not want to be named, said the following about the S-400 purchase.

In my opinion, the S-400 issue is a kind of cost of the plane crash. Turkish authorities were giving 3 reasons at that time for S-400 purchases. The first is technology sharing. Second, fast delivery. Third, affordable price. But first of all, Russians never share technology. On the other hand, although there were advantages in terms of delivery time and price, there were serious problems in terms of efficiency. There is a concept called integrated air defense. This occurs with radars, not on their own. An indivisible picture emerges when all of NATO's radar systems are integrated, then you will know the moment the missile is launched. If a system is not integrated into a large radar network, you can only do point defense with it. You cannot defend the zone (14.10.2022, Interview).

After 2016, security perceptions and expectations came to the fore in the foreign policy-making process in Turkish foreign policy. Since the PKK and YPG are at the center of the vulnerability, the areas of cooperation in Turkish-Russian relations began to increase as a counterbalance to the US. The increasingly powerful anti-Turkey policies of the US, the harsh rhetoric of the Trump Administration that advanced disputes, namely the PKK, FETO, and the Eastern Mediterranean, were perceived by Turkish decision-makers as a menace to Turkey's national security.

The Astana meetings between Russia, Turkey, and Iran created a suitable basis for the post-coordination process. In December 2016, Turkey and Russia agreed on an evacuation plan for civilians from Aleppo (Köstem, 2020). As of the end of 2016, Turkey, Russia, and Iran were looking for ways to cooperate at the table. The ministers of the Foreign Affairs of the Turkish Republic, the Russian Federation, and the Islamic Republic of Iran met in Moscow on December 20, 2016, and they agreed on a future roadmap for the Syrian civil war (MFA, 2016). Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov stated that Turkey and Russia took a step into a “strategic partnership,” He also underlined that this is the transition from bipolar order to multi-polarization. (Xinhua, 2018 cited in Köstem, 2020). In a similar line, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu defined Russia as Turkey's strategic partner (T24, 2018).

In fact, when we consider Turkey's security gap process and the role of the USA in this process, collaboration with Russia throughout the Syrian civil war was a sort of must in terms for Turkey rather than an option. Because in the post-2016 process, Turkey has been principally driven by counteracting the PYD-YPG menace in northern Syria. By stages, the three military operations of Turkey in the post-2016 process allowed Turkey to maintain its effectiveness in Northern Syria. However, those military operations were conducted with (and thanks to) the agreement with Russia. On the other hand - by collaborating with Turkey, Russia desired to undermine the transatlantic alliance and its strategic aim of Western-led regime change (Köstem, 2020). Former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu accepted the Turkish-Russian agreement on military operations in a live broadcast he attended in August 2021 with the following words: “Operation Euphrates Shield was prepared during my prime ministry. However, just as the operation was being carried out, the city of Aleppo was sacrificed for the Russians to accept the operation.” (Habertürk Tv, 2021). This statement shows that as the security problems from Syria accumulated, the fall of Assad was put in the background.

4.3. The Security Vacuum in Northern Syria and Faith Accompli Conquest of Turkey

On November 24, 2015, Turkey shot down a Russian plane and the crisis caused by this situation with Russia caused a decrease in Turkey's effectiveness in Syria. Due to

the resolution process that ended in the same year, the PKK started to organize large-scale terrorist attacks across the country, and this caused Turkey to direct its energy in the fight against terrorism more inside the country. During the period from 2015 to 2016, when Turkey revised its Syria policy with a new understanding, the PYD-YPG, which received the support of the United States by citing its fight against ISIS, had the opportunity to expand its field of activity and influence in Syria. The power vacuum in Syria and the rapid spread of PYD-YPG in the region have caused a serious security threat for Turkey. In other words, the risks posed by the rise of cross-border terrorism carried out mainly by PKK affiliates and the ISIS on the Turkish home front increased dramatically in 2015 and 2016. This was accompanied by critical suspense regarding the possibility of increased instability in Turkey's surroundings due to neighboring countries collapsing into failed states and the perceived threat that a security vacuum would spill across the Turkish border from Syria and Iraq. Moreover, PYD was trying to form a sort of "Kurdish zone" in northern Syria called a terror corridor by Turkey, next to Turkey's Mediterranean Sea border. This was considered a destabilizing factor in the region and an enormous threat to Turkey's national interests. On the other hand, terrorist groups are taking advantage of the power vacuum in Syria, which has created a weakness in Turkey's internal security. This thesis identified this transformative process as the "Security Gap" process. Because before the Security Gap process, the proxy war waged by the JDP government within the framework of its offensive foreign policy had now turned into a direct military intervention. In other words, Turkey's offensive foreign policy has changed its method. In this context, Turkey carried out three military operations to eliminate these internal and external security weaknesses originating from Syria. Turkey's military operations against Syria might have been evaluated following Altman's "faith Accompli Conquest" theory, which has recently gained ground in the international relations literature. According to Danial Altman (2020, p.517), "conquest evolved in fundamental ways" due to the familiar principle of territorial integrity in international relations. Consequently, territorial wars became rare and invading an entire country almost wholly disappeared. According to Danial Altman, prevalent evidence suggests that a territorial conquest widely decreased after the end of the Second World War.

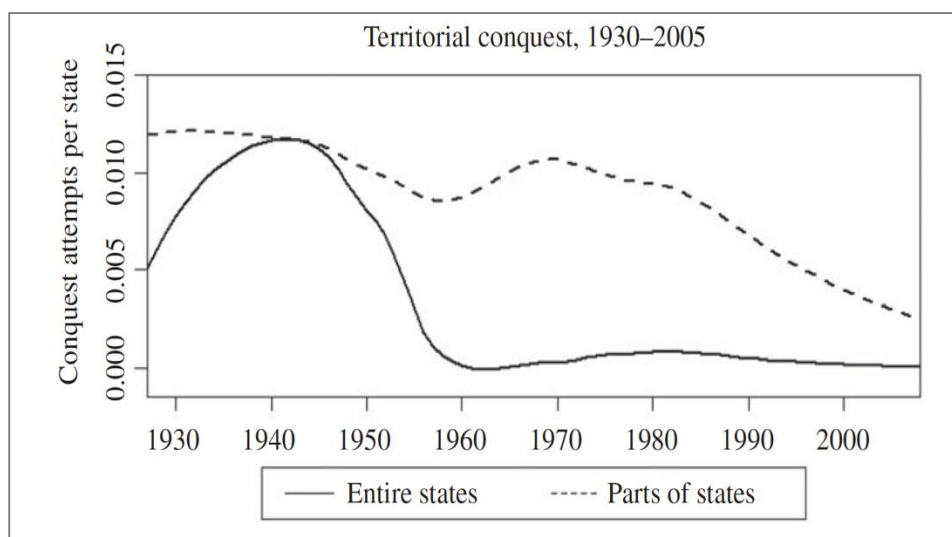


Figure 18. The Graph of Territorial Conquest between 1930-2005

However, it does not necessarily mean that conquest is gone, but it has changed. As nation-states increasingly search for opportunities to capture territory without initiating wars, "the faith accompli" invasion has become the overall strategy for conquest (2020). In contrast to the 1945 era, nation-states capture small pieces of territory to prevent total war in this new invasion version. Thus, faith accompli aims for much smaller territories and anger war less frequently. Turkey's military operations in Syria might be evaluated on this theoretical basis. As Altman stated, Turkey's military operations against Syria have aimed at small pieces of Syria, trying not to provoke an all-out war in the region. As Turkey increasingly sought opportunities to seize territory without initiating wars, the fait accompli became the predominant method in Turkey (Altman, 2020).

Turkey's decision-makers launching military operations against some areas of Syria in the post-2016 period is directly related to Turkey's security deficiencies that Turkey is exposed to. The Kurdish Autonomous Administration in northern and eastern Syria has been of great concern to Ankara, seeing it as a threat to its national security. Turkey's main problem was that Syrian Kurdish self-rule might encourage Kurds in Turkey to take steps for autonomy or independence in the southeastern part of Turkey. Following an attempt by the YPG to take control of the border town of Ras al-Ayn in late 2012, Turkey responded by supporting Free Syrian Army (FSA) factions and Islamist brigades to deactivate them. After a long period of conflict, YPG eventually captured the town in July 2013. After this point, Turkey has been on guard against

what it sees as the danger of a PYD and YPG more than before, a danger that was increased by the breakdown of negotiations in Turkey with the head of the PYD, Salih Muslim, then the breakdown of the "resolution process" with the PKK in 2015.

Finally, the US' assurance on the YPG as a critical land power partner in its war against ISIS led to the YPG taking control of Manbij in August 2016. The Raqqa operation jointly carried out by the USA and the YPG at the end of 2016 provokes further Turkey's security concerns. All these developments shaped Turkey's foreign policy and Syria strategy; the results in the region prepared the option of unilateral use of hard power to stop the YPG at different times and in different circumstances. Turkey has used military force to achieve its strategic objective of constraining the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) activity, which it views as the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The Turkish-controlled areas of Syria comprise 8,835 square kilometers covering more than 1,000 settlements, including cities such as Afrin, al-Bab, Azaz, Jarabulus, Jindires, Rajo, Tel Abyad, and Ras al-Ayn (İşyar, 2018). Turkey captured the strategic regions in Syria without starting an all-out war with Syria in three military operations after 2016.

The senior commander, who has served for a long time beyond the border, especially in Afrin, says the following about the new military security concept;

The current counter-terrorism concept of the Turkish Armed Forces is different from before. The old concept was more defensive. we were primarily trying to defend the areas in our own country. This concept includes permanent operations by creating bases of operations in specific and strategic points. The new concept is based on cross-border operations, going to a reasonable depth beyond the border and drawing lines there (Interview, 9.11.2022).

This military concept of Turkey, which goes down to the depth of the border with cross-border military operations and becomes permanent there, is compatible with Altman's *Fait Accompli Conquest* approach. In post-2016 military operations, just as Daniel Altman described, Turkey's began to control small parts of northern Syria. Turkey's main goal here is to push the PYD-YPG terrorist organization, which is close to the border line, forward. Nonetheless, military operations are beyond self-defense because after the operation, the local and permanent governments were established by Turkey in the region.

A senior commander in Turkey's military operations zone says:

Turkey's security problem is very clear. For example, Azez - Jarablus line, which is under the control of terrorists, is just 33 km from Turkey. The range of missiles fired from there could easily hit Gaziantep and Kilis. Even during the operation, if I remember correctly, 27 missiles fell on this region. But as the Turkish army went deeper, the missile range of the terrorists was not enough. Therefore, there was only one commando battalion in El-Bab. There was only 1 brigade on the Azez-Jarablus line. There were 6 brigades during my duty. Now there is even more. We did the same tasks there as the gendarmerie did in the country to ensure safety and order. Together with the people we formed from reliable men of the Free Syrian Army which investigated by the MIT, we ensured the order. Deputy Governors from Gaziantep are administering Al-bab and Jarablus. Kilis deputy governor is also responsible for Azez. This is also the case in Afrin (Interview, 3.11.2022).

As it is seen, Turkey has not only carried out a cross-border military operation, but also established local governments in the regions against the threats arising from the central authority vacuum. As Altman underlined, Turkey's military operations against Syria have aimed at small pieces of Syria to push backed terrorist organizations and also controlling the strategic areas through local governments. As Turkey increasingly sought opportunities to seize territory, the *fait accompli* became the primary method.

Regarding Turkey's military operations after 2016, the retired Syrian ambassador says;

As of 2016, Turkey's priority was to clean up the ISIS and YPG right next to its border as much as possible. Territories were created through military operations. However, these attempts, which were presented as solutions, had different complications in themselves. There are many armed groups in Turkey's operational areas, apart from its own army. There are a number of problems posed by these armed groups. In the absence of a holistic approach, we see that the current *de facto* situation creates different problems in itself (Interview, 13.11.2022).

Table 2. Key events In Turkey's Shift to Hard Power and Security Oriented Policies

2012	<i>PYD-YPG</i>	<i>PYD's Occupation of Three Important Regions in Northern Syria (Qamishli, Jazira, Hasakah)</i>
2013	<i>ISIS</i>	<i>The Rise of ISIS, Proliferation of Terrorism, Immense Influx of Refugees</i>
2013	<i>PYD/YPG</i>	<i>The Declaration of Autonomous Administration in Northern Syria by PYD/YPG</i>
2015-2016	<i>ISIS – PYD/YPG</i>	<i>Internal and External Security Challenges of Turkey (Security Gap)</i>
2015	<i>Russia</i>	<i>Foreign Intervention, the Change of Equation in Syrian Civil War</i>
2016	<i>PYD/YPG</i>	<i>The Establishment of Extended Autonomous Administration in Northern Syria by PYD/YPG</i>
2016	<i>Coup Attempt</i>	<i>Internal Instability, Military Role in Politics, Security Anxiety</i>

4.3.1. The Operation Euphrates Shield (August 2016)

The first and the effective indirect resultant of Turkey-Russia rapprochement after the failed coup attempt in July 2016 was the initiation of Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) by Turkey. Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield was made possible under the right coordination with Russia. Despite the coordination between the two countries, Turkey is not very comfortable in the operation process. One of the senior commanders in the region describes the difficulties Turkey faced with Russia during the Euphrates Shield Operation process as follows;

We had serious problems with Russia during the operation. There were times when we could not fly drones because they controlled the airspace. There were times when Russia completely closed its airspace. At such times, drones served near the border, but this reduced visibility. During the periods when the negotiations between Turkey and Russia were positive, the airspace was opened. At that time, the operation was advancing very fast, and when the airspace was closed, it slowed down again. Every time the airspace was opened, we were doing our forward operations much more comfortably.

Besides that, Just as Yükselen underlined (2020, p.108), OES signified the change of strategy in Ankara's approach to the Syrian case. As a result of the Security Gap process, in one way, Turkey's homeland has become vulnerable to threats that came from both ISIS and YPG; in the other way, the Syrian branch of the PKK terrorist organization has captured one-third of Syria. From this point forward, there is an

urgent target for Turkey that is more prioritized than the fall of Assad; to destroy the terrorist elements that dominate the other side of the border and protect the border. Similarly, according to Bağcı (2015), Turkey had three fundamental national interests/targets in Syria;

1. to prevent the establishment of any Kurdish government in Northern Syria,
2. to control radical Islamist groups in Syria,
3. to have a new government in Syria that Turkey can control.

Three elements for Turkey; regime forces, PYD-YPG and radical jihadist groups in the region were the source of security risks. However, the two structures that directly affected the internal security problems in Turkey were ISIS and the PYD-YPG and in this respect, they have become a priority in Turkish foreign policy. Territorialization of the ISIS and PYD-YPG and their spillover into Turkey with an increasing number of terrorist assaults were not tolerable for Turkey. Therefore, President Erdoğan underlined that the military operation, which is called Euphrates Shield, aimed to eliminate both the ISIS and YPG, in his words: "Terror groups that threaten our country in northern Syria" (Hürriyet Daily News, 2016). This political discourse demonstrates that the homeland's security has become a primary issue on the Turkish foreign policy agenda.

ISIS was controlling about a 100-kilometer borderline in the Azaz – Jarablus, north of Syria; under these circumstances, the borderline of Turkey could have readily led to the aiming of other border placements and military points in Turkey notably the city of Kilis. Between April and May 2016, ISIS increased rocket attacks almost every day; the town of Kilis was attacked by rockets with Katyusha rockets. During there assualts, 19 people died, and 67 people were wounded due to the rocket attacks of ISIS (Hürriyet Daily News, 2016).

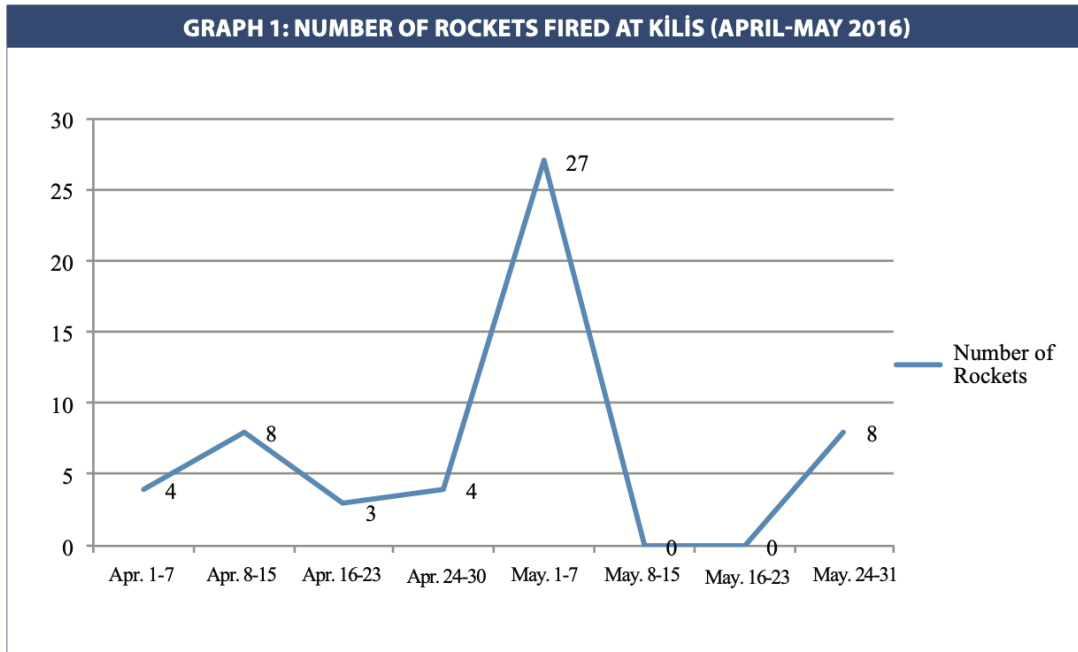


Figure 19. The Graph of Fired Rocket Numbers at Kilis -2016

Other than those rockets attacks, ISIS intensified suicide attacks in Gaziantep, an area close to the border. For instance, just before the OES, 54 civilians were killed in a wedding ceremony by ISIS (Yeşiltaş et al., 2017). There had been at least 14 attacks between 2015 and 2017, which caused the death of over 300 civilians and more injuries (Yükselen,2020). ISIS targeted to open a front in Turkey through intractable conflict and then localize its existence in Turkey by recruiting new militants. However, the threat perception that triggered the military operation was twofold for Turkey Except for ISIS. There was another dimension of intensification of terror attacks done by PKK. In addition, the attempts to establish an autonomous zone of PYD/YPG in the north of Syria were fueling the problem of terrorism. The threat orientation of the two terrorist organizations was intertwined. PKK was trying the create security pressure on Turkey by committing acts of violence within the cities. The fundamental aim was to absorb Turkey's energy internally by solidifying the military power in northern Syria. While achieving this goal, the PKK terrorist organization was using the presence of ISIS as a strategic advantage. In this way, it has been successful in gaining the support of the international community.

To sum up, the growing internal and external threat of PKK-YPG and ISIS's terrorist attacks created security deficiencies for Turkey, which led to OES. OES was launched

within the new foreign policy approach, internal security, border security, and the destruction of terrorist elements across borders. Before the operation of Euphrates Shield, Turkey hit PKK/YPG targets in the region all week, demonstrating Turkey will not let them fill the vacuum if ISIS leaves. Moreover, through hard power components, Turkey has been involved in the Syrian civil war by reminding the right of self-defense in Article 51 of the UN charter (Öztiğ, 2019).

On August 24, 2016, the OES might be considered a turning point in Turkey's Syrian foreign policy as a military reflection of the new foreign policy paradigm. Particularly in the first phase of the Syrian civil war, Turkish foreign policy, with the effect of neo-Ottomanism, declared itself the pioneer of change in the Middle East and tried to maximize its power in the region. This expansionary and offensive foreign policy failed and created several security vulnerabilities for Turkey in time. To eliminate these security vulnerabilities, Ankara has increasingly begun to use military power after 2016 (Altunışık, 2020). Operation Euphrates Shield emerges as the first of these military operations. It is meaningful in bringing the principle of self-protection to the fore in Turkey; it has shifted to security-centered policies. Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) and the FSA captured the regions of Azaz in the west, Jarablus in the east, Al-Bab in the south, and the triangular territory in between, which also includes the zones of Marea and Dabiq. At the end of March 2017, the Turkish National Security Council declared that the OES had finished successfully. Ankara announced that;

The objectives were to secure borders and eliminate the threats and terrorist attacks of ISIS and ensure a chance for our Syrian brothers to turn back their homeland" (National Security Council, 2017). Therefore, it might be underlined that Ankara has defined the targets of Operation Euphrates Shield as securing the Turkish border and stopping the ISIS-linked terrorist attack in the homeland, providing an opportunity for repatriation of Syrian refugees enforcing external security, and eliminating of cross border terrorist units.

The primary goal of the operation was to clear the borderline from ISIS, prevent attacks on border provinces, and establish border security. In addition, Turkey wanted to stop the westward advance of the YPG, which has organic ties with the PKK and to prevent efforts to create an independent Kurdish corridor in this region. In March 2017, TAF and FSA captured Syrian towns such as Jarablus, Al-Rai, Daibq, and Al-Bab from ISIS. While Turkey's operation in Northern Syria, Russia has, in general, kept its

reaction moderate and has tried to boost the coordination between Russian and Turkish armed forces (Ersen, 2017). Thanks to the collaboration with Russia, Turkey signaled to the U.S and NATO that it would no longer wait for consent from them to create a safe zone (Köstem, 2020).

4.3.1.1. Political Alignment Between Turkey and Russia: Astana Meetings and Sochi Agreement

On December 20, 2016, the foreign ministers of Turkey, Russia, and Iran agreed to collaborate to achieve a robust ceasefire to reach reconciliation based on the territorial integrity of Syria (Yükselen, 2020). The reconciliation process came to life with the Astana summit in January 2017, where Turkey, Russia, and Iran underlined their commitment to a political resolution. Neither the U.S nor the PYD-YPG was invited to attend. The deepening cooperation through the Astana process between Russia and Turkey caused an unsaid exclusion of the U.S from the political resolution process in Syria, which led the Western powers to define the Astana meeting as a different version of the fruitless Geneva process. While the United Nations launched the Geneva meetings, the Astana process became the innovation of Russia, Turkey, and Iran as the guarantors of the ceasefire in Syria. Thereupon Turkey accelerated its pledge to the already signed de-escalation zones (DEZ) in four regions of Syria (Köstem, 2021). In this way, Turkey tried to boost its bargaining chip against the US. Thus, the Astana process and the alignment with Russia turned out to be a balancing act (Yükselen, 2020). After engaging with Russia over the Syria crisis, Turkey chose softer discourse against the Assad regime, which might be perceived as another significant gain for Russia (Özterem, 2017). Turkey's changing discourse and position in terms of priority in Syria policy was also a reflection of the realities on the field, mainly after Assad took control of Aleppo in December 2016. As a result of the meeting between Turkey, Russia and Iran held in Astana; a mechanism was created to promote and observe the ceasefire. It was mainly introducing a non-Western approach to a potential resolution agreement. According to the memorandum on establishing the de-escalation areas in Syria of May 4, 2017, Idlib province, Homs, Eastern Ghouta, and Southern Syria have become the de-escalation zones, as seen in the table.

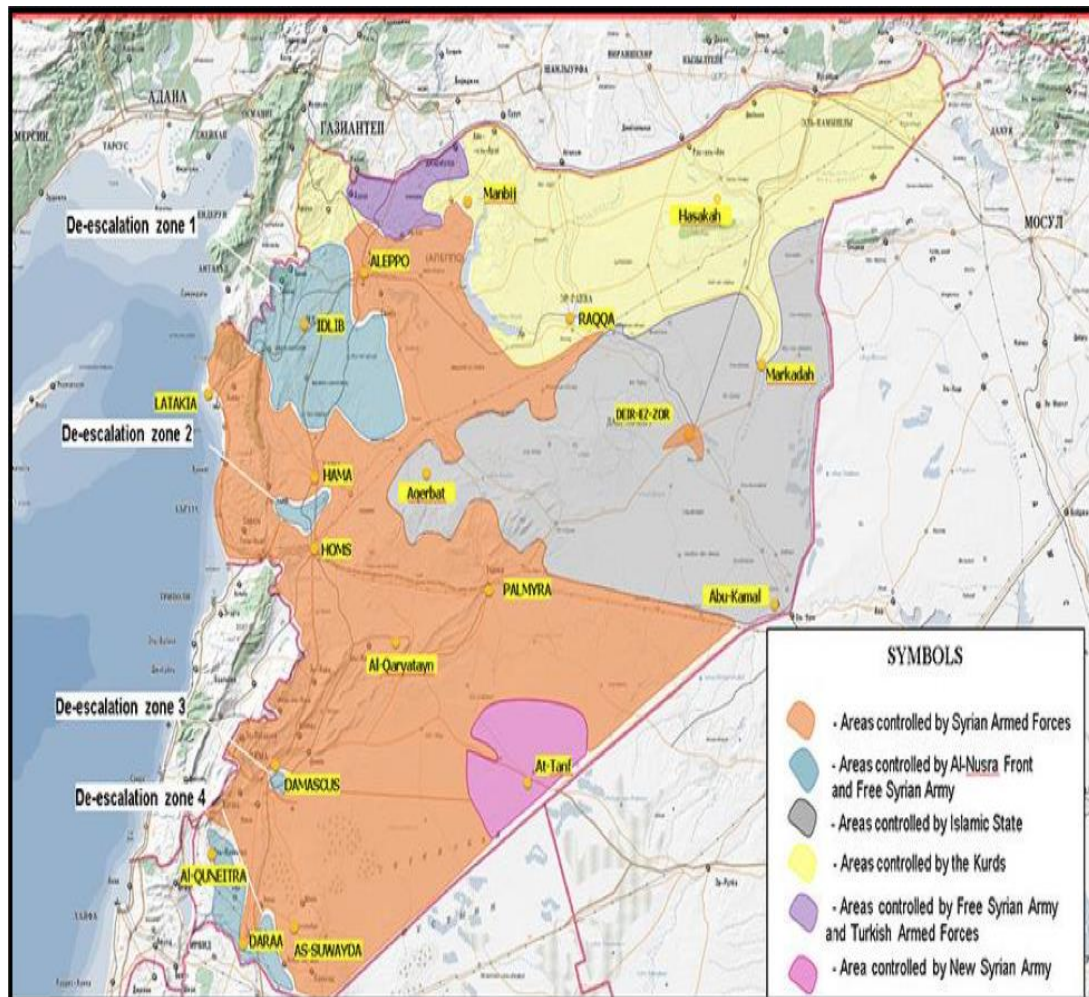


Figure 20. De-escalation Zones in Syria

To be more specific, the first non-conflict zone was created on July 8 in Deraa. A second de-escalation zone was created in eastern Ghouta at the end of July. Afterward, de-escalation zones were created in Homs and Idlib, respectively (Önhon, 2021). Nevertheless, with Russian military support, the Assad regime utilized the de-escalation zones to exterminate the opposition and repair the domination of regime forces. Although the four de-escalation zones caused a relative reduction in violence within a month after the Astana agreement, in time Astana process facilitated the restoration of the regime's control in the opposition-held residential district. The reduction in conflict in de-escalation zones helped the Assad forces battle ISIS in its last fortress. However, as soon as fighting with ISIS slowed down, the Assad forces activated front lines in Idlib and other de-escalated zones. As a result, the de-escalated zones different than Idlib fell one by one. The changing nature of Idlib through this

process has turned into a place where 4 million refugees gathered and a place where radical groups were blended into the civilian population (Köstem, 2020).

The tripartite mechanism in the Astana process at the point of resolution of the Syrian crisis has deepened with the first Sochi meeting between President Erdoğan and President Putin. Having underlined before, Idlib was also added to the defined de-escalation zones within the roof of the Astana process. In this context, Turkey became the guarantor of the opposition components in Idlib. On September 17, 2018, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met his counterpart, President Vladimir Putin, in Sochi to discover their alternatives to prevent massive destruction in Idlib, and the "Memorandum on stabilizing the situation in the Idlib de-escalation zone" was signed by the Turkish and Russian Defense Ministers (Önhon, 2021). President Erdoğan and President Putin agreed on the establishment of a demilitarized zone. The Sochi agreement required a 15 to 20-km deep demilitarized zone freed from heavy weapons (Aljazeera, 2019). Under the agreed terms, Russian and Turkish troops will patrol in coordination to isolate the Assad regime forces and the opposition forces.

4.3.2. The Operation Olive Branch and the U.S. - Turkey Relations

In 2018, the U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson underlined that the US needed to be on the ground in Syria; otherwise, the power vacuum would be filled by Iran and Russia (US Department of State, 2018). Especially after 2015, the support of the USA to the PKK'S Syria branch YPG was apparent. The U.S. strategy to counteract ISIS rotates around the logic "by, with and through local forces" (Üstün, 2021) to prevent using US powers in genuine war. Nevertheless, the US administration chose to cooperate with the YPG- with its new name Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)- as a challenge to the Arab opposition groups lined up with Ankara. The CENTCOM and other U.S. institutions have encouraged the YPG-dominated SDF as the most effective armed element on land. The profound distrust between Ankara and Washington, particularly after the Kobani siege crisis, has aggravated and played a crucial role between the two parties. In August 2016, after the YPG crossed into the west of the Euphrates, Turkey initiated the OES to stop establishing a contagious zone dominated by the YPG in northern Syria. However, the aim of keeping the YPG away from the borders and west part of Euphrates could not be fully achieved with OES (Yükselen,

2020). Although Turkey had some hopes about the new page with the Trump administration, its final decision of Trump about the Raqqa operation did not change the momentum. Having come to power with significant pledges about downing ISIS, the Trump administration allowed the CENTCOM plans for Raqqa to continue as planned. Afterward, it authorized the direct arming of the YPG (Üstün, 2021). The changing condition of weaponry and sophisticated organization with the US support signaled the purpose of the YPG to accommodate a kind of an autonomous political structure in time which pushed Turkey to adopt a strategy to eliminate this possibility.

Five days before Operation Olive Branch (OOB), President Erdoğan accused the US of setting up a terrorist army on Turkey's border (BBC, 2018). Looking at the statements made by Erdoğan before the operation, it is challenging to say that there is an alliance between the two countries. On 15 January 2018, President Erdoğan stated,

America has admitted that it has established a terrorist army along the borders of our country. We must strangle this terror army before it is even born. The Turkish Armed Forces will settle the Afrin and Manbij issues... This is what we will say to all our allies: Remove your markings from the terrorists' uniforms so that we do not have to bury them in the ground along with the terrorists (BBC, 2018).

It is seen that in 2018, and Turkey has taken a stance against the US's Syria policy in the highest and harshest way. The President of Turkey has made it clear that by circling Afrin from the south, Turkey has ensured that the YPG could not create an autonomous and contiguous zone in its ambitions to reach the Mediterranean. On 9 January 2018, president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan asserted that Turkey would continue its military operation in Syria's Afrin and Manbij regions (Reuters, 2018). On 20 January 2018, the Turkish military began an intervention in the Afrin region of Syria, code-named by Turkey Operation of Olive Branch. The YPG forces had taken significant advantages in Afrin since 2012, when the Assad regime withdrew from this region. After the initiation of the operation, in 58 days, Turkey achieved to expel the YPG forces and captured Afrin in 2018 (TRTWORLD, 2020).

President Erdogan declared two fundamental purposes; firstly, Turkey has aimed to eliminate the terror corridor of its southern border; secondly, Turkey has sought to enable the repatriation of Syrian refugees to Syria via a safe zone (A.A., 2018). Turkey insists on imposing its control on Afrin to achieve territorial contiguity on all border

areas between the Turkish city of Jarablus, west of the Euphrates and the Mediterranean Sea. The operation eliminated any possibility of attaining territorial contiguity between the Kurdish regions. It also prevented Syrian Kurds from connecting their central areas, Qamishli, Ain Al Arab, and Afrin, to establish self-rule in the future (Parlar Dal, 2018). The Olive Branch officially ended in mid-March 2018, when Ankara declared its complete control of the city of Afrin following the withdrawal of Kurdish forces. Thus, Turkey has made a significant move against the external security weakness during the Security Gap process

4.3.3. The Search for a Safe Corridor/Zone in Northern Syria: The Operation Peace Spring

By mid-2015, the PYD-YPG's expansion of the mostly Arab-majority northern Syria with their conscious policy of forced displacement against the Arab and Turkmens was at the top of Turkey's list of security concerns. The PYD-YPG's capture of Tal Abyad in June 2015 was a turning point with the PKK's declaration of the so-called "People's Revolutionary War" against Turkey shortly after the occupation of Tal Abyad. According to Turkey, those forced migration movements were consciously carried out by PYD/YPG according to their own demographic interests. In his statements in 2016, President Erdogan expressed his discomfort with the presence of the YPG in Syria and the wave of forced migration made by the YPG. For instance, President Erdoğan asserted that in April 2016, "The PYD/YPG, an extension of the PKK in northern Syria, is forcibly displacing Arabs, Turkmens, and rival Kurdish groups and carrying out ethnic cleansing" (BBC Türkçe, 2016). The PYD-YPG's policy of forced displacement of its Arab, Turkmen, and Kurdish opponents from northern Syria had also been reported by Amnesty International in 2015 (The Amnesty International, 2015). The deliberate expulsion of Arabs and Turkmen from the rural areas of Syria meant a significant security threat for Turkey in the north of Syria. Indeed, Operation Peace Spring surfaced with President Erdoğan's statements that Turkey will conduct a military operation toward the east of the Euphrates, containing the areas such as Ayn al-Arab (Kobane) to Qamishli, and he underlined that "Our preparations are complete" in December 2018 (Yükselen, 2020). With the speech of President Erdoğan at the UN General Assembly in September 2019, Turkey's 3rd military operation plan was fully declared to the world. In his speech at the United Nations General Assembly, President

Erdogan's primary message was on the need for a safe zone for the return of Syrian refugees. He asserted that;

In Syria, there has been no return to the places where neither the regime nor the PKK-YPG nor ISIS exists. The only places refugees return to are the areas we have made safe... We intend to establish a peace corridor with a depth of 30 km and a length of 480 km in the first place. When the safe zone is declared, we have the chance to settle between 1 million and 2 million refugees in this safe zone (AA, 2019).

The safe zone plan that President Erdogan pointed out before the spring of peace is as follows:

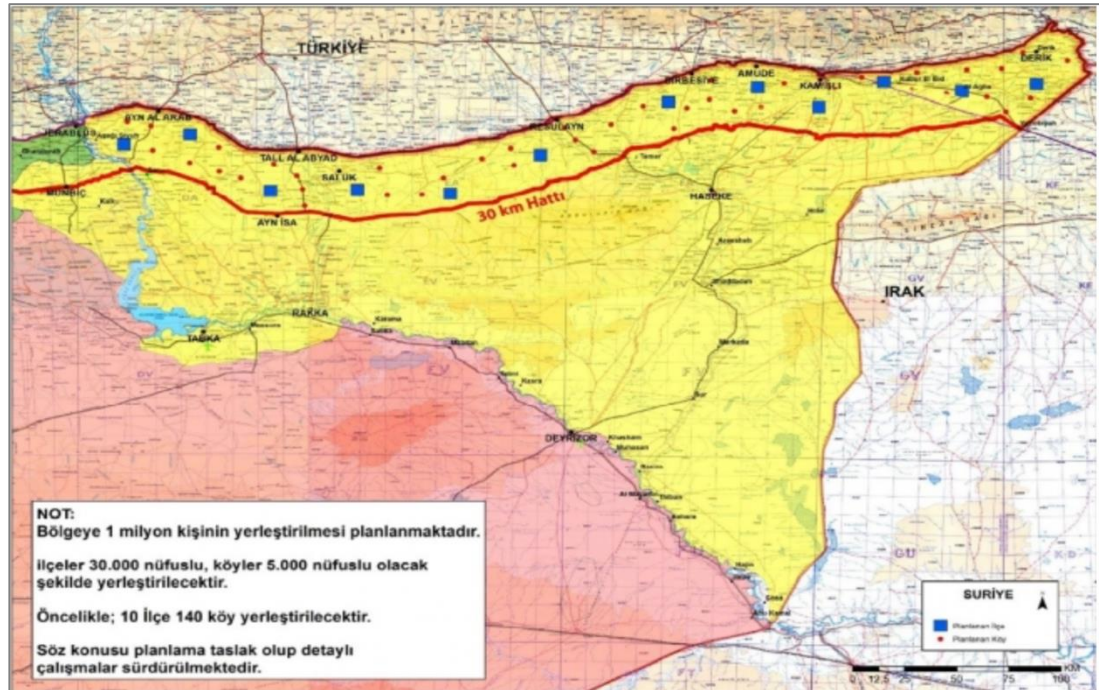


Figure 21. Turkey's Security Zone Plan in Northern Syria (AA, 2019)

In that case, it can be said that the Peace Spring operation has two main objectives; to end the presence of PYD/YPG at and beyond the border and to ensure the return of Syrian refugees to the planned safe zone. Based on these two significant motivations, OPS was launched by the TAF and the allied FSA. In this context, Turkey initiated the operation on October 9, 2019, with a target of primary control between the cities Tal-Abyad and Ras al-Ayn. The fundamental purpose of the operation is defined as the clearance of the border from PYD-YPG terrorists and the establishment of a safe zone for the resettlement of up to 2 million Syrian refugees within the designated area. The

execution of the OPS progressed smoothly, and Turkey took under control between Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ayn. Nevertheless, the diplomatic side of the operation did not proceed in the same way. On the diplomatic side, Turkey was exposed to immense pressure at the start of the operation.

Despite the green light from the Trump administration, Turkey's military operation caused extensive criticism in Washington. For instance, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham and Democratic Senator Chris Van Hollen started a bipartisan endeavor in the Senate to urge economic sanctions on Ankara. Even the American President himself was threatening the Turkish economy on Twitter. Apart from the USA, the European Union and the Arab League also became the center of international pressure against Turkey. On October 9, the President of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker, called on Turkey to stop the Peace Spring Operation in Syria (BBC Türkçe, 2019). On October 12, 2019, the Arab League also condemned the OPS, and they defined the operation as an invasion. On October 13, a significant development took place that determined the future of Turkey's military operation; PYD-YPG left the regions targeted by Turkey to the regime forces, and the Assad regime suddenly appeared to maintain control of territories that were abandoned by PYD-YPG such as Manbij and Kobane. This development can be interpreted as the partial success of the Peace Spring Operation because one of Turkey's main objectives was to remove the YPG from the borderline. President Erdoğan underlined, "The regime's entry into Manbij is not very negative for me. Why? After all, it is their land. But it is important that terrorist organizations do not stay here." (NTV, 2019).

The operation was stopped primarily because of international pressure from US and Russia on October 17, 2019 (Köstem, 2020). As a result of negotiations between President Erdogan and the Trump administration, Turkey agreed to pause the OPS, and in turn, PYD-YPG retreated behind the safe zone created at a depth of about 32 kilometers. Turkey reached another accord with Russia on October 22 in Sochi that guaranteed the withdrawal of the PYD-YPG from the 20-mile-deep safe zone, too (Yükselen, 2020). Ankara and Moscow agreed to establish the status quo in the OPS field that includes Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ayn, with a distance of 32 km. Furthermore, the agreement covered the entry of Russian military police and Syrian border guards

along the Syrian side of the Syrian-Turkish border (outside the area of the Peace Spring Operation) to remove and disarm YPG elements to a distance of 30 km (BBC, 2019).

4.4. Chapter Summary

The year 2016 can be defined as searching for change in Turkey's security. Increasing problems in the context of the Syrian Civil War forced Turkey to make a radical change in its Syria policy. The magnitude of active security threats, namely PKK, ISIS, and the Gülenist coup attempt, far exceeds any other political priorities in Turkish politics. Especially between July 2015 and July 2016, ISIS and PKK terror organizations attacked significant cities and killed hundreds of people in the Turkish homeland. Furthermore, the declaration of an expanded autonomous zone by YPG, the Syrian extension of PKK, as of 2016, further deepened Turkey's security concerns. The thesis explains all these security vulnerabilities as the "Security Gap" concept. Although PYD received outstanding support, notably after Turkey shot down a Russian combat aircraft in November 2015 by Russia, the leading supplier of ammunition and political support came from the US. Under these circumstances, despite the rise of assertiveness of Russia in the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean region, Turkey developed close relations with Russia to balance the US in the area. This form of movement brings to mind the "balance of power", the dominant concept of structural realism. According to Kenneth Waltz (1979, p.118) and his balance of power theory, the alliance formation is comprised in case of material (or perceived) threat; thus, situated states will usually balance against it. In this line, the balance of power theory is an explanatory framework for understanding Turkey's perceptions of the Kurdish threat in Syria.

The threat perception of Turkey's historically came from the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the way the Turkish national identity was built. This situation explains Turkey's bandwagon with Russia to push back Syrian Kurdish entities and end their autonomy claims in northern Syria. Against this historical and deep security threat, Turkey has aimed for safer borders and eliminating terrorist groups in north Syria after 2016. Therefore, after this point, toppling the Assad regime has become a secondary issue on Turkey's agenda; instead, gaining ground in Syria to emaciate the PYD and YPG has become a priority in the region. The target change in Turkey's Syria policy has also changed the methods it has actually applied. The proxy war waged by

Turkey within the framework of the offensive realist paradigm before 2016 left its place to the direct intervention of Turkey's armed forces. The offensive realist framework has not changed, but the tactical methods applied have changed.

At the beginning of Arab Spring, the aspiration of democracy promotion in the Middle East of Turkey shifted to the prevention of Kurdish autonomy or independence in Iraq and Syria. In other words, Turkey's idealistic and more offensive policies in the context of Syria have transformed more security-oriented foreign policy due to the Security Gap process. Turkey took the first step in defining the new security concept by going over the crisis with Russia. It was stated that a new era would begin in Turkish foreign policy after Ahmet Davutoğlu resigned from his position as Prime Minister in May 2016 and was replaced by Binali Yıldırım. Yıldırım expressed this new approach as "increasing friends, decreasing enemies" (İşyar, 2018) After 2013, when the concept of precious loneliness was first used, the developments significantly aggravated Turkey's security problems. By 2016, an understanding has been adopted that accepts loneliness has no value in such a challenging security environment. The new security concept reflects that more friends are needed for greater mobility in a challenging security environment. The normalization of Turkey-Russia relations as of 2016 is a natural consequence of the new security paradigm. Turkey and Russia resolved the crisis between them and started some joint initiatives in Syria. The confrontation between Turkey with two great powers at the same time had upset the balance of power, so the rapprochement between Turkey and Russia was a paramount necessity rather than an option. Turkey signed the Moscow Declaration in December 2016 and became the guarantor country for the ceasefire's continuation. Syria's territorial integrity was emphasized in the declaration, and the PYD/YPG was excluded from the Astana process. These have been essential steps for Turkey's new security paradigm.

The post-2016 security-oriented foreign policy has manifested itself in many areas; ending the open border policy, closure of the Syrian provincial border crossing points, and even the construction of the third-largest border wall in the world emerged as a result of the security paradigm shift in Turkey's Syria policy. Turkey wanted to stop the security weakness caused by mass immigration and open border policy, albeit late. Therefore, the open border policy toward Syria has been abandoned. However, the terrorism problem Turkey faces is not only caused by internal dynamics. External

dynamics are also quite decisive. Moreover, the power vacuum in northern Syria has highlighted external factors more. A cross-border struggle has been launched to neutralize the PKK's extensions in Syria and minimize the threats and risks arising from ISIS's activity on the Turkish border. In this respect, one of the essential dimensions of the new security concept is cross-border security. Furthermore, in the restoration of relations between Turkey and Russia, Turkey increasingly seized the opportunity to seize strategic territories without initiating all-out war, with fait accompli, took control of some regions in the north of Syria. Thus, a policy based on direct military force has been adopted against the ISIS and YPG threats originating from Syria. In this way, Turkey has partially realized its goal of a safe zone, which it has expressed since the first days of the war. Turkey (with three military operations carried out within the framework of the new paradigm after 2016) took some critical strategic points from ISIS and PYD in Syria.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The thesis examines the change in Turkey's Syria policy between 2011 and 2019 within the causality mechanism. The thesis shows that the Syrian civil war has involved diversified actors and agents, making the conflict area and equation multilateral and complex. This global proxy war has undoubtedly caused instability in the region, and Turkey has become a direct party to a proxy war. Turkey's becoming a party to a civil war in the Middle East was against the status quo and basic principles of Turkish foreign policy; the JDP government preferred an offensive approach in the region and turned the Arab Spring into a field of expansion. The targets and policy preferences that Turkey set for Syria were built on a miscalculation, and this miscalculation had consequences for Turkey in terms of security weakness both across borders and inside. This study aims to identify the content and driving reasons for these security challenges and their consequences on Turkish foreign policy from 2011 – to 2019. Based on the aim of the dissertation, the following research question has gained importance: How has the security challenges of Turkey impacted Turkey's Syria policy in time? What is the role of the mass migration from Syria to Turkey in the security vulnerability that Turkey is exposed to? The correlation between the reasons for the paradigm shift in Turkey's Syria policy change and the security vulnerabilities is significant in answering these questions.

Two elements might be seen in Turkey's approach in the early stages of the Syrian crisis; unrealistic optimism and offensive realism. In the context of Syrian crisis, the expectations and predictions of Turkish decision makers and the realities were different from each other. This was most expressively captured in May 2011 when Davutoğlu stated that the Arab Spring is also a Turkish spring and predicted that “this region will live a better future after the sufferings end.” (Bulletin, 2011). From the temporal length of the Syrian crisis to its political consequences, Turkish decision

makers made a mistake of calculation. Turkish policy makers predicted regional gains, for example, regional domination, without much consideration for potential setbacks. These expectations appear to have played an important role in guiding Turkish decision makers to regime change in Syria. Drawing on the early examples of the Arab Spring, Turkish decision-makers assumed that the Assad regime would soon fall through unrealistic optimistic lens. Parallel to this, from the early stages of the Syrian crisis, Turkey saw no harm in becoming the center of both political and military opposition. Since the summer of 2011, the Syrian opposition's political wing, Syrian National Council, and its military wing, Free Syrian Army, have been publicly deployed and supported in Turkey. These offensive policies of Turkey aimed at maximizing power through regime change.

Nonetheless, two critical milestones were determined within Turkey's Syria policy framework between 2011 and 2019. The first important point is that with the establishment of ISIS in April 2013, the balance in the Syrian civil war developed dramatically against Turkey bidirectionally. The first dimension was about the reflection of the rapid rise of ISIS on international actors and the balance. Whereas the Turkish government pushed their resources for the anti-Assad campaign politically and militarily at the core of their Syria strategy, Western powers have prioritized the destruction of ISIS rather than the Assad regime, which was highly harmful to Turkey's Syria policy. In this respect, the rise of ISIS has damaged Turkey's policy goals towards Syria because it triggered the separation between the Western powers and Turkey. The second dimension of the spread of ISIS was directly related to security risks to Turkey. The rapid spread of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and its strengthening in the region caused Turkey's serious border and internal security weaknesses. The wave of violence in Syria spread to Turkey, which triggered the internal security deficiencies.

ISIS was not the only terrorist organization to take advantage of the central authority vacuum in northern Syria. Thanks to the power vacuum in northern Syria, PYD/YPG expanded and established certain self-administration areas around the Turkish border too, which created a severe perception of security risk for Turkey. Both the ISIS and PKK have found suitable ground for infiltration from Syria to Turkey thanks to the power vacuum, mass migration and border security vulnerabilities; the way, they intruded on Turkish territory and carried out multiple attacks causing fear and

instability in Turkey and gaining more and more space for the ISIS and PYD/YPG in northern Syria, declaration of autonomous administration of PYD/YPG first in 2013 and then in 2016, threats to the security of major cities by the most significant terrorist attacks in Turkish history triggered a paradigm shift in Turkey's Syria policy. To conclude, fundamental security concerns became the first and primary agenda item of Turkish foreign policy due to the consequences of the Syrian civil war on the Turkish state. After realizing the rapid expansion of PYD-YPG combined with a project to alter the demographic composition in Syria, Turkey relegated on political transition in Syria to a secondary status and concentrated on pacifying PYD-YPG.

Besides, Turkey's overthrow of the Assad regime is secondary to Russia's direct intervention in the region too. Russia's role and influence in the Syrian civil war equation are crucial for Turkey's paradigm shift in its Syria policy. In the fall of 2015, Russia abandoned the proxy war. Instead, it intervened in the Syrian conflict directly by aiming at Syrian opposition groups through destructive air forces attacks, particularly in the northern parts of Syria, which are incredibly close to the Turkish border. Therefore, direct Russian intervention has become an additional security concern for Turkey. In the same year, when Turkish air forces took down the Russian jet, further security problems were revealed for Turkey, even Turkey alleged that the Russian aircraft had violated Turkish airspace. Due to the jet crisis, Russia conducted measurements and implemented an air-defense system in Syria; in this way, Turkish aircraft operations in the area were blocked. Considering the security risks facing Turkey in northern Syria, when Turkey was not able to use its air force as before in Syria, this affected Turkey's ability to "counter the threat of ISIS spreading into its territory, at the same time PYD/YPG, which achieved to move closer to the Turkish border and took control of southern parts of Syria" (Özterem, 2017, p.125). Therefore, Russia's direct intervention in Syria posed additional security risks to Turkey and significantly reduced the likelihood of Assad falling.

The important security complications emerged when the Assad regime did not fall in terms of Turkey. Terrorist organizations, especially ISIS and PYD-YPG, which increased their area and power in northern Syria with the lack of central authority, created significant internal and external security weaknesses for Turkey. In the thesis, internal and external security vulnerabilities are analyzed in detail over the *Security*

Gap concept. The *Security Gap* process covers all the internal and external security vulnerabilities that Turkey is exposed to due to Syria. With this process, Turkey not only failed to overthrow the Assad regime, but also became the target of the spiral of violence in Syria. These security vulnerabilities can be defined as external shocks which refers to outsourced security crisis. External shocks can cause radical changes in nation-states' foreign policy preferences, just as Herman (1995 p.5) underlined. In this case, too many essential security risks faced by Turkey are, in a way, "external shocks" pushed Turkey to an alternative route in Syria policy.

Here, as stated in the main argument of the thesis, all these security vulnerabilities are revealed the changing nature of Turkey's engagement in the Middle East, especially after 2016, within a fluxional geostrategic and domestic context. The frequent use of military power, closed border policy, and border walls have become constitutive elements of Turkey's new foreign policy and even redefined Turkey's relations with partners and adversaries. Violence and growing terrorism in Syria, which shares Turkey a border more than 900km in length with Turkey, demonstrated its contagious nature - Turkey needed and implemented more security oriented and direct strategy. In this context, the open border policy implemented in 2011 was terminated, border crossing points closed, visa applications re-enacted, third-largest border wall in the world was built on the border by Turkey. Since 2016, Turkey has increasingly used military power to eliminate security risks. According to the Turkish government, those cross-border security risks mainly originated from the existence of PYD/YPG, which is an extension of the PKK terrorist organization. Turkey had failed to persuade the U.S. to cut its backing and collaboration with PYD/YPG and thus faced the US-backed Kurdish entity with links to the PKK along its southern border (Altunışık, 2020).

The transformation in Turkey's Syria policy in terms of goals and methods cannot be understood without analyzing Turkey's security risks originating from Syria. In particular, the regional rise of the PYD-YPG with the support of the USA has also been effective in shaping Turkey's major foreign policy preferences. After 2016, the JDP government began to develop closer relations with Russia; under these circumstances it was necessity rather than an option. This was seen as vital after Russia's direct military intervention in the Syrian civil war in 2015, which gave the Assad regime the upper hand in the conflict. Considering the critical role of Russia in

Syria, Turkey has tended to balance against the US. The Turkish government used the geostrategic importance of Turkish territory by trying to improve close relations with Russia despite all problems. After Erdoğan's letter of apology in June 2016, Turkey-Russia relations developed rapidly in the context of Syria. Cooperation in nuclear energy, tourism, and even the defense industry has been re-established. While this is a maneuver against the US and the US-backed PYD in Syria for Turkey, on the other hand, Russia has also provided an opportunity to alienate Turkey from its NATO allies, mainly the US, as well as to balance its alliance with Iran in Syria. As a result, the foreign ministers of Turkey, Russia, and Iran agreed to hold Syrian peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan, via the triple mechanism. The Astana process between Turkey, Russia, and Iran has provided suitable ground for coordination for those countries. Subsequently, in May 2017, at the fourth round of the Astana process, representatives of those countries signed a memorandum to establish four de-escalation zones in Syria. Indeed, the Astana process might be seen as an extension of foreign policies of three guarantor states, which have been included in the Syrian civil war equation militarily, and an effort to turn military operations into political and diplomatic gains. This triple mechanism was empowered by constant meetings at the senior public diplomacy level. After Russia's direct involvement in Syria in 2015, it was not seen as possible for Turkey to carry out a military operation in Syria without the approval of Russia. Therefore, developing Turkish-Russian relations allowed Turkey to initiate its first military operation in northern Syria, mainly against ISIS and PYD-YPG as of 2016.

In the post-2016 period, security-oriented and militarized foreign policy is clearly emerging in Turkey's Syria policy. As of 2016, the closure of border crossings, the transition to a closed border policy and the construction of a border wall shows Turkey's transition to security policies. Beyond that, unilateral military operations against northern Syria show that the security paradigm continues with its offensive realist dimension. The proxy war that Turkey has been carrying out since the very beginning on the axis of the Syrian crisis has evolved into a direct military intervention with the paradigm shift. One of the main reasons for the threat from Turkey to create a power vacuum caused by the imbalance in Syria. Turkey considers the YPG and its political extension PYD, as the Syrian branch of the PKK, and thus an immediate threat to Turkey's national security. The northern part of Syria was under the control of ISIS and YPG, which Turkey defines as terrorist organizations. The possibility of

the northern Syria turning into a similar structure established by the USA in Northern Iraq increased, and the PKK had created a corridor for itself in the region. Turkey was in a significant divergence with the USA on this issue in Syria and declared the West of the Euphrates to be the red line. However, with the support of the USA, YPG captured Manbij, which was under the control of ISIS, on August 6, 2016, and thus passed to the west of Turkey's red line, the Euphrates. The emergence of threats both inside and outside the country has led Turkey to pursue an active offensive policy in the field. On August 24, 2016, Turkey launched Operation Euphrates Shield Movement with Free Syrian Army forces in order to “defend” the borderline through cross border operation under Article 51 of the United Nations Treaty.

Preventing the expansion of a PYD-administered contiguous Kurdish region is now at the top of its agenda, while regime change from its priorities have dropped in importance. The Russian and Iranian presence on the ground, coupled with the fall of Aleppo to the regime forces, have further confirmed this decision. This situation reinforced the foreign policy choices that use military force against terrorist organizations. This reading of events has formed the background to Turkey's Euphrates Shield Operations in Syria. While the operational goal of Euphrates Shield was to push ISIS back from the Turkish–Syrian border, its strategic goal was to prevent the creation of a contiguous PYD-held territory along the Turkish–Syrian border. At the end of the operation, the goal of establishing a safe zone with a length of 90 km and a depth of 40 km in the north of Syria was achieved, but the goal of sending the YPG to the east of the Euphrates was not realized due to the alliance with the USA (Polat, 2020, p.69).

In the post-2016 period, Turkey's Syria policy evolved into an offensive and militarized line and continued in this way. In other words, since 2016 Ankara has increasingly begun to use military power to pursue its objectives. Parallel to this process, another military operation followed this operation at the beginning of 2018; this time, the target was directly the canton of Afrin, namely PYD/YPG. The OBB reveals a great change in terms of Turkey's goals and allies in the region. Because Turkey, which initially fought with the USA against Assad, has now started to struggle with the PYD, which is supported by the USA, in a way, it has now started to conflict with the USA by proxy (Ekşi, 2018, p. 91). Finally, in October 2019, after negotiations

with Washington, Ankara launched another military operation, Operation Peace Spring, in north-eastern Syria. These military operations aimed to prevent the outbreak of an autonomous Kurdish region in northern Syria. While Turkey's military operations stopped a PYD-controlled contiguous area across its border, they could not fully implement Turkey's planned buffer zone – as seen in the table.

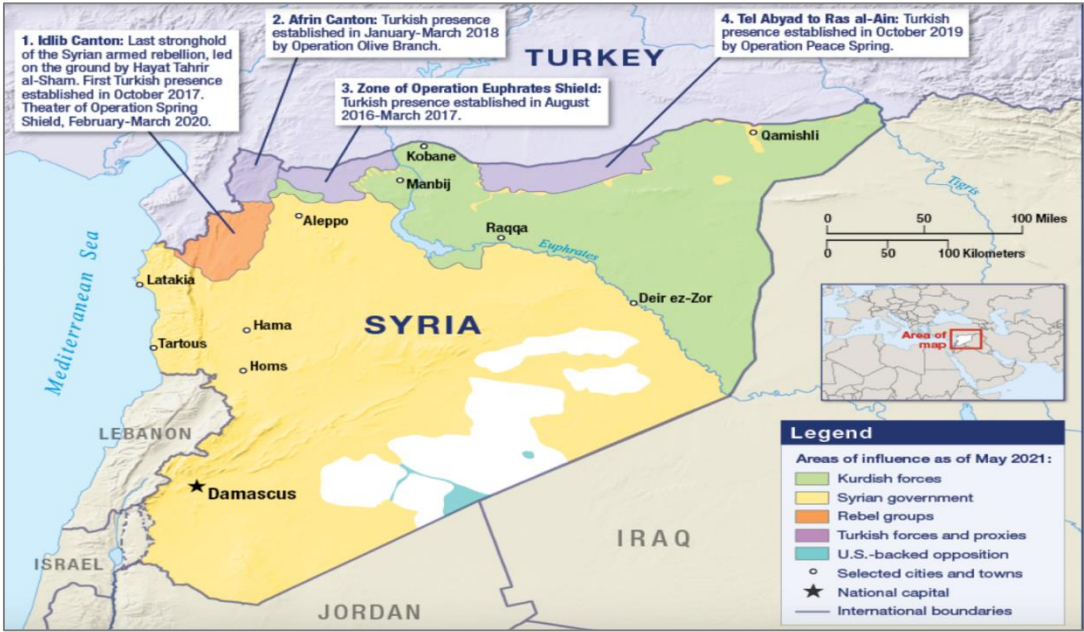


Figure 22. Turkey's Current Safe Zones in Syria

The internal and external security crises that Turkey has been exposed to due to the Syrian civil war have had a decisive effect on foreign policy choices. The process of direct involvement of Turkish decision makers in the Syrian war in the Syrian civil war has been explained through the concept of power maximization in the region. However, the target of regime change in Syria was built on the miscalculation of Turkish decision makers. In fact, the internal and external security crises that Turkey is exposed to are also related to this miscalculation and its subsequent effects. This situation brings the security concept to the forefront, another important concept of the offensive realist theoretical framework. According to Mearsheimer states seek to maximize power in an attempt to attain or maximize security. Because international relations are a zero-sum game where power and security are relative, one state's aspirations for security falls on another states expense (Mearsheimer, 2001). In order to understand Turkey's foreign policy change, there is a need to perceive why nation

states maintain power. Mearsheimer identifies basic assumptions about the international system which explain why states pursue power. Firstly, power is a fundamental concept for all realists, the concept of power exists in the root of how nation states perceive the world around them (Mearsheimer, 2001). Secondly, nation states have to calculate opportunities and risks in proportion to their power. In this sense, with the absence of Hobbes Leviathan and the system is made up of independent, sovereign state with potentially no restraint on their actions (Mearsheimer, 2001). Thirdly, No nation state can be certain about another states intentions, particularly relating to use of offensive military capability. Mearsheimer underlines that causes for aggression (offensive realist policy paradigm) are many and the uncertainty of the aggression levels of other states provokes this situation. This leads states to never be sure if another state is motivated by offensive intentions to act jointly with offensive military capabilities (Mearsheimer, 2001).

When the Syrian uprising started Turkish decision makers perceived the process as a change to maximize its power in the region, therefore they directly involved in the civil war. Turkish decision makers' desire for regime changes in Syria, in other words, their desire to create a Sunni regime close to them can be explained by the desire for power maximization, which is one of the most fundamental elements of offensive realism. However, just as Mearsheimer underlined nation states must calculate opportunities and risks in proportion to their power (Mearsheimer, 2001). Nation states, like individuals, are driven by inherited propensities—their traditional geopolitical inclinations and sense of history. What they differ in their ability to discriminate between "patient ambition" and "imprudent self-delusion" (Brzezinski, 2012). The JDP government in Turkey saw and evaluated the Arab Spring and the Syrian crisis as an opportunity to expand Turkey's geopolitical sphere of influence. Nevertheless, this evaluation was built on a miscalculation, with Brzezinski's dichotomy based on "*imprudent self-delusion*" not "*ambition patience*". Decision-makers in Turkey have set targets beyond their capacity; accordingly, Turkey was exposed to unprecedented security risks internally and externally. The miscalculation about the duration and outcome of the Syrian civil war and the gradual growth of security risks originating from Syria led to a radical change in Turkey's Syria policy and even in all Turkish politics in the post-2016 period. The reason for this paradigm change is the *Security Gap* process, which is the main argument of the thesis.

The paradigm shift created by the security risks originating from Syria actually expresses the target change in Turkey's Syria policy. The rapid rise of radical Islam in the region, the deepening separation between the western bloc and Turkey, and finally the direct Russian intervention in 2015 undermined Turkey's goal of overthrowing the Assad regime. For this reason, Turkey's proxy war against the Assad regime with military and political elements has lost its function. Russia's military intervention in Syria in 2015 and the US military presence in Syria gaining weight over PYD-YPG had significant effects on Turkey's Syria policy. As realist theory emphasizes, states cannot know where the aggression of other states will end and their true intentions. The presence of both Russia and the USA in Syria, as well as the presence of non-state actors that gained strength and space, caused Turkey to transform its policy towards falling Assad. In other words, internal and external security risks have led to a methodological change in Turkey's offensive Syria policy.

Turkey's new paradigm after 2016 has shifted to a more secure and militarized axis. Especially the security risks posed by PYD-YPG in northern Syria were perceived as a priority risk threat on Turkey's agenda. As a result of the internal and external security risks mentioned in the thesis, Turkey started the process of direct military intervention against terrorist elements instead of the proxy war it waged against the Assad regime. Turkey has begun to rely on hard power elements as an efficient tool in Turkish foreign policy, particularly since August 2016, when it initiated Operation Euphrates Shield in order to take control of Al-Bab city in the north of Syria. After that the "Olive Branch" and "Peace Spring" operations had been launched which demonstrates Turkey's offensive-realist foreign policy using direct military elements. Turkey's use of direct military intervention instead of proxy war after 2016 is a result of the "*Security Gap*" process which hit the highest point in 2015 and 2016. Turkey's need to establish a safe zone in northern Syria is directly aimed at preventing PYD-YPG from establishing a domination area in the region. On this axis, it has been treated as an external security crisis in the thesis. In addition, Turkey has increased its border security measures within the security paradigm and aimed to prevent terrorist infiltrations from the north of Syria. As a result, the security weaknesses that Turkey has been exposed to in the process of abandoning the proxy war and resorting to direct military intervention and changing its aims in Syria policy within a security paradigm are a driving factor. With the change in Turkey's agenda and goals towards Syria, its

offensive realist political practices have also changed, and the proxy war has evolved into a direct military intervention. Even if the goal of overthrowing the Assad regime was not realized, the desire of Turkish decision makers to have a say in the future of Syria by increasing the area dominance in the north of Syria remained. In other words, although the methods and priorities changed between 2011 and 2019, the offensive realist paradigm continued to exist. The driving reason for the target and method change in Turkey's Syria policy is the Security Gap process explained in detail in the thesis. Without understanding the *Security Gap* as the driving force behind the paradigm shift in Turkish foreign policy - Turkey's changing Syria policy, transformations and drifts in Turkey's relations with the great powers, and even the reason for authoritarian tendencies in Turkey's domestic politics cannot be understood fully.

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APPENDICES

A: APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



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26 Temmuz 2021

Konu : Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi : İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Bağcı

Danışmanlığınızı yürüttüğünüz Kadir Cenk Özatici'nin "Turkey's Foreign Policy and Syrian Refugee Crisis" başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve **302-ODTU-2021** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.

Prof. Dr. Mine MISIRLISOY
İAEK Başkan

B: TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

2011 yılında patlak veren Arap Baharı, bölgenin jeopolitik denkleminde ve güvenlik paradigmalarında önemli bir çözülmeye neden olmuştur. Bunun sonucunda Suriye, önemli jeostratejik konuma sahip bir ülke olarak, küresel güç mücadelesinin düğümlendiği Ortadoğu'ya terör ve istikrarsızlık ihraç eden başarısız bir devlet haline gelmiştir. Bu çalışma, Suriye iç savaşından kaynaklanan jeopolitik faktörler ve Suriye topraklarındaki iktidar boşluğu çerçevesinde, Türkiye'nin zaman içinde değişen Suriye politikası, sınır kontrol zafiyetleri ve güvenlik açıklarının karşılıklı etkileşimini incelemektedir. Türkiye'nin 2011-2019 yılları arasında değişen Suriye politikasının ardındaki nedenleri açıklamak tezin temel amacını oluşturmaktadır.

Türkiye'de karar vericiler Suriye iç savaşının erken dönemlerinden itibaren sürece doğrudan dahil olmuş ve ülke kısa süre içinde Suriye muhalefetinin merkez üssü haline gelmiştir. Bu bağlamda Türkiye'nin hem söylem hem de eylem bakımından ofansif realist bir dış politika süreci yürüttüğü argümanı öne sürülmektedir. Türkiye'deki ilk Suriye muhalefet toplantısı Nisan 2011 başında İstanbul'da Ak Parti hükümetine yakın bir insan hakları örgütü olan Mazlum-Der tarafından Suriye Müslüman Kardeşler (SMB) Genel Sekreteri Shaqfeh ve Siyasi Şef Muhammed Tayfur'un katılımıyla yapılmıştır (Gürpınar, 2015). Nisan 2011'deki İstanbul toplantısından sonra ikinci toplantı, tıpkı Libya Ulusal Geçiş Komitesi gibi bir nevi daimî komite tarafından 1 Haziran 2011'de Antalya'da yapılmıştır (Gürpınar, 2015). Bu iki kritik toplantının ardından Suriye Müslüman Kardeşleri Türkiye'de birçok toplantı düzenleyerek basın toplantısı ve basın açıklamaları üzerinden taleplerini dile getirme fırsatı bulmuştur. Suriye iç savaşının erken dönemlerinden itibaren Türkiye, iç savaşın muhalif tarafının bir kanalı haline gelmiştir (Hinnebusch, 2015). Haziran 2011'de Türkiye daha sert bir adım atarak Suriye ordusundan kaçanlara koruma sağlamaya karar vermiştir. Bu koruma, Suriye iç savaşının seyrinde çok önemli bir rol oynamış ve kısa sürede Özgür Suriye Ordusu'nun (ÖSO) temelini oluşturmuştur. Böylece Türkiye, Suriye iç savaşının erken dönemlerinden itibaren Suriye muhalefetinin askeri ve siyasi uzantılarının merkez üssü haline gelmiştir. Türkiye'de karar vericilerin bu süreçteki

nihai hedefi Esad rejiminin devrilmesi ve Esad-sonrası dönemde Müslüman Kardeşler merkezli ve Türkiye ile yakın ilişki içinde olan yeni bir iktidarın oluşturulmasıydı. Fakat Türkiye'nin Suriye politikasındaki öncelikleri, Ankara'nın yanlış hesaplamaları, uluslararası dengeler ve "beklenmedik" güvenlik tehditleri nedeniyle zaman içinde büyük ölçüde değişmiştir. Tez de bu değişimi iç savaşın başından itibaren gerçekleşen ve birbirini tetikleyen süreçlerin nedensellik mekanizması içinde açıklamaya çalışmaktadır

Türkiye'nin Suriye iç savaşının başlangıcında belirlediği güç maksimizasyonuna matuf hedefler ofansif realizm çerçevesinde açıklanmaktadır. Ofansif realizmi defansif realist perspektiften ayrıştıran temel nokta Mearsheimer'ın (2001) vurguladığı gibi devletlerin güç maksimizasyonunu ne ölçüde istediği ile ilgilidir. Ofansif realist perspektife göre anarşik uluslararası sistem ulus devletlere güç maksimizasyonu peşinde koşmak için yaygın teşvikler sağlamaktadır. Arap Baharı ve bölgedeki dönüşüm süreçleri Türkiye'nin güç maksimizasyonunu sağlaması için Ak Parti iktidarı tarafından bir fırsat penceresi olarak görülmüştür. 2011-2016 yılları arası süreçte bu beklenti boşa çıkmış ve Esad'ı devirme üzerine inşa edilmiş dış politika hedefi, özellikle 2015'te Rusya'nın doğrudan müdahalesinin de etkisiyle akamete uğramıştır. Hem Suriye politikasındaki hedefin gerçekleşmemesi hem de Suriye iç savaşı kaynaklı güvenlik riskleri ile Türkiye'nin Suriye politikasında bir paradigma değişikliği gerçekleşmiştir. 2016 sonrası süreçte ağırlıklı olarak askerileştirilmiş ve güvenlik odaklı politikalara dönülmüş, bir yönüyle Suriye'de yürütülen vekalet savaşı doğrudan askeri müdahaleye evrilmiştir. Türkiye'nin Suriye krizinde Esad'ı devirme hedefi, karşı karşıya kaldığı güvenlik riskleri nedeniyle zaman içinde öncelik olmaktan çıkmıştır.

Türkiye'nin 2011 itibariyle izlediği açık sınır politikasının ve bölgeden yoğun kitlesel geçişlerin de etkisiyle özellikle 2013 yılı itibariyle ülke yoğun bir iç güvenlik zafiyeti ile karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Çünkü hem açık sınır politikası sebebiyle sınır hattında hiçbir kontrol mekanizmasının kalmaması, hem de iç savaşın oluşturduğu şiddet dalgasından kaçan kitlesel göçün sınırlarda oluşturduğu yoğunluk, Suriye'nin kuzeyinde alan ve güç kazanan terör örgütlerinin sınır geçiş faaliyetleri açısından uygun bir zemin hazırlamıştır. Suriye'deki güç boşluğu ile terör unsurlarının Türkiye'ye yönelik terör girişimleri sınır güvenliği zafiyetlerinden önemli ölçüde beslenmiş, Türkiye bir iç güvenlik zafiyeti ile karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Bu süreçte farklı

milletlerden çok sayıda IŞİD üyesinin Suriye'den Türkiye'ye geçtiği tespit edilmiştir (Dora, 2020). Özellikle IŞİD'in yükselişinden sonra yoğunlaşan sınır ötesi nüfus faaliyetleri keskin bir şekilde artmış; bu şekilde terör unsurlarının sızması daha mümkün hale gelmiştir. 2013 Hatay Reyhanlu saldırısı ile belirgin hale gelen ve şehir merkezlerini hedef alan terör saldırıları sayısı bu noktadan itibaren hızla artmıştır. Türkiye'nin iç savaşın süresi ve sonucu konusundaki yanlış öngörüsü, şiddetin kendi topraklarını sirayet etme riskini artırmıştır. Suriye iç savaşı krizinin ikinci döneminde (2013-2016), kontrolsüz yoğun sınır ötesi faaliyetlerin doğal sonucu olarak Türkiye, özellikle şehir merkezlerinde ciddi güvenlik sorunlarına maruz kalmıştır. Söz konusu iç güvenlik zafiyetleri Global Terrorism Database grafiklerinde de açıkça gösterildiği gibi 2015 ve 2016 yıllarında ise en üst noktaya çıkmıştır.

Öte yandan yine Suriye iç savaşıyla oluşan merkezi otorite boşluğu sebebiyle Suriye'nin kuzeyinde ilk önce IŞİD sonra PYD-YPG büyük bir alan ve güç kazanmıştır. Tez Suriye'nin kuzeyindeki merkezi otorite boşluğu ile güçlenen terör unsurlarının bölgedeki yükselişi ve Türkiye'ye oluşturduğu ciddi güvenlik zafiyetlerini dış güvenlik krizi olarak açıklamaktadır. 2013 yılında Bağdadi, IŞİD'i ve Nusra Cephesi ile entegrasyonunu ilan etmiştir. Bağdadi, IŞİD'in tek lideri olduğunu da açıklamıştır. IŞİD'in kurulması ve Irak üzerinden Suriye'ye yayılarak iç savaşa doğrudan müdahil olması Türkiye açısından ciddi jeopolitik riskler oluşturmuştur. Bu tekfirci ideoloji, Ocak 2014'te Rakka'nın IŞİD tarafından işgal edilmesinin ardından Suriye'de hızla metastaz yapmıştır (Gerges, 2019). Rakka ve çevresinin IŞİD tarafından kontrol altına alınması önemlidir çünkü sonrasında Rakka IŞİD'in başkenti ilan edilmiştir. IŞİD, Nisan 2014'te Deyrizor iline topyekûn bir saldırı başlatmıştır. Deyrizor, coğrafi konumu nedeniyle IŞİD'e önemli bir siyasi ve lojistik fırsat sağlamıştır. Petrol zengini bir bölge olan Deyrizor'a doğru ilerleme, IŞİD savaş makinesini sadece stratejik değil, finansal olarak da beslemiştir. Ocak 2014'te IŞİD Irak'ta Felluce'yi ele geçirmiş ve aynı yıl Bağdadi kendini yeni halife ilan etmiştir. IŞİD'in hızla yayılması bir süre durdurulamamış; Haziran 2014'te, Irak ve Suriye İslam Devleti'nin tahminen 1500 militanı, Irak'ın en büyük ikinci şehri olan Musul'un kontrolünü ele geçirmiştir (Lafta 2018). Bu, Irak'ta neredeyse tüm Sünni bölgelerin IŞİD'in kontrolünde olduğu anlamına gelmekteydi. IŞİD'in Irak'ta beklenmedik zaferleri Suriye'de güvenlik türbülanslarına neden olmuştur. IŞİD'in Irak'ta ve Suriye'de sonu gelmeyen işgallerinden sonra ABD, IŞİD'in daha da yayılmasını

engellemek için hava kuvvetlerini kullanmaya karar vermiştir. Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun (2020) Sistemik Deprem ve Yeni Dünya Düzeni kitabında altını çizdiği gibi, IŞİD'in devreye girmesiyle Suriye iç savaşının denklemi dramatik bir şekilde değişmiştir. "IŞİD'in yükselişi iç savaşın doğasını değiştirmiştir. Esad rejimine karşı özgürlük talebiyle ortaya çıkan muhalefet arasındaki mücadele, bir anda Esad ile teröristler arasındaki mücadeleye dönüşmüştür" (Davutoğlu, 2020, s. 112).

Bu çerçevede, 2011-2019 yılları arasında Türkiye'nin Suriye politikası çerçevesinde iki kritik dönüm noktası önemlidir. İlk önemli nokta, Nisan 2013'te IŞİD'in kurulması ve hızla yayılmasıyla birlikte Suriye iç savaşında dengelerin dramatik bir şekilde Türkiye aleyhine değişmeye başlamasıdır. Birinci boyut, IŞİD'in hızlı yükselişinin uluslararası aktörlere yansması ve dengelerle ilgilidir. Türk hükümeti, Suriye stratejisinin merkezinde siyasi ve askeri olarak Esad karşıtı kampanya için kaynaklarını zorlarken, Batılı güçler, Türkiye'nin Suriye politikasının hilafına bir eksene kayarak Esad rejiminden ziyade IŞİD'in yok edilmesine öncelik vermişlerdir. Bu bağlamda IŞİD'in yükselişi, Batılı güçler ile Türkiye arasındaki ayrışmayı tetiklediği için Türkiye'nin Suriye'ye yönelik politika hedeflerini zedelemiştir. IŞİD'in yayılmasının ikinci boyutu, Türkiye'ye yönelik doğrudan güvenlik riskleri ile ilgilidir. IŞİD'in Irak ve Suriye'de hızla yayılması ve bölgede güçlenmesi Türkiye'ye yönelik kitlesel göçün ivmesinin hızla artmasına sebep olmuş ayrıca ciddi sınır ve iç güvenlik zafiyetlerini de tetiklemiştir.

IŞİD'in yükselişinin doğrudan etkisi 2013 yazında görülebilir. IŞİD'in hızla yayılması ve güçlenmesi, Suriye muhalefetinin radikalleşmesine ve parçalanmasına neden olmuştur. Daha da önemlisi, Esad rejimi Batılı güçlerin perspektifinde meşru zemin bulmuştur; yani Batılı güçler önceliği IŞİD tehdidine vermiş, Esad rejiminin devrilmesi ikincil bir mesele haline gelmiştir. Bu süreçten sonra ABD ile Türkiye arasındaki ayrılık çok daha görünür hale gelmiştir. Obama yönetimi, IŞİD'e karşı sahada güvenilir bir ortak arayışı içindeydi ve bu noktada en uygun aday PYD-YPG olarak belirlenmiştir. ABD'nin PYD-YPG militanlarına silah aktarma yönündeki önemli kararı, Türkiye açısından başka bir güvenlik tehdidi başlattı (Yükselen, 2020). Bu açıdan bakıldığında IŞİD'in kurulması ve hızlı yayılmasının Türkiye'ye ve onun Suriye politikasına yönelik hedeflerine etkisi 4 temel başlık üzerinden değerlendirilebilir. 1) Türkiye'ye yönelik kitlesel göçün ivmesinin artması 2) Suriye

muhalefetinin parçalanması ve radikalleşmesi 3) Selefi tekirci ideolojinin hızlı yükselişi ile Esad'ın Batı nezdinde meşruiyetinin artması ve diğer açıdan muhalefetin meşruiyet ve destek kaybı 4) PYD-YPG terör örgütünün IŞİD'e karşı tek büyük kara gücü olarak ciddi bir uluslararası destek sağlaması ve meşruiyet sağlaması. ABD'nin Ağustos 2014'te IŞİD' yönelik hava saldırısı yetkisi vermesi ve Kobani kuşatması sırasında YPG'ye mühimmat desteği sağlaması, zaman içinde uluslararası toplumun IŞİD'e karşı ortak bir savaşa dönüşmüştür. 10 Eylül 2014'te ABD, IŞİD'i yenmek için geniş bir uluslararası koalisyon kurulduğunu duyurmuştur (BBC, 2014).

Bir parantez açarak Suriye muhalefetinin radikalleşmesi ve parçalanması sürecinde Batı'nın Suriye krizine yönelik tereddütlü tutumunun da etkisini işaret etmek gerekmektedir. Avrupa Birliği'nin (AB) Suriye krizine karşı sağlam ve uyumlu tepki vermemesi, norm ve değerleri pahasına güvenlik ve istikrara öncelik verdiği görülmektedir. İlk olarak, Suriye iç savaşı kriziyle mücadeleye yönelik AB nezdindeki ilk girişimler Esad rejimine ekonomik yaptırımlar uygulanmasını içeriyordu. Ancak bu noktada bile AB üyeleri kendi aralarında bölünmüş durumdaydı. Fransa, Almanya, İsveç, Hollanda ve Birleşik Krallık Esad rejimine yaptırım uygulanması önerisini desteklerken, Yunanistan, İspanya ve İtalya tereddütlü davrandılar (Dandashly, 2016). Ayrıca, Fransa ve Birleşik Krallık hariç, hemen hemen tüm Avrupalı devletler herhangi bir askeri müdahale seçeneğine tamamen karşıydı. Ancak burada daha önemli ve belirleyici olan ABD'nin tutumu ve yaklaşımıdır. Bush yönetimindeki iki dönemin ardından Obama yönetimi, ödenen mali bedeller nedeniyle kendisinin ve müttefiklerinin çıkarlarını savunmak için geniş kapsamlı denizaşırı tek taraflı askeri operasyonlardan vazgeçmiştir. Obama'nın dış politika yaklaşımı ve güvenlik politikası algısı “müdahaleci olmama” anlayışına dayanıyordu; Obama yönetimi iç işlere odaklandı (Lindsay, 2011). ABD Mayıs 2010'da cephe savaşı ve önleyici savaş yerine diplomasi ve özel savaşı vurgulayan yeni bir ulusal güvenlik stratejisi belgesi ilan edilmiştir (İşyar, 2018). Bu kapsamda ABD yönetimi, Türkiye ve Arap Birliği'nin aktif rol oynamasını talep ediyordu; örneğin Dışişleri Bakanı Hillary Clinton "Suriye'deki görev Arap Birliği ve Türkiye'ye aittir. BM kararı olsa da ABD ve NATO müdahalesi olmayacaktır" diyordu. (Habertürk, 2011). Batılı güçlerin eylemsizliği, Suriye muhalefetinin nazarında “Batı'yı sorgulama” sürecine neden olmuştur. Sonunda Batılı güçler ile Suriyeli muhalifler arasında bir güvensizlik ortaya çıkmıştır. ABD, rejime yönelik olumsuz ifadeler kullansa da, sonunda bu ifadeler eylemlerle

desteklenmemiştir. Bu eylemsizlik, Obama'nın "*leading behind*" mantığını öne süren dış politika doktrininin doğal bir sonucu olarak görülebilir. 2011-2014 arası süreçte, artan şiddet ve kimyasal silah kullanımına rağmen Batı'nın Suriye muhalefetini sahada doğrudan destekleme noktasındaki tereddütleri ve eylemsizliği, selefi radikal örgütlerin giderek daha fazla destekçi bulmasını sağlayacak bir kırılmaya da zemin hazırlamıştır.

ABD açısından temel olarak oyunun kurallarını değiştiren üç gelişme, ABD'yi Suriye ve Irak'taki denkleme dahil etmeye itmiştir; 1) Musul'daki IŞİD işgali (Haziran 2014), 2) IKBY ve Erbil'e yönelik IŞİD tehdidi (Ağustos 2014), 3) IŞİD'in Kobani Kuşatması (Eylül 2014). IŞİD'in Irak ve Suriye'deki önemli noktalara hızla yayılması, ABD'nin hareketinin birincil motivasyonuydu; bu, Guta'daki kimyasal saldırının veya diğer Esad rejimi insan hakları ihlallerinin bile Amerika'nın sıralaması açısından IŞİD tehdidi kadar önemli olmadığını göstermektedir. Bu çerçevede 20 Ekim 2014'te Dışişleri Bakanı John Kerry, IŞİD'in Ayn el-Arap kuşatmasına ilişkin "Gözümüzü hedeften ayırmıyoruz. Böyle bir dönemde IŞİD'e karşı savaşanlara sırtımızı dönmek sorumsuzluk ve ahlaksızlık olur" demiştir (BBC, 2014). 112 gün süren Ayn el-Arab kuşatmasının ardından IŞİD'in Peşmerge ve YPG tarafından geri püskürtülmesi, IŞİD'in hızlı yayılımının durması açısından önemli bir dönüm noktası olmuştur. Sonraki süreçte Tel ab-yad Haziran 2015'te YPG tarafından ele geçirilmiş ve kısa sürede Ayn Issah da ePYD-YPG terör örgütünün kontrolü altına girmiştir. Bu bölge, IŞİD'in "başkenti"ne sadece 50 km uzaklıktaydı. Hassan ve Weiss'a (2016) göre ABD, IŞİD önündeki tek kara gücünü desteklemek için Ekim 2015'te PYD-YPG'ye 50 ton Mühimmat teslim etmiştir. Daha sonra ABD'nin YPG'ye yaptığı kapsamlı mühimmat yardımı da Türkiye Cumhurbaşkanı tarafından dile getirilmiştir (Euronews, 2019). YPG, Suriye'nin kuzeyindeki güç boşluğunu doldurma fırsatı bulmuş ve coğrafi genişleme yoluyla Ayn İsa, Rakka, Menbiç dahil Suriye'nin kuzeyini ele geçirmiştir.

Bu terör örgütlerinin (IŞİD ve PYD- YPG) Türkiye açısından oluşturduğu güvenlik riskleri tezde "dış güvenlik riskleri" ekseninde incelenmiştir. Suriye kaynaklı oluşan iç ve dış güvenlik risklerinin tamamı tezde "security gap" (güvenlik açığı) tanımı ile kavramsallaştırılmıştır. Tezin en önemli amacı "güvenlik açığı" sürecinin Türkiye'nin Suriye politikası üzerindeki dönüştürücü etkisini ortaya koymaktır. Bu çerçevede tez, Türkiye'nin Suriye politikasında 2011 ve 2019 yılları arasındaki değişimi nedensellik

mekanizması içinde incelemektedir. Bu incelemeyi yapabilmek için kullanılan teorik çerçeve uluslararası ilişkiler literatüründeki başat teorilerden biri olan neo-realizm olmuştur. Devletlerin davranışlarının belirlenmesinde yapıya yaptığı vurgu nedeniyle “yapısal realizm” (Structural Realism) olarak da adlandırılan Neorealizm, ilk defa Kenneth Waltz’un Theory of International Politics adlı eseriyle gündeme gelmiştir. Neorealizm’in öncülerinden kabul edilen Kenneth N. Waltz (1979) uluslararası sistemi “bir siyasi yapı ve etkileşim içinde bulunan ögelerden (uluslararası sistemde devletler) oluşan bir bütün olarak tanımlamıştır. Uluslararası sistemin başat aktörleri devletlerdir ve devletler anarşik bir sistemik yapı içinde varlığını idame ettirmeye çabalamaktadır. Devletlerin üzerinde düzenleyici bir üst otorite olmaması sebebiyle her devlet varlığını idame ettirmek için güç edinme isteğine sahiptir ve güvenlik devletlerin ihtiyaçlar hiyerarşisinde son derece önemlidir. Ayrıca Waltz’ın mantığına göre; en doğru uluslararası ilişkiler teorisi merkezi sistemik yapısı, birimler arası etkileşim ve sistem değişikliklerinin sürekliliğine odaklanmak zorundadır. Neo-realizmde aktörler dışsal faktörler olarak kabul edilir. Çünkü yapının onları doğru biçimde davranmaya mecbur edeceği düşünülmektedir.

Yapısal Realizm, kendi içerisinde bazı alt teoriler barındırır, bunların en belirgin olanları *Ofansif Realizm* ve *Defansif Realizm*’dir. Ofansif Realizm’in en önemli temsilcisi Mearsheimer’dir. Mearsheimer (2001) büyük devletlerin politikalarını açıklamak için beş tane varsayım kullanır;

1. Anarşi uluslararası sistemin en önemli özelliklerinden biridir. Uluslararası sistem anarşiktir. Yani mevcut hükûmetlerin üzerine hükmetme gücüne sahip bir güç yoktur.
2. Her güçlü ya da büyük devletin saldırgan bir kapasitesi mevcuttur
3. Devletler diğer devletlerin niyetlerini asla tam olarak bilemezler. Bu durumda bir devletin niyetini hiç bir zaman diğer devlet ya da devletler tarafından tam olarak bilinemez. (uncertainty)
4. Devletlerin birinci amacı hayatta kalmaktır. Anarşik düzende hayatta kalmak için devlet yalnızca kendi kaynaklarına güvenebilir. (survival and self-help)
5. Büyük güçler rasyoneldir. Nasıl hayatta kalacaklarına dair akıl yürütürler ve hesap yaparlar. Başka devletlerin atacağı ya da attığı adımları gözetir ve ona göre konumlanırlar (rational actor)

Ofansif Realizm, yapısal Realizm'in rekabetçi türüdür. Bu çerçeve Mearsheimer (2001) "Uluslararası sistemin ulus devletler için güç maksimizasyonuna matuf olarak önemli teşvikler sağladığını" ifade eder. Aslında Ofansif ve Defansif realizm arasındaki fark, Mearsheimer'ın da vurguladığı gibi devletlerin ne kadar güç istediği sorusu noktasında ayrışır. Waltz güç dengesi perspektifi kapsamında devletlerin mevcut güç dengesini muhafaza etme eğiliminde olduğunu ifade eder. Yapısal realist mantığa göre devletler gücü artırmaktan çok korumak eğilimindedir. Oysa Mearsheimer'a (2001) göre uluslararası politikada statükocu devlet bulmak oldukça zordur. Zira uluslararası sistemin anarşik yapısı sürekli bir güvenlik açığı oluşturmakta ve devletler bu açığı kapatmak için güç arayışında bulunmaktadırlar. Mearsheimer (2001, s.79) "Statükocu güçlerin dünya siyasetinde nadiren bulunduğunu vurgular ve uluslararası sistemin devletlerin güç kazanma fırsatlarını teşvik ettiğini" ifade eder.

Bu tezde genel olarak yapısal realizm spesifik olarak ise ofansif realist perspektif kullanılmıştır. Çünkü Arap Baharı ve Suriye krizi, Türkiye açısından Ortadoğu'da sadece demokratikleşme süreci değil, aynı zamanda bölgedeki jeopolitik ve jeostratejik dengelerde de köklü bir değişim anlamına geliyordu. Arap Baharı süreci, Türk karar vericiler nezdinde sadece Arap ülkelerinin siyasi kurtuluş hareketini değil, aynı zamanda Türkiye'nin bölgedeki siyasi nüfuzunu artırması için tarihi bir fırsata da gönderme yapmaktadır. Bu nedenle, gücü artırmak için risk alarak fırsatları değerlendirmek, ofansif realist çerçeveye tamamen uyumludur. Nitekim Suriye krizinin erken dönemlerinden itibaren Türkiye'de karar vericiler son derece aktif ve müdahaleci bir rol oynamıştır. Türkiye'nin Suriye politikası çerçevesinde; güç maksimizasyonu arzusu, Suriye'de rejim değişikliğine yönelik söylem ve eylemler, vekâlet savaşı ve müteakip doğrudan sınır ötesi askeri operasyonlar en etkili şekilde ofansif realist çerçevede açıklanabilir.

Suriye iç savaşı çok yönlü, karmaşık ve dinamik bir süreçtir. Sürecin anlaşılması için birbirini tetikleyen olaylar örgüsünün net bir şekilde anlaşılması gerekmektedir. Herhangi bir siyasi - ve sosyal durumda nedensel bir mekanizmanın izini sürmek ve dönüm noktalarını belirlemek için en doğru metodoloji *süreç izlemedir (process tracing)*. Süreç izleme, "bağımsız bir değişken (veya değişkenler) ile bağımlı değişkenin sonucu arasındaki araya giren nedensel süreci - nedensel zincir ve nedensel mekanizma - çerçevesinde tanımlama girişimlerini" içerir (Beach & Pedersen, 2013,

s.1). Sosyal bilimciler karmaşık süreçleri ve olayları genel olarak parçalara ayırarak ve sonra tekrar inşa ederek algılamaya çalışırlar. Bu çerçevede tezle ilgili temel soru, Suriye iç savaşının evriminde belirli noktalarda hangi özel mekanizmanın oynadığıdır. Bu sebeple Türkiye'nin Suriye politikasında değişimi süreç izleme yöntemi ile sebep sonuç ilişkisi içinde incelemiş ve nedensellik mekanizması metodolojik bir yaklaşım olarak ortaya konulmuştur.

Bir araştırmacı siyasi araştırma yürüttüğünde, yüzeyin ardındaki gerçeğe daha derin bir bakış açısı sağlamak için nitel araştırma yönteminde yaygın olarak farklı metodolojik yaklaşımlar uygulanır. Bu amaca ulaşmak için, artan sayıda araştırmacı, etkili bir araştırma yöntemi olarak elit mülakat yöntemini (William, 2015) kullanmaktadır. Ben de araştırmamda özellikle bölgede bulunmuş üst düzey bürokratlar, askerler ve akademisyenlerle mülakatlar gerçekleştirerek açık kaynaklarda bulunmayan bilgileri erişmeye çalıştım ve bazı noktalarda bu bilgilerden faydalandım.

Suriye krizinin ilk aşamalarında Türkiye'nin yaklaşımında iki unsur görülebilir; gerçekçi olmayan iyimserlik ve ofansif realist dış politika. Suriye krizi bağlamında Türk karar vericilerin beklenti ve öngörülleri ile gerçekler birbirinden farklıydı. Bu, en açık biçimde Mayıs 2011'de Davutoğlu'nun Arap Bahar'ının aynı zamanda bir Türk baharı olduğunu belirtmesi ve "acılar sona erdikten sonra bu bölgenin daha iyi bir gelecek yaşayacağı" öngörüsünden anlaşılabilir (Bülten, 2011). Türk karar vericiler, Arap Bahar'ının ilk örneklerinden yola çıkarak, Esad rejiminin kısa süre içinde düşeceğini varsaymıştır. Türkiye'nin ofansif politikaları, rejim değişikliği yoluyla gücü maksimize etmeyi amaçlamıştır.

Daha önce ifade edildiği gibi Suriye'nin kuzeyindeki merkezi otorite boşluğundan yararlanan tek terör örgütü IŞİD olmamıştır. Suriye'nin kuzeyindeki iktidar boşluğu sayesinde PYD/YPG'nin Türkiye sınırı hattında genişleyerek belirli özyönetim alanları oluşturması Türkiye için ciddi bir güvenlik riski algısı oluşturmuştur. PYD/YPG terör örgütünün önce 2013'te, ardından 2016'da özerk yönetim ilan etmesi ve Türkiye'nin 911 km'lik Suriye sınırının büyük bir kısmının bu terör örgütünün kontrolüne girmesi, terör saldırılarının büyük şehirlerin güvenliğini tehdit etmesi gibi giderek artan Suriye merkezli güvenlik zafiyetlerinin Türk dış politikası üzerine zaman

içinde dönüştürücü bir etkisi olmuştur. Sonuç olarak Suriye iç savaşının Türk devleti üzerindeki etkileri nedeniyle, temel güvenlik kaygıları Türk dış politikasının birincil gündem maddesi haline gelmiştir. Bu noktada tezin temel argümanlarından biri, 2016 yılına kadar artan iç ve dış güvenlik sorunları, yani Güvenlik Açığı süreci nedeniyle Türkiye'nin Suriye politikasında bir paradigma kayması gerçekleştiği üzerine inşa edilmiştir. 2016 yılında gerçekleşen bu paradigma değişimi 3 temel ekseninde gerçekleşmiştir; Türkiye'nin Suriye politikası, iç politika ve Türk dış politikası. Tezin temel hedefi üç katmanlı bu büyük paradigma değişimini Suriye kaynaklı krizler ve güvenlik riskleri çerçevesinde açıklamaktır.

Keyman'ın (2017) öne sürdüğü gibi, 2016 yılında Türk dış politikası sadece sıfırlanmadı, aynı zamanda yeni bir dış politika biçimi ortaya çıktı. 2011'de Suriye savaşının başlangıcından 2016 yılının ilk yarısı bitene kadar Türkiye, Esad rejimini düşürme hedefine yönelmiş ve bunun sonucunda Türkiye'nin dış politika hedeflerinin öncelikleri belirlenmişti. Bölgesel istikrarsızlık, güç boşluğu, bölgesel ve uluslararası dengelerin Türkiye aleyhine gelişmesi, Türkiye'nin bu politikasını çıkmaza sokmuştur. Türkiye'nin dış politika stratejisi rotasında kendini düzeltmesi, istikrarsızlık ve güvenlik eksikliklerine karşı yeni bir politika oluşturması gerekliliğinden kaynaklanmıştır. Esad rejiminin devrilmesi ve Arap Baharı sürecinin öncüsü olma arzusu 2016 yılı itibarıyla artık birincil öncelik olarak görülmekten çıkmıştır. PYD/YPG ve IŞİD tehdidi Türkiye için bir öncelik haline gelmiş ve Esad rejiminin devrilmesi, muhalif güçlerin desteklenmesi ve İran ile vekalet savaşının genişletilmesi gibi diğer tüm hedefler ikinci plana itilmiştir. Tezde de belirtildiği üzere özellikle 2015 yılında gerçekleşen Rusya'nın Suriye'ye doğrudan askeri müdahalesinin de bu değişim sürecinde önemli etkileri olmuştur.

2016 yılından itibaren Türkiye'nin güvenlikçi tedbirleri ile birlikte sınır ötesi askeri operasyonları ön plana çıkmaktadır. En başta belirlenen Esad'ı devirme politikası artık bir öncelik değildir çünkü yeni öncelik Suriye kaynaklı yoğun iç ve dış güvenlik krizleri olmuştur. Bu çerçevede 2011-2016 yılları arasında açık sınır politikası uygulayan Türkiye, 2016 yılında açık sınır politikasına gayri resmi olarak son vermiştir. Türkiye'nin Suriye'ye sınır duvarı örmeye başlaması, açık sınır politikasından vazgeçmesinin ilk ve en somut örneğidir. Bu bağlamda Türkiye'nin 2016 sonrası güvenlik politikalarının temel unsurlarından biri de Türkiye-Suriye

sınırındaki hudut duvarıdır. Türkiye'nin Suriye sınır duvarı Hatay, Şanlıurfa, Kilis, Gaziantep ve Mardin'in güney illerini kapsamaktadır. Bu arada Türkiye, Ocak 2016'da diğer ülkelerden Türkiye topraklarına giren Suriyeliler için yeni bir vize politikası başlatmıştır, bu da açık sınır politikasının sona erdiğinin ilk işaretlerinden biridir. Bu güvenlikçi politikalar yakın sınır politikasına ve sınır geçiş noktalarına da yansımış ve sınır geçiş noktalarının çoğu kapatılmıştır. Birleşmiş Milletler İnsani İşler Koordinasyon Ofisi raporu, Suriye ile Türkiye arasındaki 19 geçiş noktasından 16'sının artık açık olmadığını göstermektedir (OCHA, 2017).

Suriye krizinden büyük ölçüde etkilenen Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu'daki yeni paradigması, geleneksel müttefikleriyle büyüyen sorunlu bir ilişki bağlamında uygulanmıştır. Bu dönemde Türkiye'nin dış politika ekseninde açık bir kayma gözlenmektedir. Suriye merkezli güvenlik sorunları Türkiye ile ABD arasında büyüyen çatışma alanları oluştururken, Rusya ile Türkiye arasındaki işbirliği alanları da giderek artmaya başlamıştır. Türkiye-Rusya ilişkileri, Ankara'nın bir Rus savaş uçağını düşürmesinin hemen ardından Kasım 2015'te büyük zarar görmüştür. Krizden yaklaşık yedi ay sonra Ankara, Türkiye ile Rusya arasındaki ilişkileri normalleştirmek için bir adım atmıştır. Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın özür dilemesinin ardından her iki taraf da yeni bir sayfa açmaya karar vermiş ve iki taraf 2016 yazında Suriye üzerinden politikalarını harekete geçirerek çok boyutlu bir görüşme başlatmıştır (Özterem, 2017).

Rusya ile normalleşme süreci, ABD'ye ve Suriye'de ABD destekli PYD-YPG'nin hızlı yükselişine karşı denge arayışındaki Türkiye'nin paradigma değişimini belirli bir oranda açıklamaktadır. Bu noktada Türkiye ile Rusya'nın yakınlaşması ve arasındaki ilişkinin doğası, Türkiye'nin maruz kaldığı iç ve dış güvenlik tehditleri üzerinde durulmalıdır. Türkiye'nin Rusya eksenine yaklaşması, Türkiye'nin güvenlik zafiyetleri ve bu zafiyetlerin ABD tarafından beslenmesi ile yakından ilgilidir. 2013 sonrası dönemde Türkiye'nin karşı karşıya olduğu güvenlik sorunları birikmiştir. İlk olarak 2013'te başlayan çözüm süreci 2015 yazında sona ermiş ve PKK Türkiye içindeki eylemlerini artırmıştır. İkincisi, Türkiye geçirgen sınırları nedeniyle IŞİD terörünün kolay hedefi haline gelmiştir. Üçüncüsü, 2016 itibarıyla Suriye'nin kuzey sınırının büyük bir kısmı YPG'nin eline geçmiştir. Temmuz 2016'da tüm güvenlik

risklerinin artması ve Fetö'nün başarısız darbe girişimi, Türkiye'yi Rusya ile daha yakın ilişkiler aramaya motive etmiştir.

2016'daki başarısız darbe girişimi, Rusya ile Türkiye arasındaki ikili işbirliğini geliştirmek için yeni bir fırsat yaratmıştır. ABD ve Avrupalı liderler, darbecileri ve destekçileri devirdiği için Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'ı desteklemekte isteksiz ve çekingen davranmışlardır. Darbe girişimi sonrasında ABD Dışişleri Bakanı John Kerry, Türk hükümetini toplu tutuklama ve tasfiyelerden kaçınması konusunda doğrudan uyarmıştır (Çoşkun, 2019). Buna cevaben Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, darbenin Pensilvanya'da ikamet eden baş aktörü Fethullah Gülen'e atıfta bulunarak ABD'yi başarısız askeri darbenin bir parçası olmakla suçlamıştır. Temmuz'daki başarısız darbe girişimi, Türk-Rus ilişkilerinin düzelmesinde çok yönlü bir etki yapmıştır. 9 Ağustos 2016'da Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan ve Devlet Başkanı Putin Moskova'da bir araya gelmiş, görüşme iki taraf arasındaki husumetin sonu olarak algılanmıştır. Bu gezi, Erdoğan'ın 15 Temmuz darbe girişiminin ardından yaptığı ilk yurt dışı ziyareti olması açısından anlamlıdır (Aktürk, 2019). Putin'in Türk şirketlerine getirilen kısıtlamaların kaldırılacağını açıklaması, vizesiz seyahat ve charter uçuşlarının eski haline getirilmesi bu yakınlaşma sonrası mümkün hale gelmiştir. Daha da önemlisi taraflar, savunma sanayii alanındaki işbirliğini derinleştirmeye de ilgi duyduklarını ifade etmiştir (Özterem, 2017). Böylelikle Türkiye ve Rusya, ABD karşıtı tepkiler noktasında bir normalleşme sürecini başlatmışlardır.

Öte taraftan Şubat 2016'da Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, bir yandan YPG'yi desteklediği için ABD'nin ittifakını sorgularken; bir yandan da YPG'ye yönelik topçu atışlarının asla durmayacağını söylüyordu (BBC, 2016). Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan o dönemde şunu ifade etmiştir;

"Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ile NATO'da birlikte değil miyiz? Müttefikiniz miyiz, PYD mi yoksa YPG mi sizin müttefikiniz? Bunu da bilmek istiyoruz... PYD ve YPG'ye yönelik top atışlarını durdurmak gibi bir niyetimiz yok... Suriye'nin kuzeyinde yeni bir Kandil oluşumuna asla izin vermeyeceğiz" (BBC, 2016).

Göründüğü gibi Suriye kaynaklı güvenlik krizi Türkiye'nin ABD ve Rusya ilişkilerini de derinden etkilemiştir. Türkiye, Suriye kaynaklı güvenlik tehditlerini ortadan kaldırmak için kademeli olarak askeri güç kullanmaya başlamıştır. Türkiye - Rusya

arasındaki yakınlaşma süreci bu ekseninde de incelenmelidir. Ağustos 2016'da Ankara ve Moskova temsilcileri istihbarat teşkilatları, Dışişleri Bakanlıkları ve Genelkurmay Başkanları arasındaki işbirliğini geliştirme konusunda anlaşmıştır (Ersen, 2017). O andan itibaren Türkiye ve Rusya'nın Suriye'deki askeri birlikleri bilgi paylaşımı ve eylemlerin koordine edilmesi noktasında eş güdüm göstermeye başlamıştır. Genelkurmay Başkanları, istihbarat teşkilatlarının başkanları ve Savunma Bakanları düzenli ortak toplantılarla koordinasyonu güçlendirmiştir (Erşen & Köstem, 2020). Bu koordinasyon Türkiye açısından bu önemliydi çünkü bu koordinasyon Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin (TSK) Suriye'deki ilk askeri operasyonunu başlatmasına olanak sağlamıştır.

Türkiye'nin Suriye politikasını yeni bir anlayışla revize ettiği 2015'ten 2016'ya kadar olan süreçte, IŞİD ile mücadelesini gerekçe göstererek ABD'nin desteğini alan PYD-YPG, faaliyet ve etki alanını genişletme fırsatı bulmuştur. Suriye'deki güç boşluğu ve PYD-YPG'nin bölgede hızla yayılması Türkiye için ciddi bir güvenlik tehdidi oluşturmuştur. Üstelik PYD'nin, Suriye'nin kuzeyinde, Türkiye'nin Akdeniz sınırının yanında, Türkiye'nin terör koridoru dediği bir tür "Kürt bölgesi" oluşturmaya çalışması, Türkiye tarafından ulusal çıkarları için çok büyük bir tehdit olarak görülmüştür. Bu kapsamda Türkiye, Suriye kaynaklı bu iç ve dış güvenlik zafiyetlerini ortadan kaldırmak için üç askeri operasyonlar gerçekleştirmeye başlamıştır. 2016 sonrası dönemde Türkiye'nin karar vericilerinin Suriye'nin bazı bölgelerine yönelik askeri operasyonlar başlatması, Türkiye'nin maruz kaldığı güvenlik açıklarıyla doğrudan ilişkilidir. Kuzey ve Doğu Suriye'deki "Kürt Özerk Yönetimi", Ankara'nın ulusal güvenliğine yönelik bir tehdit olarak görülmüştür. Türkiye'nin temel endişesi, "Suriyeli Kürt özerkliğinin" Türkiye'deki Kürtleri Türkiye'nin güneydoğu kesiminde özerklik veya bağımsızlık için adımlar atmaya teşvik etmesine zemin hazırlamasıdır. Tüm bu gelişmeler Türkiye'nin dış politikasını ve Suriye stratejisini şekillendirmiştir. Bölgedeki denklem, Türkiye açısından YPG'yi durdurmak için tek taraflı sert güç kullanma seçeneğini hazırlamıştır. Türkiye, PKK terör örgütünün Suriye kolu olarak gördüğü YPG faaliyetini kısıtlama şeklindeki stratejik hedefine ulaşmak için askeri güç kullanmıştır. Ankara, 2016'dan sonra üç askeri operasyonda Suriye ile topyekun bir savaş başlatmadan Suriye'deki stratejik bölgeleri ele geçirmiş ve entegre bir YPG otonom bölgesinin oluşmasını engellemek istemiştir.

Türkiye açısından 2016 sonrası güvenlik odaklı dış politika birçok alanda kendini göstermiştir, çözümleri Suriye kaynaklı iç ve dış güvenlik zafiyetleri bu süreçte Türkiye'yi yoğun şekilde etkilemiştir. Açık sınır politikasına son verilmesi, Suriye il sınır kapılarının kapatılması ve hatta dünyanın en büyük üçüncü sınır duvarının inşa edilmesi, Türkiye'nin Suriye politikasındaki güvenlik paradigması kaymasının bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Türkiye, kitlesel göç ve açık sınır politikasının yol açtığı güvenlik zafiyetini geç de olsa durdurmak istenmiştir. Bu nedenle Suriye'ye yönelik açık sınır politikası terk edilmiştir. Ancak Türkiye'nin karşı karşıya olduğu terör sorunu sadece iç dinamiklerden kaynaklanmamaktaydı. Dış dinamikler de oldukça belirleyiciydi. Suriye'nin kuzeyindeki iktidar boşluğu dış etkenleri ve güvenlik zafiyetlerini daha fazla ön plana çıkarmıştır. PKK'nın Suriye'deki uzantılarını etkisiz hale getirmek ve IŞİD'in Türkiye sınırındaki faaliyetlerinden kaynaklanan tehdit ve riskleri en aza indirmek için sınır ötesi mücadele başlatılmıştır. Bu açıdan yeni güvenlik anlayışının temel boyutlarından biri de sınır ötesi güvenlidir. Ayrıca, Türkiye-Rusya ilişkilerinin yeniden tesis ederek Türkiye, topyekûn bir savaş başlatmadan stratejik bölgeleri ele geçirme fırsatını giderek daha fazla değerlendirerek Suriye'nin kuzeyindeki bazı bölgeleri kontrol altına almıştır. Böylece Suriye kaynaklı IŞİD ve YPG tehditlerine karşı doğrudan askeri güce dayalı bir politika benimsenmiştir. Bu şekilde Türkiye, savaşın ilk günlerinden itibaren dile getirdiği güvenli bölge hedefini kısmen gerçekleştirmiştir.

En başından itibaren Tez'in altını çizdiği önemli dönüşümler; Türkiye'nin Esad'ı devirme politikasının ikinci plana atılarak önceliğin terör örgütlerinin tasfiyesine verilmesi, sınır güvenliği çerçevesinde sınır duvarı örülmesi ve sınır geçiş noktalarının kapatılması, güvenlikçi paradigmaya geçiş, 2016 öncesi ÖSO üzerinden yürütülen vekalet savaşının 2016 sonrası doğrudan askeri müdahalelere evrilmesi, Türkiye'nin ABD ve Rusya ile olan ilişkilerini Suriye kaynaklı güvenlik problemleri çerçevesinde yeniden tanımlaması gibi pek çok değişim açıklanmaya muhtaçtır. Tüm bu politika dönüşümü Tez'in ısrarla altını çizdiği iç ve dış güvenlik zafiyetleri ve bu güvenlik zafiyetlerinin yoğunluğu ve etkileri anlaşılmalıdır. *Güvenlik Açığı* süreci olarak tezde ifade edilen sürecin 2016 sonrası Türkiye'nin güvenlikçi paradigmaya geçmesinde, askerileştirilmiş politika tercihlerinde ve büyük güçlerle olan ilişkilerinde belirleyici bir etkisi olmuştur.

Özetle, Türkiye'nin Suriye politikasındaki amaç ve yöntemlerindeki dönüşüm, Türkiye'nin Suriye kaynaklı güvenlik riskleri analiz edilmeden anlaşılabilir. Suriye iç savaşı nedeniyle Türkiye'nin maruz kaldığı iç ve dış güvenlik krizleri dış politika tercihlerinde belirleyici olmuştur. Suriye iç savaşında Türk karar vericilerin Suriye savaşına doğrudan müdahil olma süreci, tez tarafından bölgedeki güç maksimizasyonu kavramı üzerinden açıklanmıştır. Ancak Suriye'de rejim değişikliği hedefi, Türk karar alıcıların yanlış hesapları üzerine inşa edilmiştir. Aslında Türkiye'nin maruz kaldığı iç ve dış güvenlik krizleri de bu hesap hatası ve sonrasındaki etkileriyle bağlantılıdır. Bu durum ofansif gerçekçi kuramsal çerçevenin bir diğer önemli unsuru olan güvenlik kavramını ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Hem Rusya'nın hem de ABD'nin Suriye'deki varlığı, güçlenen ve alan kazanan devlet dışı aktörlerin Türkiye açısından oluşturduğu ve giderek artan iç ve dış güvenlik riskleri, Türkiye'nin politika yapım sürecinde hem hedef hem de metodolojik anlamda dönüşüme sebep olmuştur. Türkiye'nin 2016'dan sonra vekâlet savaşı yerine doğrudan askeri müdahaleyi kullanması, 2015 ve 2016'da en yüksek noktaya ulaşan "güvenlik açığı" sürecinin bir sonucudur. 2011-2019 yılları arasında yöntemler ve öncelikler değişse de saldırgan realist paradigma varlığını sürdürmüştür. Türkiye'nin Suriye politikasındaki hedef ve yöntem değişikliğinin itici nedeni tezde detaylı olarak açıklanan "Güvenlik Açığı" sürecidir. Bu süreç Türkiye'nin erken dönemlerden itibaren Suriye iç savaşına taraf olması ile birlikte, zaman içinde iç savaşın şiddet sarmalının Türkiye'nin iç ve dış güvenlik mimarisine olumsuz etkilerini ifade etmektedir. Türkiye, Suriye'de oluşan merkezi güç bolluğunun komplikasyonları sonucunda çok yoğun bir iç ve dış güvenlik krizine maruz kalmıştır. Türkiye bu süreçle birlikte Esad rejimini devirmeyi başaramadığı gibi Suriye'deki şiddet sarmalının da hedefi haline gelmiştir. Bu güvenlik açıkları, dış kaynaklı güvenlik krizlerini ifade eden dış şoklar olarak tanımlanabilir. Dış şoklar, tıpkı Herman'ın (1995 s.5) altını çizdiği gibi, ulus-devletlerin dış politika tercihlerinde köklü değişikliklere neden olabilir. Bu durumda Türkiye'nin karşı karşıya olduğu çok fazla temel güvenlik riski, bir bakıma "dış şoklar", Türkiye'yi Suriye politikasında alternatif bir rotaya itmiştir.

Tezin ana argümanında da belirtildiği gibi, tüm bu güvenlik açıkları, Türkiye'nin özellikle 2016'dan sonra Ortadoğu'daki angajmanının değişen bir jeostratejik eksene kaymasına sebep olmuştur. Askeri gücün sık kullanımı, kapalı sınır politikası ve sınır duvarları, Türkiye'nin yeni dış politikasının kurucu unsurları haline gelmiş ve hatta

Türkiye'nin ortakları ve "düşmanları" ile ilişkilerini ve bu ilişkilerin doğasını yeniden tanımlamıştır.

Ulus devletler, geleneksel jeopolitik eğilimleri ve tarih anlayışları açısından tıpkı bireyler gibi, miras aldıkları eğilimler tarafından yönlendirilirler. Devletler "Sabırlı hırs" ile "ihtiyatsız yanılğı" arasında ayırım yapma becerilerindeki farklılıkları gösterebilir (Brzezinski, 2012). Türkiye'de AKP hükümeti, Arap Baharı ve Suriye krizini Türkiye'nin jeopolitik etki alanını genişletmek için bir fırsat olarak görmüş ve değerlendirmiştir. Bununla birlikte, bu değerlendirme, Brzezinski'nin "sabırlı hırsına" değil "ihtiyatsız yanılığısına" dayalı ikilemi ile bir yanlış hesaplama üzerine inşa edilmiştir. Türkiye'de karar vericiler, kapasitelerinin üzerinde hedefler koymuş; buna bağlı olarak Türkiye, içeride ve dışarıda benzeri görülmemiş güvenlik risklerine maruz kalmıştır. Suriye iç savaşının süresi ve sonucuna ilişkin yanlış hesap yapılması ve Suriye kaynaklı güvenlik risklerinin giderek artması, 2016 sonrası dönemde Türkiye'nin Suriye politikasında ve hatta tüm dış politika vizyonunda köklü bir değişikliğe yol açmıştır. Bu paradigma değişikliğinin nedeni, tezin ana argümanı olan Güvenlik Açığı sürecidir. Türk dış politikasındaki paradigma değişiminin arkasındaki itici güç olan Güvenlik Açığı süreci dikkate alınmadan anlaşılabilir. Türkiye'nin değişen Suriye politikası, Türkiye'nin büyük güçlerle ilişkilerindeki dönüşümler ve sürüklenmeler ve hatta Türkiye'nin iç politikasındaki denge değişimleri dahi Suriye kaynaklı yoğun etkilerle yeniden şekillenmiştir.

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