

**ISTANBUL KULTUR UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

TURKEY AND RUSSIA RELATIONS AT SYRIAN CROSS ROAD

**MA Thesis by
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1700001264**

**Department: International Relations
Programme: International Relations**

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. İbrahim Mensur AKGÜN

AUGUST 2020

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ABSTRACT

TURKEY AND RUSSIA RELATIONS AT SYRIAN CROSS ROAD

Mehmet KARACA

During their long history, the Turkish – Russian diplomatic relations have always followed a pattern of ebb and flow. As both states continually sought to become strong regional actors, they have inevitably crossed paths with one another. Also, both Turkey and Russia have significant presence in Syria, a very unstable region where the United States and other states also seek to increase their influence as well. This has caused both Turkey and Russia to adopt more cautious approaches. As the post-Cold War era saw rapprochement between Turkey and Russia, as significant economic cooperation was made in tourism and energy deals among others. In this thesis, the reason which these two once-contending states have now decided to act in cooperation regarding the Syrian Crisis is discussed and analyzed in depth.

In this thesis, the Turkish – Russian diplomatic relations were examined regarding the framework of the Syrian crisis. After the crisis began, the Turkish – Russian relations were affected by politics that were pursued in Syria by both parties. Although the event where a trespassing Russian fighter jet was shot down by the Turkish Air Force marks a significant diplomatic crisis, among other obstacles, it can be said that before and after these setbacks the Turkish – Russian relations generally saw positive development during this period. But why would the two countries seek to normalize their relations immediately after such a crisis? It was made plain that Turkey and Russia could not forego their need to cooperate in the region when confronted with the reality of Turkey's allegiance with the U.S. and NATO, as shown by the purchase of S-400 defense units and the military cooperation between the two countries, among other examples of mutual cooperation. Though it can also be said that problems between the two states might surface again in the future; as Turkey desires a Syria without the Assad government, whom Russia is a staunch supporter of. Also, Russia has continued to host diplomatic talks with groups whom Turkey considers as terrorist threats, and there also lie disagreements regarding Idlib and its surrounding regions which were designated as demilitarized zones during the Sochi Summit. In present day, several states and other actors within the region seek to overcome one another and establish their dominance, or to form alliances with one another in order to achieve a state of balance. The ongoing struggles can therefore be realistically seen as a cobweb of complex relations seeking to establish a balance of power.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Syria and Turkey - Russia relations

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SURİYE KRİZİ ÜZERİNDEN TÜRKİYE VE RUSYA İLİŞKİLERİ

Mehmet KARACA

Tarihsel açıdan bakıldığında Türkiye - Rusya ilişkileri'nin inişli çıkışlı bir seyir izlediğini görmek mümkün. Diğer taraftan her iki ülke de kendi bulundukları bölgede güçlü birer aktör olmak istemelerinin yanında, bölgesel güç olma açısından da birbirlerine rakip konumdadırlar. Aynı zamanda iki ülkenin Suriye gibi istikrarsız bir bölgede yer alması, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri başta olmak üzere bölgede bazı devletlerin etkisini arttırmak istemesi, Türkiye ve Rusya'nın daha temkinli olmasına neden olmuştur. Özellikle Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönem Türkiye - Rusya ilişkileri açısından ekonomik işbirliğinin üst seviyelere taşındığı bir dönem olduğu bilinmekle birlikte, turizm ve enerji anlaşmaları başta olmak üzere ekonomik alanda çeşitli anlaşmalar yapılmıştır. Bu iki ülkenin neden Suriyede yaşanan krizde birlikte hareket etmeye özen gösterdikleri bu çalışmayla incelenmeye çalışılmıştır .

Bu çalışma ile Türkiye - Rusya ilişkileri Suriye Krizi bağlamında incelenmiş, Suriye Krizinin başlamasından sonra sürece dahil olan Türkiye ve Rusya arasındaki ilişkiler, bölge üzerinde izlenen politikalara göre değişkenlik göstermiştir. Rusya ile yaşanan Rus Jetinin Türkiye tarafından vurulması sonrası yaşanan kriz başta olmak üzere birkaç olumsuz durumun dışında yine Rusya ile olan ilişkiler oldukça olumlu ilerlemiştir. Böylesine önemli bir kriz iki ülke arasında gerginliğe yol açmış olsa dahi çok kısa bir süre içerisinde diplomatik ilişkilerle süreç ikili ilişkilerin gelişmesine katkı sağlayacak şekilde pozitive dönmüştür. Peki neden bu iki ülke bölgede yaşanan böylesine bir krizde dahi ilişkileri hızlıca normalleştirmek istedi? Ortaya çıkan bu durum özellikle Türkiye'nin Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve NATO müttefikliği açısından Türkiye ve Rusya'nın birlikte hareket etme ve S-400 konusu başta olmak üzere askeri iş birliği de dahil olmak üzere birçok alanda birlikte hareket etme isteğinden vazgeçemeyeceğini ortaya koymuştur. Fakat bunun yanında çalışmadan elde edilen bulgular incelendiğinde bir taraftan Türkiye'nin Esad'ın içerisinde olmadığı Suriye isteği, diğer taraftan Rusya'nın Esad ile işbirliği iki ülke arasında olumsuzlukların ortaya çıkabileceğini göstermektedir. Rusya'nın Türkiye tarafından terör grupları olarak nitelendirdiği kesimlerle görüşmeler yapmaya devam etmesi bunun yanında her iki ülke arasında yapılan Soçi Anlaşmasında silahsızlık bölgesi olarak kabul edilen İdlib ve çevresi konusunda anlaşmazlıklar söz konusudur. Geldiğimiz noktada bölgede yer alan birçok ülke ve gruplar birbirlerine üstünlük sağlamak ya da birbirleriyle denge sağlamak açısından ilişkiler kurmaktadır. Realist bir çerçevede baktığımız zaman bölgede yaşanan bu ilişkiler karmaşasını bir güç dengesi oluşturma stratejisi olarak görmenin gerekliliğini ortaya çıkarmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arap Baharı, Suriye, Türkiye – Rusya ilişkileri

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the course of history; Turkish and Russian states have been two powerful actors rivaling each other. Although, they are also known to cooperate with one another; especially against serious threats stemming from the West. They are known to have cooperated to defend their respective interests; thereby inhibiting and balancing the power of the other. The period between the World War I and World War II is of particular importance for their relations. However, it did not take too long for the relations to deteriorate as the balance shifted in the Soviet Union's favor after the World War II and forcing Turkey towards the newly emerging Western alliance structures (Balta, 2019).

While their differences are apparent when the historic relations between Turkey and Russia are examined, Turkish - Russian relations go back hundreds of years in the past. The Ottoman Empire and the Grand Duchy of Moscow (predecessor state to the Russian Empire and eventually the Soviet Union) first developing in their own geopolitical regions, had a commercial relationship established even before the borders between the two states were fully formed and defined. With the first formal communication between the states being a mutual exchange of governmental documents in year 1492, both states had appointed ambassadors by 1497. Afterwards, the first geographical contact between the Turkic and Russian populations occurred in the 17th century, bringing the states into conflict. Six wars have been fought in a span of a hundred years to determine the borders between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Tsardom, leading to the first geopolitical balance between the aforementioned states (Şahin, 2010: 647).

The geopolitical balance between the Russian and Turkish nations has generally existed under the constant threat of political strife, with their competing positions against each other preventing a significant improvement of their relations throughout

history. The Turkish dominion over the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, combined with the long-standing Russian geopolitical desire to expand to the southern, warmer seaports make up the core causes of strife between the nations. The traditional allies of both the Russian and Turkish states also being opponents of each other is also an important factor if historical Turkish – Russian rivalry is to be analyzed (Koçak, 2017: 14).

Approximately five hundred years have passed since the Turkish – Russian relations were first established officially; an event which has since continuously affectedpopulaces located in Eurasia (Özbay, 2013: 4). With both the Russian and Turkish states historically seeking to expand their territories and spheres of influence in Central Asia, the Caucasus, the regions surrounding the Black Sea and the Balkans; Turkey and Russia have inevitably crossed paths with each other. Tensions also rose as the Russian Empire established itself and was subsequently regarded internationally as a major power. Russia’s ever-persistent ambition of expanding into the warmer regions to their south has also made tension and conflict unavoidable with their southern rival Turkey. Therefore, armed conflict, or at least a threat of one has perpetually existed between the Turkish and Russian states, with the Russian Empire ranking as one of the Ottoman Empire’s most fought-against adversaries. It was not until after the October Revolution, chronologically concurrent with the foundation of the Turkish Republic, that the relations between the two countries were at their most amicable point (Titov, 2020). As both the newly born Soviet Union and the Turkish Republic were initially focused on their own internal affairs, both nations deliberately avoided political tension with each other, thus the period between 1920 – 1930 marked significant advancements in Turkish-Soviet relations. (Kazdal, 2018: 52).

The period between 1920 – 1930, also called the ‘modern era’ of Turkish – Soviet relations, was a period where both states sought primarily to establish a strong and stable political order and economic system within, to preserve their territorial integrities, and also seeking international recognition as legitimate, independent states. The most apparent indicator of both states’ mutual point of view and their mutual avoidance of possible obstacles would be the signing of the Soviet – Turkish Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality in 1925 and the subsequent signings of Treaty of Kars and Treaty of Moscow. Especially the 1925 treaty of friendship had coincided with the

Turkish – French tensions concerning the Hatay region in Turkey’s south, and also the Turkish – British tensions concerning Mosul and the contested isles in the Aegean Sea. Therefore, the treaty is regarded as a balancing and worthwhile effort during a difficult time in Turkey’s international relations (Çelikpala, 2019: 4).

It would simply be stating a fact that to say that, in the time periods before World War I, that the Russian and Turkish states were longtime opponents, that there were numerous armed conflicts fought between the nations, and that both states’ populations have made long lasting historical and cultural impacts upon each other. However, certain periods of time do mark amicable relations between Russian and Turkish states. With thoughts of an alliance between the Turks and the Russians first emerging in 1914, a Turkish – Russian Committee of Friendship was established in the years leading to World War I, a time period which also is regarded by many to be the Ottoman Empire’s most turbulent periods (Reynolds, 2019). Similar arguments regarding the enhancement of Turkish – Russian relations are ever since being proposed from time to time. For example, Orgeneral Tuncer Kılınç’s 2002 proposal that Turkey should pursue a strategic alliance with Iran and the Russian Federation against the European Union is still remains in mind. Orgeneral Kılınç’s proposal was actually a reflection of Eurasianist thought, which appears as a reflection of Kemalist thought. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself had adopted a warmer, more moderate approach to international politics, with Turkish – Russian relations taking a more level course during this period (Çelikpala, 2019: 4).

The most salient indicator of the emerging Turkish – Soviet rapprochement would be the Soviet Union’s support of Turkey during Turkish War of Independence in 1919-22. The pleasant relations between the Russian leader Vladimir Lenin and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk prompted the Soviet Union to financially support Ankara while also providing armaments and other military equipment. This event brought about a period of geopolitical stability between the two nations, while also helping imperialistic powers such as France and United Kingdom realize that Turkey would not make any compromises to them in the name of independence (Reynolds, 2019).

However, Turkish – Soviet relations saw significant deterioration after the passing of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1938. Notable causes of this negative

development can be identified in Soviet ideology, and also in Atatürk's particular success in foreign politics that his successors could not replicate. The said differences apparent during the developing years of Soviet ideology were mainly rooted in the human factor. Most concrete examples of this phenomenon can be observed by comparing the differences between Khrushchevism and Stalinism, or Khrushchevism or Brezhnevism, (Gönlübol, 2000: 218) highlighting the importance and influence that singular leaders can possess in foreign politics. The cordial relations that were established between Atatürk and Lenin were therefore strained to a breaking point during the Stalin era. To add, another cause of the deterioration of Turkish – Soviet relations until the 1990's was the world aligning itself to two political loci of power after World War II. However, even though the Cold War era saw Turkey and USSR drifting apart politically, interactions between the populations of the two countries were still sustained (Başbuğ and Başbuğ, 2015: 333).

Reynolds (2019) suggests that Soviet assistance was pivotal in Turkish victory during the Turkish War of Independence. According to Reynolds, the key factor that led the campaign result in a decisive Turkish victory was Turkey's military success. A success which was achieved partly in thanks to Soviet armaments, military supplies and financial aid, therefore earning the Soviets a geopolitical ally, even though the Turkish regime had no interest in Bolshevism. After the war, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had a statue of Sergei Aralov, the first Soviet ambassador in Turkey, built in Taksim square as a monument of the Turkish Republic. The monument still stands today, as a token of appreciation of the aforementioned Soviet aid during the Turkish War of Independence (Reynolds, 2019).

While the period between the World Wars saw amicable diplomatic relations developing between the USSR and Turkey, both countries kept a certain distance from each other. World War I saw the birth of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, while the Turkish War of Independence ensured the existence of the Republic of Turkey. During the 1930's, Joseph Stalin had begun to revitalize the Russian economy; first increasing the production of Soviet heavy industry with five-year plans, then giving rise to a stronger Red Army, therefore a stronger USSR as a military force. This revitalization secured the Soviet position as an important power on the wake of World War II (McConnel, 2019).

Even though both states had enjoyed a period of cordial relations during the period between the World Wars, they eventually fell within different ranks during the Cold War. Therefore it can be observed that, in the end, both states had actually failed to cultivate and nurture a deeply rooted relation between each other during the time period. To add, the Soviet – Turkish Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality which was signed in 1925 was not renewed after the end of World War II, leading to a decline in the diplomatic relations of the two states. The rising tensions were also apparent at the Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits, where USSR stated that the treaty would be outdated and claimed that a Russian military presence on the Turkish Straits was necessary. Soviet aspirations of expansion concerning the Turkish provinces of Ardahan and Kars had also served to sow mutual distrust between the states (Bilge, 1992).

Kurban (2014: 254), states that the Turks did not trust their northern neighbors, the Soviet Union, as Turkey perceived the presence of the Soviet Union as a threat against Turkey's independence and territorial integrity. The underlying cause of this mistrust can be found in the fact that Soviet Russia had signed secret treaties with France and the U.K. regarding the dissolution of Ottoman borders; seeking further dominion over the Straits and the Black Sea. On the other hand, the USSR's one-sided withdrawal from the Soviet – Turkish Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality of 1925, with Russian researchers stating that USSR had come to a state of war with Turkey, affected the relations between the two states negatively. Thus, Turkey drifted apart from Soviet Russia, towards the Middle East, Near East and the United States of America (Kurban, 2014: 254). Therefore, the Turkish – Russian friendship that could be said to have begun during Turkish War of Independence ended due to Soviet Russia's change of course in foreign politics, also bringing the balanced foreign policy that Turkey sought during the unusual period which came after World War II to an end (Oran, 2001: 276)

Turkey spent the period of time between World War II and the 1950's under the effects of Soviet Union and communism, while strengthening its military and political ties with the United States of America; which moved in motion with the western world. After these events, Turkey succeeded in becoming a member of NATO and other

international institutions that the West had developed. In the meantime, Turkey also saw significant adjustments in its internal affairs; a switch to a multi-party democracy was made in 1946. The change of Turkey's political system brought the Democrat Party to power after 1950, a change which caused variations in ideological discourses. While Meanwhile, the Soviet threat was also regarded as "communist = Russian", with both perceived as threats (Çelikpala, 2019: 4-5).

McConnel (2019), in his analysis of Turkish – Soviet relations based on Cold War historians; argues that Turkey's NATO membership was not intended as an answer to the Soviet Russian threat, but was rather a result of the strategy that Turkey was pursuing at the time. However it may have resulted in picking a side, and even though diplomatic notes were given by Soviet leader Stalin during 1945-6, the tensions never reached the point of an invasion or a campaign. It is thought that Turkey's siding with the USA and the western world, and USA's geopolitical moves against Stalin had also an effect on that (McConnel, 2019).

USSR had lost a significant amount of influence and territory after World War I. However, now emboldened by the Red Army's might, Soviet demands from Turkey after World War II had caused Turkey to become a member of NATO in 1952, therefore causing Turkey to be on the side of the West (Reynolds, 2019). Although several NATO members were opposed to Turkey's proposed membership, the United Nations' efforts of ensuring peace in the Korean Peninsula, which Turkey contributed by the Democrat Party announcing that Turkey would send 4.500 troops to serve, accelerated Turkey's acceptance into NATO's fold. USA's support also helped Turkey to enter NATO, however, Turkey sending troops into Korea deepened the rift between Turkey and Soviet Russia. In retaliation, the Soviets pressured Bulgaria into announcing the deportation of 250.000 ethnic Turks whom were previously residing within its borders (Albayrak, 2004: 460).

During the founding years of Democrat Party, the diplomatic relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union were quite tense. Diplomatic tensions were not limited to between Turkey and the Soviet Union however, as that period of time saw numerous countries scramble to align themselves with one of the two world superpowers. However, after Stalin's passing in March 1953, significant changes happened

regarding the Soviet Union's external relations. The Soviets henceforth built their diplomatic relations upon the principle of "Living together in peace". The Turkish – Soviet relation also saw a period of a calmer atmosphere; with the Soviet Union denouncing its previous demands made in the wake of World War II (especially regarding Montreux and other affairs) with a diplomatic note in May 1953. However, the relations between the two states never advanced beyond simple gestures of good will, with the memory of past disagreements and demands still casting a dark shadow. (Ethem, 2013: 180).

The renouncements made by Stalin's successors regarding the past tensions between Soviet Union and Turkey therefore did not find a response; as evidenced from President Celal Bayar discussing the statements made by Soviet authorities during an opening speech of Grand National Assembly of Turkey in 1955 (c. Kurban, 2014: 258)

"Since the past year, there is absolutely no shred of evidence that the threats against our freedom and peace have been receding... Unfortunately, not only no positive outcome could be negotiated up until now, but also there is no evidence to suggest that those who nurture goals of an attack have given up their such aspirations..."

The USSR and the USA, as two world superpowers, both became centers of power and led the struggle, trying to broaden their respective spheres of influence during the Cold War, which has affected most if not all corners of the globe. As the Middle East was a region of strife in the wake of World War II just as it is today, it became one of the areas that the two superpowers contested with each other. With the United States influence over the Middle East becoming apparent after the Truman Doctrine, the USA underwent efforts to keep Soviet Russia away from the Middle East. The U.S. President Eisenhower sought more influence in the region, and John Foster Dulles, whom Eisenhower had appointed to the office of United States Secretary of the State in the year 1953, went for a diplomatic mission in the Middle East. There, Dulles proposed that the northern belt countries cooperate for mutual defense (Serbest, 2016: 402).

As the first step towards the Baghdad Pact; a treaty between USA and Pakistan was signed concerning technical and economic affairs during December 1953, which was followed by an official Pakistani request of military aid from USA in February of the next year. Besides these mutual affairs, Pakistan and Turkey made a joint declaration; stating that both states would act according to the treaty they had signed in 1951, and that they would continue their cooperation across all fields. After the formation of their bilateral cooperation, the US President Eisenhower made a statement regarding political, economic and military cooperation, stating that no country could stand by itself, and expressing his contentment regarding the cooperation efforts (Eisenhower, 1954).

Turkey and Pakistan, with the participation of Turkish and Pakistani ambassadors, signed a treaty in Karachi on the date April 2, 1954. The treaty intended to pave the way forwards Middle Eastern cooperation and organization against the Soviet Union. The treaty consisted of seven clauses, laying down the foundation of a future defense pact, with emphasis on the ability of other states to join the treaty as well. Soon after this treaty, a defense pact was signed between Pakistan and the United States in May 1954, just under a month from the military aid treaties that were signed with Iraq during 20th of April 1954. It was proposed that Turkey lead the alliance against the Soviet Union; as Turkey both had a land border with the USSR and was thought to be the most powerful state among the allying countries (Serbest, 2016: 404-405)

Turkey, after signing a treaty of mutual cooperation with Iraq during February 1955, declared that a pact was made between Turkey and Iraq, and the pact was set to be the core of a larger possible defense coalition that might emerge. As per the clauses of the treaty that was signed between Turkey and Iraq, and because the Iraqi government was not recognizing Israel as a legitimate state, a possible inclusion of Israel into the defense pact was made directly impossible. Arab Union members were, however, free to join. The United States was the incentive force between the aforementioned treaties and alliances, as it aspired to fill the gap that was left between NATO to the west and SEATO to the east with the Baghdad Pact. With these pacts and alliances, it was sought to encircle Russia and the communist bloc from western Europe to as far as the Philippines (Gönlübol, 2006: 260).

Such a treaty being signed by Turkey and Iraq drew negative reactions from Egypt and other Arab countries, and talks begun of forming an Arab Union Pact, a web of military, economic and political alliance which Iraq would be excluded from. Countries including Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia begun negotiations between each other, condemning Turkey and Iraq. In reaction to these developments and the apparent factionalism apparent throughout Middle East, Great Britain announced its membership of the Baghdad Pact, drawing a negative reaction from the Soviet Union (Serbest, 2016: 412). The following statements were issued by the Soviet Ministry of External Relations during 19th of April 1955 (Fordham University, 2019):

“Just like SEATO, the military alliance formed in Southeast Asia, the colonizing, slaving mentality of several western countries is behind the recent attempts of establishing a military alliance between the countries of the Middle East. The western powers seek to enrich and embolden their great monopolies by exploiting these countries’ natural abundances... Like as it was in the past, the United States and Britain seek to conceal the aggressive nature of their Middle Eastern plans to Middle Eastern states by laughable allegations of a potential Soviet threat.”

With Pakistan and Iran’s association to the Baghdad Pact the number of member states rose to five; as a result, the United States of America pointed out that the project it called the Northern Line was completed thanks to its support. However, the U.S. abstained from joining the pact itself. The Baghdad Pact member states commenced their first meeting on 21st of November 1955, splitting the Arab World into three. On one side stood the Pact member countries including Turkey, on another side stood Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt against the pact, with Lebanon and Jordan electing neutrality. Even though the desired number of member states could not be reached through Baghdad Pact, a sense of unity against the Soviet threat, starting from Turkish Balkans through Iran and Pakistan, was born. But on the other hand, the opposition of the Pact by countries such as Egypt and Syria, and the Egyptian – Soviet treaties that were signed, led to a continued Soviet presence in the Middle East (Araoğlu, 1983: 491-2)

Turkey's need of security against the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, combined with the security policies Turkey has followed in the period between 1950 and 1960, necessitated United States of America's help. The situation was also a policy of ensuring the interests of America and the West in the Middle East and having a stronger presence in the region. However, the unfavorable reactions of non-Baghdad Pact members towards Turkey, and Turkey being the sole Pact country recognizing Israel's existence as a legitimate state reflected negatively upon the Middle East, with Turkey's relations with Arab countries, save Iraq, worsening (Gönlübol, 2006: 270-71). On the other hand, Turkey's close ally in the Middle East, Iraq, woke up to a coup d'état on the morning of 14th of July 1958. Assuming the control over the country under the leadership of General Abd al-Karim Qasim, a declaration was made by the new government stating that a new republic would be formed in Iraq that would honor the country's previous pledges (Serbest, 2016: 418)

After the Iraqi coup, news of King Faisal's demise reached Ankara on the day of a Baghdad Pact meeting, with the Pact's members denouncing the coup by a joint declaration. Also, the Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes suggested intervention of Iraq to other Pact members, although the Pact members rejected this offer. Such an attempt by Turkey was then condemned by the Soviet Union via a diplomatic note. Thus, a new tension was put on Turkish – Soviet relations (Bağlum, 1991: 222)

Internal criticism also arose in Turkey against a possible intervention against Iraq, led by President Celal Bayar, stating that an intervention would be an escapade, preventing Adnan Menderes from moving forward with an attempt. After Iraq's new government was recognized by many western countries, including Turkey, Iraq left the Baghdad Pact in 1959. During the same year, the Pact's name was changed to 'CENTO', and its headquarters were located in Ankara. A meeting of member states was conducted during late 1959 in USA; but USA's abstinence from joining CENTO resulted in the alliance being nothing more than a vessel of cultural and technical cooperation (Bağcı, 1990: 97).

Any criticism of the United States was considered leftism or communism during the 1960's. Especially between 1950 and 1960, Turkey was known to be a defender of westernism and acted as the West's forward outpost. However, Turkey's continued

tensions with the Soviet Union up until the 1960's abated after this period, with Turkey even signing trade deals with Eastern Bloc countries such as Poland and Soviet Union (Yetkin, 1995: 48). Mutual correspondence and trade deals indicate that Turkey reacted more favorably towards Soviet Union's attempts of peace after 1960's. The main reason for this change of perspective was that Turkey not receiving the economic help that it had expected from the West. This mutual reconciliation was noted by then Minister of Foreign Affairs Zorlu, whom stated that he had expected no more benefit from Turkey's relations with the West during a meeting of Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Kurban, 2014: 269).

However, a coup was made by the Turkish Armed Forces on 27th of May 1960, and the Turkish Armed Forces seized control of the government. The talks of demilitarization, national security and missiles that were started in April 1960 with the Soviet Union, led by Adnan Menderes, were hence derailed. Political struggles within the country, the economic crisis and outside support had prepared grounds for a coup. Afterwards, the Soviet government announced that there would be no changes in Turkish – Soviet relations and officially recognized the post-coup Turkish government as legitimate on May 31st, 1960 (Kurban, 2014: 271).

Including the Cold War period, there have been periods of reconciliation between Turkey and the Soviet Union, from the foundation of Turkish Republic up until the present day. Just like the current ongoing events in Syria and the Middle East, periods of strife between Turkey and the West usually coincided with warmer relations towards the Soviet Union. A similar event occurred during the Cold War, as Turkey was slammed with embargos from the US and Turkey's western allies after Turkey's intervention of Northern Cyprus. Seeking an alternative, the possibility of economic ties between Turkey and the Soviet Union were emphasized. Without a doubt, Turkey has closely followed Soviet plans of development and economic initiatives before or during the Cold War, seeking to benefit from their expertise (Çelikpala, 2019: 5).

In the Cold War years, during periods of positive relations between Ankara and Moscow, several economic deals were struck with the Soviet Union. For example, faced with heavy American embargo after intervening into Cyprus, Turkey opened Iskenderun Iron and Steel Manufactory in 1975. After the opening ceremony which

then President of Soviet Russia attended, both countries signed a treaty concerning cooperation and a good neighborly relationship. Following this rapprochement, a 1984 treaty about natural gas, and a 1989 Shore and Border Trade Deal was signed. These treaties are the foremost indicators of commercial and economic cooperation between Turkey and the Soviet Union (Köylü, 2015: 101).

Turkish – Russian relations during the Cold War years were distant and tense. In general terms, it is often stated that the improvement of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Soviet Russia began towards the end of Cold War. Up until the end of 1980's, many projects in Turkey such as Iskenderun Iron and Steel Manufactory, Karabük Iron and Steel Manufactory, the first aluminum factory under Eti Holding, the first oil refinery in Turkey, agricultural industry and Iskenderun harbor and Mersin harbor were completed with Soviet aid; be it productional aid, constructional aid or the training of more than fifty thousand Turkish personnel by Russian units (Polatoğlu 2019: 477)

Essentially, the economic relations during the Cold War between Turkey and Soviet Union started in the middle of 1960's, with Turkey's 1961 constitution paving the way. Within the framework of the new development plans included in 1961 constitution, the first Five Year Development Plan went into effect between 1963 and 1967, with heavy industry projects being approved with cooperation of the Soviet Union. This time period saw positive relations between Turkey and Soviet Union, and industrial enterprises were founded with Turkish – Russian cooperation during the period. Thanks to Turkish President Süleyman Demirel's effort, Soviet Premier Kosygin was hosted in Turkey. Thereafter the Second Five Year Development Plan was set in motion between 1968 and 1972. Thus, industrial projects between Turkey and Soviet Union became reality one by one (Tokgöz, 2011: 9).

The 1970's mark a period where Turkey and Soviet cooperation lay the foundation of many industrial projects. Construction of Aliğa and Seydişehir Aluminum Facilities began in 1969 while the construction of Iskenderun Iron and Steel Manufactory began the next year, and 1972 saw the beginning of production. The first furnace of Iskenderun Iron and Steel Manufactory was thrown in by Demirel and Kosygin in 1975. It was mutually decided that the costs of the facilities would be paid

by exporting of certain items that Moscow would decide which. Economic relations continued throughout 1980, with the signing of the Natural Gas Treaty with Soviet Union during Özal presidency. The treaty, which was signed in 1984, both helped Turkey take another step forwards the use of clean energy, and also mutually strengthened the economic relationship between the two countries. With this treaty, the Soviet Union agreed on purchase of imported products from Turkey (Tokgöz, 2011: 10-11).

However, the normalization of Turkish and Soviet political relations was not as rapid as their economic relations. Especially during the collapse of Eastern Bloc, there was an air of mistrust between Ankara of Moscow, as Kremlin was upset of Turkey's activities. The foremost reasons of Kremlin's disturbance were; Turkey's relations with the Turkic peoples living under Russian republics, and Turkey's military activities in the Black Sea. Similar concerns between the two countries at first steered the Turkish – Soviet relations in the 1990's. However, the event that removed all worries and doubts would be the treaty of friendship between Turkey and Russia in March 1992, with both countries declaring their mutual trust, good neighborhood friendliness (Tüfekçi, 2017: 141).

Fundamentally, the time period between 1992 and 1997 marked a time where both states generally cast their relations, economic and commercial benefits and mutual interests aside. A rivalry arose during this time, limiting the capability of cooperation that would otherwise serve the interest of both countries. Turkey played its trump card; the straits, in hopes of the pipeline that dominated conversations during the period would go through its border instead. However, Turkey and Russia once more started to pursue their mutual interests, and disregarded surmountable problems so that their relations would flourish once more (Akgün and Aydın, 1999: 27).

Under the framework of the natural gas deal that was struck in 1984 between Turkey and the Soviet Union, Turkey began purchase of Russian natural gas through its pipelines that go through Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine, with a 1996 deal increasing the purchase amount from 6 billion cubic meters to 8 billion total. In 1989, Shore and Border Trade Deal was signed, and Turkey in addition sent about 900 workers into the Soviet Union to work under Turkish building contractors operating

on Soviet soil. However, the deal was turned into ‘suitcase trading’ that was common in the 1990’s after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. The situation helped new job opportunities arise, especially in the Black Sea region (Tokgöz, 2009: 223).

The tail end of the 1980’s saw important developments regarding world order. The Soviet Union and the United States of America were the world’s leading superpowers in the wake of World War II; and so they formed the international Western and Eastern Blocs in the direction of their own goals, manners and ideologies. This era ended with the Eastern Bloc leader Soviet Union’s inability to respond to the evolving conditions of military, politics and the world order. The most apparent results of this inability would be the events that led to the tearing down of the Berlin Wall (Armaoğlu, 2012: 1096-7).

The beginning of the collapse of the Soviet Union would be the reforms that Gorbachev had first initiated in 1986. With the goals of restructuring of the Soviet Union in accordance to the new world order and providing a solution to growing problems, the proposed ‘perestroika’ (restructuring) and ‘glasnost’ (openness, transparency) policies. The civil unrest against the communist order that these policies brought about led to collapse. The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in July 1991 marked a definite end. During the following period, Gorbachev both announced his resignation from the Party, and that its operations had come to an end. It can be said that Gorbachev’s announcement of his resignation was the end of an era. (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2020).

Gorbachev’s policies of restructuration and transparency caused the Soviet Union to go through a period of hardship, with severe political and economic problems arising. On the other hand, cultural and political problems of belonging necessitated various economic precautions to be undertaken. The underlying causes of the economic problems that the Soviet Union suffered during this period are its rapidly applied programs of privatization and the transition from a planned economy to a market economy. As a result, a broken economic structure arose within the Soviet Union, which caused a select few to greatly prosper while the masses suffered in poverty (Sönmez, 2010: 39).

During the transitory period that Soviet Russia underwent during the 1990's, it can be said that the relations with Turkey were generally about maintaining a suitable environment for continued relations. Politically, it's safe to say that both countries spent time and effort towards increasing their influences in the regions of interest in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The general framework of reciprocal relations between the two countries were focused on the PKK problem that was vital for Turkey, and the Chechnya problem. With Vladimir Putin's rise to power near the end of the 1990's, steps were taken so that the two countries could stay unaffected from the problems that had arisen in Central East and the Caucasus (Tüfekçi, 2017: 135).

On the other hand, Russia was dealt a heavy blow with the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, on top of its already struggling economy. The damage caused on the Russian economy by the crisis caused the transitory period to become even harsher, when Russia's then internal problems are considered, the rise of new crime organizations and media moguls can be noted. Economic reforms and political developments caused the previously Soviet-aligned administrative zones to drift away from the Kremlin. Also, the Chechnya problem and the loss of prestige that came with it, not to mention the spread of the struggles to Dagestan; brought into discussion Russia's problems of governmental structuring, and fears of yet another problem that might arise in ethnic Bashkortostan or Yakutia (officially Sakha Republic) only accelerating the criticism further (Sönmez, 2010: 40-1).

Especially during the Yelstin era, Russia had its greatest troubles with Georgia, with the strife between the two countries growing even tenser after Putin took power. Putin imposing visa requirements upon Georgian citizens and while granting the right to move freely to South Ossetian and Abkhazian citizens was taken as a threat to Georgia's independence, which caused tensions to further rise. Another event that caused strife between Tbilisi and Moscow would be that Putin's refusal to dismantle military bases located in Georgia; while Georgia's refusal to let Russian military to use Georgian soil during the Chechnyan War and Georgians supporting Chechnyan militias had already caused the Russian – Georgian relations to sour. The tensions caused Georgia to align itself closer to the EU, NATO and especially Turkey (Ağacan, 2003: 19-20).

In addition, policies reminiscent of the Cold War era regarding the Turkic Republics and ethnic Turkic peoples residing in Central Asia, and Vladimir Putin's outbursts can be considered negative incidents. On the other hand, besides the Georgian – Russian tensions and Azerbaijan and Turkey's ongoing troubles with Armenia, the propagation of Turkey's geopolitical position by the West to be used against Russia provided the basis of tensions. The first decade of the new millennium, however, saw more positive relations between Russia and Turkey. Even though the problems during the 2000's were similar to the ones in the 1990's, many protocols were signed concerning the aforementioned problems between the two countries (Başbuğ and Başbuğ, 2015: 335-336).

Another situation that arose between Russia and Turkey after the collapse of the Soviet Union was Turkey seeking to improve its strategic and geopolitical standing by connecting with the Turkic Republics. Turkey's attempts of becoming a model country saw an amiable response from the Turkish public as Turkey made various attempts in that regard; empowered by its ancestry and historical inheritance (Aktürk, 2004: 212). Russia opposed Turkey's attempts to connect with the Turkic republics, however, fearing that the great Turkic presence that starts from the Balkans and, through Central Asia, goes as far as China, would cause strife between the Turkic and Russian populaces. This situation can be regarded as the general framework of the era's Turkish – Russian relations (Çelikpala, 2019: 6).

As Russia sought to rekindle its relations with the former Soviet satellite states, it opposed the relations Turkey had with the Turkic Republics. For example, Russia opposed the talks of the Baku – Ceyhan pipeline that would let the Azerbaijani petrol reach the western markets, instead proposing the petrol be transported through the Black Sea from Russia's Novorossiysk harbor and through the Turkish Straits. However, Turkey rejected the idea; and with Turkey's efforts the Baku – Ceyhan pipeline became operational in the year 2005 (Köylü, 2015: 101; Titov, 2020).

After the 2000's, the relations between Turkey and Russia were conducted on multiple fronts such as commerce to culture, with possible opportunities of cooperation considered. The AK Parti government also had a sizeable effect on the eagerness for increasing the commerce, culture, politics and tourism interactions between Russia and

Turkey; with AK Parti putting a clause in their election manifesto that stated, once in power, they would establish amicable relations with all of Turkey's neighboring countries. As stated in AK Parti's 2002 election manifesto below, it was stated that relations based on cooperation would be established and nurtured (TBMM, 2020).

“Relations with the Russian Federation will be based not on grounds of rivalry, but cooperation across Central Asia and the Caucasus. The AK Party will exert considerable effort towards the maximum progress possible regarding the relations between Turkey and the Turkic Republics, with the goal being the transformation of the region into a major area of cooperation. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc helped a new area of cooperation appear in the Black Sea region. The potential collaboration opportunities that the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) might provide, whose foundation saw broad participation, will be set in motion.”

Similar statements were issued not only during the 2007 elections, but during the 2011 and 2015 elections as well, with similar policies being pursued during the period. When regarded by its trading volume, it's apparent that Turkey's economic cooperation with Russia has steadily increased every day since the year 2000, especially showing a serious leap in year 2004 and peaking at 33,5 billion dollars in 2012. The trading volume between Turkey and the Russian Federation between the years 2000 through 2018 is included below in chart 1.1 (TÜİK, 2020).

Chart 1.1 – The trading volume between Turkey and Russian Federation between 2000 and 2018.

Year	Exportation (Billion \$)	Importation (Billion \$)	Total Volume (Billion \$)
2000	0,6	3,9	4,5
2001	0,9	3,4	4,3
2002	1,2	3,9	5,1
2003	1,4	5,5	6,9
2004	1,9	9,0	10,9
2005	2,4	12,9	15,3
2006	3,2	17,8	21,0
2007	4,7	23,5	28,2
2008	6,5	31,3	37,8
2009	3,2	19,5	22,7
2010	4,6	21,6	26,2
2011	6,0	23,9	29,9
2012	6,9	26,6	33,5
2013	7,0	25,1	32,1
2014	5,9	25,3	31,2
2015	3,6	20,4	24,0
2016	1,7	15,2	16,9
2017	2,7	19,5	22,2
2018	3,4	22,0	25,4

Source: TÜİK, 2020

The commercial and economic relations between Russia and Turkey form the basis of bilateral relations between the countries; with Russia being an important trade partner of Turkey as evidenced by the graph above. When the reciprocal investments made by Turkey and Russia are examined, it is apparent that the total volume of investments are about \$10 billion dollars (TÜİK, 2020). Today, there are hundreds of Turkish contractors and a multitude of Turkish workers operating in Russia in above 2000 separate projects, totaling in value near \$60 billion dollars. On the other hand, energy is the key element of the trade between the two countries. In addition, the TurkStream and the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant projects have brought Turkey and Russia even closer. Tourism is another important component; as especially during the recent years the volume of Russian tourists visiting Turkey has reached record-breaking numbers (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2020).

With a total foreign trade volume of \$38 billion dollars, Russia has become Turkey's greatest foreign trade partner in 2008, with a mutual goal of increasing the total volume as high as \$100 billion dollars. Seven protocols and fifteen deals were signed during Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's 2009 visit of Ankara. At the

same time, with deals pointing towards a strategic partnership, a deal between Turkey and Russia was struck during the 2010 visit of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev; which oversaw the concurrent lifting of visa requirements between the countries and a nuclear power plant deal of \$20 billion dollars. These developments between Turkey and Russia, and the substantial increase of the total trade volume between the two countries in the past two decades, has not escaped the attention of political scientists (Markedenov and Ulchenko, 2011).

Turkey especially seeks advancements in the energy field, as the country wishes to reduce its outwards dependence while also seeking to reduce the environmental impact of its energy sources and energy production. Energy deals with Russia were struck in this regard. Even though the brief fallout of the event where a Turkish F-16 jet shot down a trespassing Russian Su-24 caused an interruption, the commercial relations with Russia continued soon afterwards. This points out the importance both countries place on their commercial relations (Koçak, 2017: 10).

The most significant development of positive relations between Turkey and Russia came after the 2000's. As Russia lost the political and economic power it once held during the Cold War, the importance of Turkey's geopolitical location also waned in the West's regard. Therefore, both countries had concerns of defense, a mutual concern which brought the two countries closer together. The root cause of these concerns is that both countries are located in an unstable geographical position concerning their interests and potential benefits. These circumstances call for a wary approach, as Turkey has been struggling with terrorist organizations for decades, such as PKK, PYD/YPG, ISIS, all of which have significant number of supporters in the Middle East.

Without a doubt, Putin's moderate foreign politics, sources of energy and the developments of Russian economy, in addition to AK Parti government's 'zero problems' policy regarding all of Turkey's neighbors, all played an important part regarding the flourishing of Turkish – Russian relations. However, external developments on the world stage also served to bring the two countries closer to each other. As Russia had a falling out with the West after its troubles with Georgia and

Ukraine, not to mention its very active and forward policies which caused the United States to become distant (Mankoff, 2016).

Similarly, Turkey was also left alone in the past years, as the European Union gave inadequate support for Turkey's full association. Turkey was left alone during the Syrian refugee crisis and also during the July 15th coup attempt. Turkey's proclaimed most important ally USA's open support of PYD/YPG also negatively affected Turkey's relationship with USA (Kazdal, 2018: 53).

According to Russian political scientist Igor Torbakov, the relationship between Turkey and Russia is a relationship of political dualism. Per Torbakov, the relationship includes mutual cooperation and also elements of rivalry. Ethnopolitical reasons are given for the nature of cooperative-yet-rivalrous relations between the two countries. The ethnopolitical reasons include; Russia's military operations into Chechnya, and Turkey's troubles with the PKK. On the other hand, the Russian – Armenian partnership and Turkey's support of Georgia and Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Russia's worries of a Pan-Turkic movement rising and Turkey's uneasiness towards Russia's arms policies are also factors worth mentioning (Markedenov and Ulchenko, 2011).

The positive developments between Turkey and Russia; namely the increasing trade volume between the countries and their economic collaborations, does not indicate that Russia and Turkey are one of a mind in regards to foreign policy issues. In theory, Turkey and Russia stand in opposing fronts, since Turkey is a NATO member while Russia is not; but Turkey and Russia stand or have stood in opposing fronts during the Syrian War, Kosovo, Nagorno-Karabakh or Armenian issues as well. However much the two countries may agree on certain issues, aligning closer to each other, they also keep their distances regarding other issues. The most strained the Turkish – Russian relations have been in the recent times would be the event where a trespassing Russian jet was shot down by Turkey.

The event also brought several other issues out to light; with Putin throwing baseless accusations against Turkey after the event, which threw the ongoing development of positive relations between the two countries into disarray. It can be

said that the event caused an air of mistrust to ferment in lieu of the ever-increasing affiliation the two countries had. The most important reason for this would be Putin's direct accusation of the Turkish government, blaming Ankara for allegedly being affiliated with ISIL. Not only that, Putin, exacerbating the problem, issued economic embargoes against Turkey and commenced a large-scale propaganda campaign in Russia. Therefore, the positive relations Turkey and Russia had been developing since the 2000's fell into a state of crisis (İmambeyli, 2015: 5).

However, when the basis of the shutdown crisis is examined; it is seen that after Russia's involvement within the Syrian Civil War and its military interferences, and the fact that Russian air forces have been stationed in Syria since September 2015; the crisis happened right as Russian warplanes were bombing the border areas (İmambeyli, 2015: 3). The Russian warplane was shot down after violation of Turkish airspace by Turkish jets. Afterwards Russia announced that no account of an airspace violation occurred, and that Russia could prove its claim. As a response, the General Staff of Turkey published the path analysis of the infringing Russian jet and also declared that the jet was warned of its airspace violation no less than ten times before any action was taken (Shvets, 2015).

Putin announced through TASS News Agency that Turkey's shooting down of the Russian Su-24 warplane was considered a backstabbing of Russia and threatened severe consequences. Per Nikolsky of TASS News Agency's (2015) news, Putin specified that the shot down plane fell four kilometers inwards of the order, and the plane was shot down by a ground missile at six thousand meters of altitude (Nikolsky, 2015). Turkey's statement on the other hand announced that the warplane's Russian origins were not apparent at the time, and professed that if that were known, another path would have been taken. Following the event, Russia and Turkey entered a diplomacy of apology, with Turkey officially apologizing to Russia by a formal letter in 2016 (Çopuroğlu and Karpuzcu, 2017: 478).

Turkey's geographical location inside an unstable region, combined with other external threats against Turkey, urges the country towards a cautious approach. On the other hand, Russia's worry that the United States could gain greater influence in such an unstable region similarly causes Russia to adopt a cautious approach. The current

situations of Turkey and Russia saw both countries get closer over strategical and defense concerns especially since 2000's, with Turkey's current situations and developments near its geographical position strengthening the bond between the two countries, both before and after the shutdown crisis.

When examined from a diplomatic point of view, it is seen that Turkey and Russia have never been closer. It is known that Turkey and Russia had an increasing amount of cooperation after the Cold War, especially in energy and tourism fields. So, how did the Turkish – Russian relations normalize so quickly, despite the shutdown crisis that happened in Syria?

Turkey possesses a very important position in its own geopolitical location, as a land bridge between Europe and Asia, while also connecting the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea via the straits. In addition, thanks to its territories in Asia, Turkey is intertwined with the Middle East; a cradle of civilization since the dawn of history and the starting point of all Abrahamic religions. There are very important rich oil fields as well (Bağlama, 2016). As for Russia, the country holds enormous territory from Eastern Europe through Northern Asia. Russia, thanks to industrial leaps it has made between the World Wars, has been the flag carrier and protectorate of the socialist ideology during the Cold War. Russia and Turkey, however northern/southern neighbors of each other they may be, have stood on opposite fronts during the Cold War. Since then, they have significantly developed their relations after the 2000's, especially during the Syrian crisis.

Countries of opposing fronts during their history and the Cold War years; are Turkish – Russian relations now seeing positive developments in the framework of economic cooperation, as evidenced by their energy deals – or have the threats to their security that arose after the wake of Cold War era brought the countries together? Whatever the reason may be; despite the problems that arise from time to time between the two countries, and despite Turkey's alliances with NATO and USA; both countries have proven that they possess the capability of cooperating in many fields, as evidenced by the S-400 deal and their decision to cooperate with each other in Syria. With all these facts in consideration, the vital importance researching the Turkish –

Russian relations becomes clear as day. Therefore, the main goal of this work is the research of Turkish – Russian relations in the context of the Syrian Crisis.

Within the framework of this goal, the historic relations between Turkey and Russia have been researched, and regional and global actors of the Syrian Crisis have also researched. The most recent publications have been reviewed in order to bring the relations between Turkey and Russia into the light. Turkey and Russia's relations have been therefore researched up until the Syrian Crisis in the first part of this work, with the second part being devoted to Turkish – Syrian relations from past to today. In the third part, events in Syria have been examined from the period of time between the Syrian Civil War up until the shutdown crisis (and its fallout); then the developing Turkish – Russian relations during Operation Euphrates Shield, Operation Olive Branch and Operation Peace Spring and the S-400 matter were all evaluated chronologically.

In this research, qualitative methods have been used in order to better relay and construe the subject. In qualitative works of research; the end goal lies not in collecting and presenting as much numerical values as possible, but rather lies in bringing forth a better understanding of the subject with deeper, more clarifying research and presenting the subject matter adequately to the target group's perspective. Methods of document analysis, recorded interviews and observation are commonly utilized; however, during the process, the events and phenomena are presented within their natural habitats holistically and realistically (Duman, 2018).

In qualitative works of research, the continuum of the events is of greater importance than the final outcome or products of the events (Altunay et al. 2014). However, when analyzing different events, different or similar events and outcomes are compared in order to determine whether and how specific situations and events affect the interaction between the variables, determine which of their aspects are of importance, and determine which particular events must be studied to complete clarity. Case analysis may be utilized not only for one specific event or period of time, but also in order to compare different periods of time (Ankara University, 2018).

In this work, statistical data and methods are mostly disregarded. Instead, the ongoing diplomatic relations between Turkish and Russian governments regarding Syria, the factors which have affected the Turkish – Russia rapprochement, the positive or negative events in the Turkish – Russian relations, and the direction towards which the Turkish – Russian relations are headed towards is discussed. As this work seeks to discuss the causality of the Turkish – Russian relations; both present-day and historical developments of the Turkish – Russian relations have been researched, analyzed and interpreted.



CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORICAL PROGRESS AND DEMOGRAPHICAL STRUCTURE OF SYRIA

In this chapter, the country of Syria will be studied in regard to its demographic structure.. Then, the political developments will be perused chronologically, starting from the Hatay problem, pre-Cold War era, Cold War era and the post-Cold War era Turkish – Syrian relations; all of which have been researched and presented thoroughly. The topic of Turkish – Russian relations regarding Syria in this thesis also necessitate research on the ethnic and demographic properties of Syria. To add, it is also imperative to emphasize how either Russian Federation's or Turkey's governments encountered Syria, and what relations and expectations that Turkey has that could be affected by Syrian Civil War's eventual result.

2.1 Ethnic and Socio-demographic Characteristics of Syria

Syria is the home of many different sects, beliefs, religions and ethnic groups whom often have clashing expectations and goals. The situation of post-Arab Spring Syria highlights this phenomenon. In this chapter, the multi-ethnic and multi-religious circumstances have been considered as the ethnic and socio-demographic characteristics of Syria are presented and analyzed.

According to official Syrian sources, 22 million citizens resided within its borders pre-Syrian crisis (Başıhoş et al. 2015: 2). As for ethnic groups, 90,3% of the citizens were of Arabic roots and 9,7% were either Kurdish, Armenian or belonged to other ethnic roots. Religiously; 60% of the Syrian population were Sunni Muslims, 16% were of the Alawite sect; raising the country's total Muslim population percentage to 86%, with 12% of the country's citizens proclaiming Christian faith. Sources also point to notable Shia Muslim and Drusian presence; about 2% of the country's population. Even though Syria's official language is Arabic, traces of French

and English use can be seen (Turkish Ministry of Commerce). The aforementioned 2% slice of population also includes groups such as Ismailism and Müttevelli. Syria's Christian population is also split between various groups such as Syrian Christians, Greco-Christians and Eastern Orthodoxy. The five main Christian groups of Syria are Syrians, Greco-Christians, Armenians, Maronites and Chaldeans, with other populations consisting of Protestants, Assyrians and churches connected to the Armenian Apostolic Church also seen. There are also a number of Jewish citizens residing within Syrian borders (Abuhassan, 2013: 9-10, Dağ, 2013: 71).

As Syria has historically exhibited diverse ethnic groups and religious beliefs; the constant struggles of political powers were frequently rooted in regional or religious differences. The first emphasizing of religious differences between Syrians took place under the French Mandate, and the minority religious groups of Nusairis (Alawites), Ismailists, and Druzians gaining influence. Until the rise of the Ba'athi regime, Sunni Muslims were the most prominent political group with their Arabic and Islamic aspects. However, after the Ba'athi regime took power; the Nusairis became most distinguished group in Syrian politics, while also becoming the dominant cultural and religious influence within Syria. As the Nusairis took advantage of the opportunities the Baas regime provided, they have also amassed bureaucratic privileges, therefore acquiring a certain amount of influence over Syria's economy as well (Akkan, 2016: 6-7).

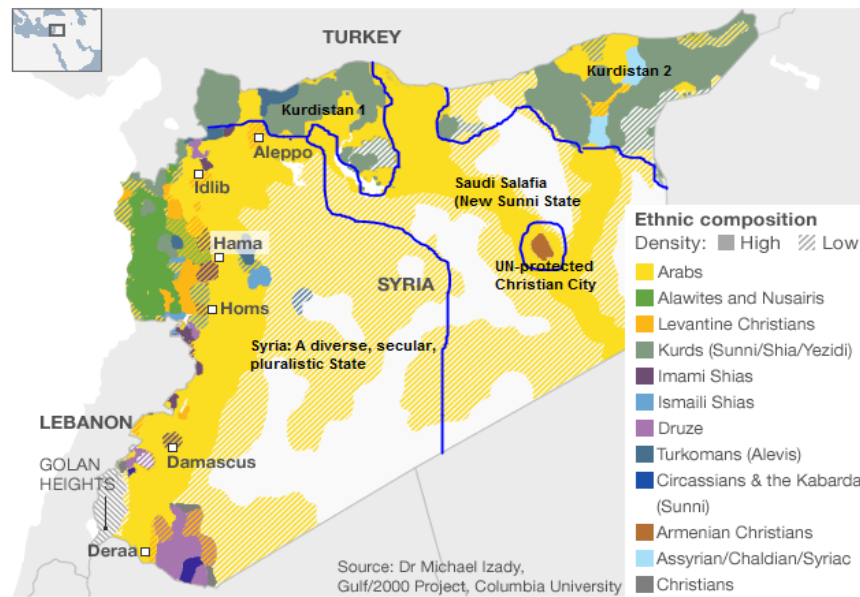


Fig.: 2.1 Various ethnicities in Syria (Izady, 2000)

According to Khazan's (2012) news article in Washington Post, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his family, along with the Syrian security forces, belong to the Alawite minority which represents only 12% of the total Syrian population; however, they were identified as Shia Muslims. Even though the Syrian Alawites are only a 12% minority, the group has been in power since Hafez al-Assad's 1970 coup d'état. While Syria's largest group, the 60% percent majority who identify as Sunni Muslims are being regarded as supporters of Syrian and Lebanese rebels and potential dissenters towards the current regime. On the other hand, and especially during recent periods, Sunnis were the group subjected to ethnic cleansing in Syria. Even today it can be observed that Alawites hold the commanding positions in the army, while Sunnis make up the majority of the troops instead (Khazan, 2012).

It is notable that minority groups hold many important political and bureaucratic positions in Syrian government, despite their status as such. Furthermore, the aforementioned groups have acquired disproportional wealth as they have a firm grip of many governmental positions. Indeed, it can be said that the bureaucratic sidelining of the majority Sunni Muslims and the increasing poverty among the group has bolstered the Syrian conflict, resulting in a war-torn, bloody picture of current day Syria (Akkan, 2016: 7).

2.2 The Political Climate in Syria

Syria and the greater Middle East region have always been a region where developed countries had made attempts to exert control over it; due to its energy resources, geographical position and its historic and religious characteristics. As the ongoing Syrian crisis has mostly political reasons; the political climate of Syria is discussed at length during the following chapter.

Syria and the greater Middle Eastern region have always retained their significance throughout history; as the region is the birthplace of all Abrahamic religions, while also being a blending hub of various beliefs, beliefs, religious sects and cultures. It is known that Syrian borders envelop a region with vast history. The region has been invaded and/or occupied by Hebrew, Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Seljuk, Arab forces, as well as European Crusaders. Damascus became the capital of the Mameluke Sultanate in 1260, until the Mameluke reign was toppled by Sultan Selim I of Ottoman Empire; establishing a 403-year Ottoman rule over the region, up until the very last years of the empire. Afterwards, Syria became a French mandate up until the end of World War II; after which the country declared its independence in 1946. In 1958, Syria and Egypt were joined together to form the United Arab Republic; however, this union did not last for long as Syria seceded three years later in 1961. Afterwards, Syria was defeated along with its allies in Six Days War (also known as Yom Kippur War); losing the strategically important Golan Heights to Israel (Deniz, 2013: 316).

The struggle for power in Syria started as France pulled out of Syria following the end of World War II; and has not dwindled to present day. The Sunni groups whom held power after 1946 supported the People's Party and National Party. This political bloc had the support of many different profession groups, in which Sunni Muslims were a majority. However, the bloc could never assume full power despite their multitude of support; as the two parties neither could solve the disputes between each other nor focus on the possible occurrence of any external problems. Accordingly, many coup attempts – with internal and external support – occurred in Syria, as no Syrian political party could establish a stable stance up until Hafez al-Assad took power in 1971 (Ataman, 2012: 8).

In 1954, the Ba'ath Party had achieved its most prominent success to date, acquiring 13 seats out of 141. By 1958 the party had acquired a certain political gravitas; as the Ba'ath Party supported Egypt and Syria's political union under the name of United Arab Republic, therefore earning itself five notable positions in UAR's cabinet – vice presidency and four ministries. However, relations between Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Ba'ath Party soured after the union, and the party moved its headquarters to Beirut after the shutdown of all political parties. Nasser's politics had agitated the Syrian Army as well however; which led to Syria's departure from the UAR after the 1961 coup. Just after, another coup d'état by General Zahr ad-Din occurred in 1962 and the government once again changed hands. Then the Ba'ath Party supporters led yet another coup in 1963, and the Ba'ath Party remained in control over Syria under Salah al-Din al-Bitar's presidency (Şahin, 2011: 108).

Another coup by two Nusairi generals in 1966 cemented the Ba'ath government's position. Subsequently, Hafez al-Assad together with his group worked to eliminate internal rivals in the party. After another period of power struggle, Hafez al-Assad emerged as the undisputed leader of Syria (Ataman, 2012: 8-9).

2.2.1 The Reign of Hafez al-Assad

Emerging victorious from the Ba'ath Party's internal power struggles, Hafez al-Assad assumed supreme power in November 1970. First dispersing of radical groups within the party and the army, he was then elected president with the support of notable politicians and top brass behind him in 1971. Serving for a roughly thirty-year period afterwards, Hafez al-Assad has become a notable actor of Syrian history. During the first years of his reign, Assad has sought to secure and legitimize his position with the party via purges. Afterwards, he has engineered the governmental system which has entitled him to enormous legislative and executive power (Ataman, 2012: 9).

Securing his dominion over military, executive and legislative powers, Assad then had the Syrian Constitution of 1973 developed, which is still in effect as of present day. The constitution granted Assad absolute control as President while maintaining constitution had a democratic façade. According to its law; the president is also

commander in chief of the Syrian Army, and is bestowed with the authority to appoint and dismiss any top-ranking military or civilian personnel at will. In addition, the cabinet advises to and derives its executive power directly from the president; essentially granting Assad with the full authority to define Syria's policies. Assad also had the final word on any subject which otherwise kept its ambiguity in the constitution, and also served as the General Secretary of the Ba'ath Party in the meantime (Akkan, 2016: 12).

Hafiz al-Assad gained the support of Alawites and many other groups as he came to absolute power. Jafaris, Ismailis, Christians and other such groups were pressured into declaring support for Assad. Assad and the groups in his circle of power lent the necessary support towards the regime; as an election cycle of seven years was in effect to keep up the guise of democracy in Syria, and the aforementioned groups feared possible persecution under a hypothetical Sunni regime taking power (Ayhan and Dilek, 2012). However, the Sunni groups which boasted considerable economic power also aligned themselves with the Ba'ath Party, supporting Assad and the Nusairis, in order to safeguard whatever power they held at the moment. Hence, the Alawite minority held supremacy over the non-Alawite majority during Hafez al-Assad's reign, as Syria essentially became Ba'ath Party State up until the 2000's. After thirty years without any change of power, Hafez al-Assad passed away in 2000, succeeded by his son and heir apparent, Bashar al-Assad (Ataman, 2012: 9; Akkan, 2016: 12).

2.2.2 Bashar al-Assad's Rule

During the reign of Hafez al-Assad, it was widely expected that his firstborn son Bassel would rule after the event of his passing. However, Bassel al-Assad lost his life in a fatal car crash in 1994. His younger brother, Bashar, then left his postgraduate studies in medicine (specializing in the field of ophthalmology), to be groomed to rule as President of Syria after his father's eventual passing, which occurred six years later in 2000. The necessary preparations and legislative regulations were made by for Bashar to rule by the Ba'ath Party and the People's Council of Syria; such as the reduction of the minimum age for presidential candidacy from 40 to 34. Bashar al-Assad was also promoted from the rank of colonel to a lieutenant general. In the referendum of July 2000, Bashar al-Assad was elected President of Syria with a staggering 97% of Syrian voters casting their ballots in his favor. The root cause of his

very high support within the Syrian voters can be seen in Ba'ath Party's extensive election campaign in favor of Bashar al-Assad, presenting him as a reformist, honest, open-minded, moderate candidate (Ataman, 2012: 23; Kayabaşı, 2019: 13).

The first few years of Bashar al-Assad's rule saw mostly positive developments. After assuming presidency, Assad put several reform packages into effect, oversaw extensive economic operations, attempted to attract foreign capital into Syria and established private banking and stock exchange. More such reforms followed, such as Syria applying for membership into World Trade Organization in 2001, establishing exchange rate policies in 2002 and repealing the Foreign Currency Law, which essentially served as a barrier between foreign investors and Syria. Bashar al-Assad concentrated on liberal economics during the first years of his reign, replacing the aging staff of economics in government with younger, more liberal economists. However, still-ongoing issues of corruption, the weight of foreign debt, unemployment, insufficient amounts of investment and low volume of exportation has led to many problems in Syrian economy. Other reasons include political corruption as the Assad family almost ran Syria as a family business, and economic embargoes imposed by the West, both of which have caused further increase in Syria's economic difficulties (Ataman, 2012: 23).

Initially, Bashar al-Assad sought to develop amicable relations with the European Union and the United States, seeking to re-shape the Syrian economy towards a more liberal economic framework. However, the alliances build by Bashar Al-Assad during this period proved insufficient – as Assad could not prevent Lebanese and Iranian Hezbollah from driving a wedge between him and the Syrian populace. As time passed under Bashar al-Assad's reign, the Syrian populace saw Hafez al-Assad's legacy persist in Ba'ath Party and its administrative mentality, as its worldview differed from vox populi, further and further driving the Syrian people away from Bashar al-Assad.

Bashar al-Assad has also suffered failure in foreign politics. The foremost example being the disputes with Israel that Bashar al-Assad inherited from during his father's reign. The peace talks between Syria and Israel began in 1991 and reached no conclusion up until 2000. Bashar al-Assad's main external politics agendas either

resulted in failure; his failure to secure Syria's interests in the peace table and his failure to ensure the security of the regime, and the Golan Heights crisis that still has not been settled until the present day. Bashar al-Assad's perceived ineptitude in external politics also overshadowed his efforts to reduce corruption and his liberalization efforts, driving away external funding and investment (Salik, 2011: 22-23). The Golan Heights dispute between Syria and Israel has also affected the U.S. – Syrian relations. As tensions grew, the United States enacted economic and political sanctions upon Syria, citing reasons such as Bashar al-Assad's support of terrorism in December 2003 and May 2004, his support of Iraqi insurgents and Syria's invasion of Lebanon (Salik, 2011: 23).

As he fell into diplomatic hardships, Bashar al-Assad sought to form alliances in order to disencumber the foreign stress on Syria. During the time that diplomatic tensions grew between Syria versus Israel and the U.S., Assad forged an alliance with Iran, which is Syria's most positive diplomatic relation. Seeking to assume leadership of Islamic Jihad Movement, Palestinian Hamas and the Shia Hezbollah in Lebanon in order to gain leverage over Israel and the U.S., Bashar al-Assad even succeeded for a period of time, especially during 2006 where he played a key role in reaching Hamas and Hezbollah during the Israel-Hezbollah conflict.

The Turkish – Israeli issues during the period, such as Israel's attack on Gaza and the apparent tension between Turkey and Israel during the Davos conference, have also served to align Turkey and Syria closer, giving Bashar al-Assad an upper hand. However, this period of cordiality between the two states only lasted until the 2011 protests against the Syrian regime (Salik, 2011: 12, 23-25).

2.3 A Brief History of Syria

In this chapter, the history of Syria is discussed in order to both analyze the historic reasons for the Syrian crisis and the local dynamics which triggered the Arab Spring.

Throughout history, the geographical region which Syria exists within today has cradled many different cultures and was ruled by many civilizations, thereby also referred to by different names during different periods. The region's geographical location between Anatolia, Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean has warranted its historical significance, and also several foreign invasions and periods of occupation. Most notable being the Ottoman rule, as Selim I of Ottoman Empire conquered the current-day Syria and Palestine in 1516, which both regions remained under its rule for little over four centuries (Dağ, 2013: 16-17).

Several reforms were made after Syria fell under Ottoman domination, such as the granting of equal rights to Muslims and Christians, which has caused unrest among certain Muslim populations. This has eventually caused ethnic and religious conflict, which led to the rise of Arab nationalism after Second Constitutional Era of the Ottoman Empire (Choueiri, 2011: 276). Disappointed by the United Kingdom's unrealized promises of independence, the Arab leaders convened at the Syrian National Congress in Damascus during World War I. The Congress declared the foundation of the Arab Kingdom of Syria, which included Palestine as well. However, a secret treaty between the Entente countries oversaw that France take control of Syria and Lebanon, while U.K. took control of Palestine. This secret treaty came into effect after the Armistice of Mudros was signed; thereafter Syria suffered a twenty-five year period of unrest and conflict under French mandate (Arı, 2012: 133).

During the mandate period, several autonomous regions were propped up in places such as Damascus, Iskenderun, Aleppo and Latakia. Several rebellions against the French mandate eventually brought Syria its independence in the wake of World War II, however, the atmosphere of political unrest and conflict within Syria persisted. The period between 1949 through 1966 is therefore referred as the Era of Coups. After Hafez al-Assad ousted his comrade Salah Jadid on 17 November 1970 and assumed control; he both sought to repress the internal opposition against him while also focusing on external diplomacy. Hafez al-Assad triumphed over many rebellions during his thirty-year reign and was succeeded by his son Bashar al-Assad on 10 June 2000 after his passing (Dağ, 2013; Fikriyat, 2018).

The Syrian government was essentially running like a family business during Hafez al-Assad's thirty-year reign; with the Assad family having total control over the Syrian economy. The opposition, which aligned closely with Islamist ideology, regularly protested the Assad regime's militaristic nature and its effect on the economy. Their foremost desires were fair, equal opportunity for all and a more Islamic system of economics. Within the scope of these disagreements, the Hafez al-Assad era saw a harsh political climate (Fikriyat, 2018).

2.4 The Inner Workings of Syrian – Russian Relations

The collapse of the Soviet Union affected the Middle East as well, giving rise to new strategies. As the Soviet Union was a protector of Syria against U.S. influence during the Cold War, its collapse has affected Syria the most among other Middle Eastern countries. The United States filled the power vacuum that Soviets had left behind in the Middle East, exerting their influence and control over the region until Putin took power. Under Putin, Russia attained significant influence again, and has attempted to re-establish and empower its relations with Syria and other Middle Eastern countries during both the Arab Spring and the start of the Syrian crisis (Ağır, 2016: 294).

Syria is located on one of the most geopolitically significant regions of the Middle East, as the country has both significant Mediterranean shoreline and lands stretching towards the inner Middle Eastern regions. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Syria's demographic characteristics, its military, political and economic structure and its noteworthy geopolitical position has gained the attention of various regional and global powers (Akengin and Yaşar, 2018: 27).

Even though Bashar al-Assad has followed significantly more moderate politics after succeeding his father Hafez; the American invasion of Iraq and its ongoing occupation of Afghanistan has caused Damascus to feel itself surrounded. After several setbacks with the West, Bashar al-Assad's inability to respond to U.S.'s expectations gave rise to unease within the country. In such a situation, Syria sought to alleviate its worries by siding with Russia, whom it already had historic relations

with. During the following period, the 9/11 attacks caused Syria to become isolated from the U.S., further reinforcing the need for Russia as an ally of Syria (Doster, 2012).

2015 was a milestone for Syrian – Russian relations, as the Syrian crisis spread to Latakia, Russia developed further its already positive relations with the Syrian government and increased its military presence in the region. In addition to the Tartus naval base, which has been Russia's only naval base in Mediterranean since 1971, Russian forces also began using Bassel al-Assad airport. Both the post Syrian crisis succession struggles, and U.S. and the West's displays of power has transformed the region to something akin to a Cold War arena of struggle (Ağır and Takar, 2016).

Today, Russia both protects its geopolitical interests within the region, and, in support of the Assad regime, regards the Syria's present-day situation as a nefarious plot. Russia protects Syria diplomatically by vetoing political decisions made against Syria in the international arena and attempting to prevent would-be sanctions imposed against Syria, and also provides armament and military support on the ground. It can be said that Russian support enables the Assad regime to survive, causing the civil war to drag further on. In present day, the Assad regime is still surviving however, Syria is far from a unified nation as many armed forces clash within its borders.

2.5 Turkish – Syrian Relations

Although the Syrian crisis has many political reasons; cultural, social, economic and geographical reasons exist as well. As Turkey shares its longest land border with Syria; both nations naturally affect each other due to their geographical proximity. Therefore, the Turkish – Syrian relations are going to be presented and analyzed starting from the Hatay dispute. Pre-Cold War, Cold War and post-Cold war eras have all been thoroughly researched in this chapter.

2.5.1 The Hatay Province Dispute and Turkish – Syrian Relations

Even though modern-day Turkey and Syria share a land border over 910 kilometers long, with populations culturally and ethnically related with each other residing on both sides of the said border; the political relations between Turkey and Syria have always had their peaks and valleys. In the wake of World War I, Turkey

fought for and won its independence just as Syria tried to resist the French mandate and tried to hold onto the territories which the Ottoman Empire had lost prior. However, Syria could not emerge as an independent state until 1946.

Tension has always been common between Damascus and Ankara. A particular tension between the two states was the dispute of Hatay province, as Syria could not stomach this perceived loss even after its independence; evidenced by Syrian nationalists depicting the Hatay province within Syrian borders (Al-Jazeera, 2014).

After the foundation of the Turkish Republic, Atatürk contemplated Turkey's relations with the Middle Eastern countries. However, the Treaty of Lausanne served little in way of resolving several disputes between Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries. In the aftermath of Lausanne, Turkey first attempted to settle the Mosul dispute with Iraq, which was a core problem between the two countries. The United Kingdom brought the issue into the League of Nations Council, representing it as a simple territorial dispute between the two countries. The dispute was eventually settled via a treaty in 1926, and Iraq retained the Mosul territory. Afterwards, Turkey focused on the dispute over Hatay province in an attempt to protect and realize the Misak-ı Milli (National Oath) principles of Turkey. During the Atatürk era, the Hatay province dispute therefore dominated the Syrian – Turkish diplomatic relations, however, Atatürk himself passed away shortly before the conclusive resolution of the conflict in Turkey's favor (Akdeniz, 2019: 162).

Decisive Turkish victories during the Turkish War of Independence such as the routing of Greek forces after the First Battle of İnönü; led the Prime Minister of France Aristide Briand to pressure the British government into easing the harsh terms of the Treaty of Sèvres. France, with Italy's support, convened at the Conference of London with Greek and Turkish delegates. The Treaty of Sèvres, which was signed between the French Prime Minister and Ottoman statesman Bekir Sami Bey, was annulled; as its terms were regarded as too oppressive, and it was negotiated solely with the Ottoman Empire, without any input from the Turkish National Movement. The French Government then sent another delegate, and after another lengthy period of negotiations, and the Treaty of Ankara was signed in October 1921. However, the treaty left Hatay province outside the Turkish borders (Benek, 2016: 180).

With the signing of the Treaty of Ankara, the land border between Syria and Turkey was decided in general terms. The border line, starting from the Gulf of Iskenderun, was drawn south of Payas towards Meidan Ekbiş. The city of Kilis was retained by Turkey while Karnaba to its south fell across the border. Thereafter the border line is drawn as to leave the territories near the railroad to Turkey until Nusaybin, after which the border is drawn towards the Tigris River. The border committee, which representatives from the both countries have participated in, then stated that the railway that begins from the Çobanbey station would be used by both countries. Thereafter, the railway, in general terms, became the border between Turkey and Syria (Benek, 2016: 181)

Turkey has made efforts to settle its border disputes starting from the treaty of Lausanne throughout the 1930's; and in fact, had resolved many problems up until the Hatay province dispute. Turkey joined the League of Nations in 1932, settling many past issues and co-operating with other member nations, which brought the Hatay province dispute into attention once more. The dispute was first brought to other states' attention along with the Montreux Convention by Atatürk; however, it was thought most ideal to wait as Syria during the time was struggling to win its independence. In 1936, the day that the treaty was to be signed Montreux, the Hatay province issue was called into attention by Atatürk. The issue then attained an international attribute later the same year as the French government started to pull out from Syria and Lebanon. However, Syria reacted negatively of losing one of its provinces to Turkey and took pains to retain its territory. The international characteristic of the problem caused the League of Nations to hold an emergency meeting on December 1936 (Bulut, 2015: 5-6)

The League of Nations held the emergency meetings on 14th and 16th of December, and it was decreed that a committee of three would be chosen and sent to the area investigate as to resolve the dispute. During this time, negotiations between French and Turkish governments were held; but availed no result. The ongoing dispute and the lengthy period of time it took for the League of Nations to take action caused the strife between Arab and Turk populations in Hatay to erupt into bloody conflict. The League of Nations' efforts of settling the Hatay province dispute continued into 1937, within the same year, French and Turkish governments agreed in principle that

Hatay would be an autonomous, independent territory. This agreement, also known as the Sandler Report, was also acknowledged by the League of Nations (Atabey, 2015: 195-196).

The constitution for the now-independent Hatay State was developed by a council of five with League of Nations' guidance. Then the constitution, with Turkey's and France's approval, was officially recognized by the League of Nations on 29 November 1937. Several treaties regarding border security were also signed on the same date between Turkey and France; hereby formally recognizing the existence of Hatay State as well (Atabey, 2015: 196). However, agitators spent no time idle, as they ambushed villages, burned forests and provoked the local populace since the very inception of the Hatay State. During this period, the Hatay State could only remain standing with Turkish support, hereby opposing Syria and other nations; as its borders were officially fully closed for both Syria and Turkey. This period of unrest soon subsided however, as the approaching footsteps of World War II; and France and England's subsequent attempts of befriending Turkey reduced the amount of pressure over Hatay State (Bulut, 2015: 9-10)

The developments necessitated the protection of the Hatay State, and talks were held between the Turkish and French governments over the topic. The negotiations that were made during this period are considered as definite diplomatic victories for the Turkish Republic. Hatay State's full independence, and the development of a different constitution than Syria's had caused criticism towards the Syrian government from its populace. The year of 1938 saw disorder and aggravation in Hatay, yet the Turkish government never wavered from its determination. In a heart-breaking turn of events, however, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk passed on November 1938, before he could witness Hatay's reunification with Turkey. His passing brought the nation into mourning as many across the world expressed their condolences; yet it hastened Hatay's reintegration into Turkey (Atabey, 2015: 199).

E	
1939	TURKEY
E-5474 168 3 AUG 1939 173	
Registry Number } E 5474/1142/4 FROM Mr. Campbell. (Paris) No. 995. (160/37/39). Dated 1st Aug. 1939. Received in Registry } 3rd Aug. 1939. At Turkey.	Franco-Turkish relations: cession of Hatay to Turkey. Transmits copy of a note dated July 23 from Ministry of Foreign Affairs enclosing a certified copy of the agreement signed at Ankara on June 23, 1939 between France and Turkey, for settlement of territorial questions between Turkey and Syria; a copy of declaration made by French Government and signed on June 23 by M. Bonnet, in which French Government declares that they have no intention of abandoning, in favour of a third party, the mission which they have assumed in Syria and the Lebanon; together with copies of note addressed by Italian Ambassador in Paris to M. Bonnet on July 10 and reply of Minister for Foreign Affairs thereto of July 20, regarding Franco-Turkish agreement of June 23 1939. (Copies Rome and Ankara).
Last Paper. E 5326	E 4637 and <i>French Embassy</i> (Munich)
References. E 4637 E 4652 E 5044 / 1142/44 (Paris) (How disposed of.)	M. Bonnet's letter of July 23nd to Signor Guariglia is an answer to the Italian Govt's note of protest about Alexandretta. It is rather a lame document, as it was bound to be in view of the strength of the Italian case. (E 5044) As the Italian protest has been printed, he might perhaps also print M. Bonnet's reply.
(Action completed.) (Index.) 22/11 22/11	22/11 section Central Bank J. R. Cobden of It will be more convenient to have all the documents relating to

Fig.: 2.2: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs correspondence regarding Hatay's reunification with Turkey (Atabey, 2015: 239).

After Atatürk's passing, the Turkish government sought a conclusive solution to the Hatay province dispute in January 1939, notifying the French government of its goal of annexing Hatay. Hatay State's President Tayfur Sökmen similarly declared the Hatay State's eventual annexation into Turkey in a public speech on 8 May 1939. The situation caused political fluctuations and protests in Syria. On 23 June 1939, the French government granted its approval of Hatay's annexation via a treaty. The Hatay State People's Assembly then held an emergency meeting on 29 July 1939 and voted in favor of Turkey's annexation of Hatay on 7 July 1939 (Yakut, 2005: 804).

Afterwards, Syria and other Arab countries objected against the annexation and the French – Turkish treaty which had paved the way towards it. Both Pan-Arab movements and Arab nationalists became vocal against the annexation, with the Syrian press representing Hatay as a ‘martyred province’ and the peaceful annexation as ‘the unjust defeat of law against power’. Several societies and organizations against the secular Turkish Republic used the annexation as propaganda fuel, seeking to sow seeds of animosity (Yakut, 2005: 805).

The regions south of Turkey such as Hatay and Syria were under French mandate until 1936, a period during which Syria focused on its domestic affairs and gaining its independence. Meanwhile, Italy and Nazi Germany’s increasing aggressions in Europe led France to pull its troops back from the Middle East; granting Syria and Lebanon their independence in the process. The same situation caused the discussion of Hatay province dispute in League of Nations, where Hatay was first granted independence on its own. Then, as the Hatay State was a majority Turkic state, a referendum was held and its citizens voted in favor of Turkish annexation. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk deserves additional credit for this diplomatic success; as his keen precautions and personal efforts proved vital during the process (Kaştan, 2017: 280).

2.5.2 Pre-Cold War Era Turkish – Syrian Relations

The peaceful re-integration of Hatay back within Turkish borders was not the only notable accomplishment of the new Turkish Republic. Especially regarding the war-torn, poverty-stricken, unindustrialized homeland the new Turkish regime inherited from the Ottoman Empire, its early accomplishments and reforms cannot be fully understood and appreciated when judged solely by any numerical metric. The peaceful exile of the Ottoman royal family, abolishing of the defunct Ottoman Sultanate, rapid industrialization, educational reforms and the young regime’s diplomatic successes can be noted as the definite achievements of the Atatürk Era (Besen, 2019: 47-48).

Anatolia’s historical significance and its geopolitical location brought with it several security risks. Therefore, the newly founded Turkish Republic adopted a foreign policy based on Atatürk’s saying, “Peace at home, peace in the world.” This

compatible, harmonious outlook helped Turkey develop amicable diplomatic relations with almost all other nations. One of the most notable diplomatic successes is Turkey's acceptance into the League of Nations in 1932 (Besen, 2019: 49).

Turkish – Syrian relations went on a friendly note during the period Syria strived for its own independence. Afterwards, Turkey became one of the first nations to officially recognize Syria as an independent state. Turkey also worked towards to cultivate cordial relations with the Arab world. However, the Hatay dispute between Syria and Turkey prevented optimal relations. Notably, Syria, as soon it became an independent state, appealed to the United Nations regarding the Hatay dispute, demanding that Turkey relinquish the province back to Syria. The effort was unsuccessful, however it served to bring about a certain discord between the nations, as Syria refused to officially recognize Hatay as a Turkish province for many decades to come (Baş, 2012: 21).

Nonetheless, yet another dispute in the Middle East helped Turkey to attain warmer relationships with Turkey and other Arab nations. The Israel – Palestine conflict was one of the most significant following the end of World War II; pitting almost the whole Arab world against Israel. Here, Turkey stood with the Arab nations, and opposed the decision to split the Palestinian territory between Jewish and Arab populations. Turkey's display of solidarity was not overlooked by neither the other Arab nations nor Syria; as the Syrian government sent an official correspondence to Ankara to express their gratitude. However, this period of warmth between Turkey and the Arab nations ended as Turkey officially recognized Israel as a state in 1949 (Baş, 2012: 91-92).

As per the effects of the aforementioned diplomatic events, Turkish – Syrian relations could not be fully stabilized. Furthermore, Syrian television and press kept on representing Hatay province as a Syrian province, referring to it as 'Alexandretta' instead. In response, Turkey began taking precautions to protect its territorial integrity regarding Hatay province; which provoked the Syrian government to represent Hatay as a fully Syrian province, be it in its official publications or its curriculum. By 1956, private properties in Hatay were expropriated by the government and landmines were placed on the border between Turkey and Syria (Öztig, 2019).

During its foundation and early decades, the Turkish Republic regarded itself as a western democracy; subsequently prioritizing its diplomatic relations with western countries over Middle Eastern ones. The Turkish proverb, “Neither Damascene candy, nor Arabic beauty (is preferred),” loosely summarizes the Turkish outlook towards Syria and other Middle Eastern countries. Even after Atatürk’s passing, Turkey, under his successor İsmet İnönü, did not make a significant effort to extend its diplomatic relations with Middle Eastern countries. The subsequent Democrat Party took a more aggressive stance once it came to power in Turkey. As the world politics moved towards the Cold War era, Turkey’s security concerns drove it to align closer with NATO, of which Turkey became a member in 1949 (Bishku, 2019).

2.5.3 Cold War Era Turkish – Syrian Relations and the PKK Problem

As the Soviet Union began to fill the vacuum of power left in the wake of World War II, Turkey sought to align itself with NATO and the West, despite Britain’s objections. As detailed in the previous chapter, the Turkish – Russian relations have been historically turbulent. During the Democrat Party era, Turkey instead strived for western alliances; sending Turkish troops to Korea. In return, Turkey began to receive the U.S.’s support (Sarınay, 2013: 866). Syria followed a similar strategy of aligning itself with a greater power and became friendlier towards Soviet Russia. It can be said that the root of the border disputes between Syria and Turkey during the 1950’s was essentially the struggle of dominance between the Western and the Eastern Blocs. This caused the dispute that which was in appearance simply between two neighboring countries, to be brought into the attention of the United Nations; where it was decided that the dispute should indeed be settled between the two countries (Besen, 2019: 52).

On the other hand, there was notable discord among the Arab countries during the Cold War as well. Both Egypt and Iraq saw themselves as the leaders of the Arab world. Iraq sought to unite the Arab world with the Baghdad Pact, while trying to prevent any Soviet influence over the Middle East. However, Syria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia declared that they would not be a part of the Baghdad Pact and would instead form an organization that would bring military unity between the countries, of which Iraq would be excluded from (Oran, 2008: 625).

In contrast, Turkey not only saw the Baghdad Pact as a defense against Soviet presence, but as a way to protect its borders as well, as Syria was not a member of the pact as a neighboring country, even though Iraq and Iran both were. As a response, Turkey presented a diplomatic note to Syria, protesting its pro-Egypt policies, which caused the divide between the two countries to widen further. Therefore, Turkey and Syria remained in opposing ranks during the Cold War (Küçükvatan, 2011: 78).

As Soviet influence became more and more influential in Syrian diplomacy; the Ba'ath Party started to gain influence in 1960's within Syria as well, rapidly overshadowing competition. What brought the Ba'ath Party to the forefront was mainly the Syrian - Turkish strife, and secondarily Syria's disputes with Israel. The Ba'ath Party cited the Turkish annexation of Hatay, warning of further Turkish ambition over Syrian soil. Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes was then pursuing a policy of warmer political relations with Syria and the Arab world; however, in Syria Menderes's statements were thought of as insincere and unrealistic as Turkey's affiliations with Israel dominated conversation (Küçükvatan, 2011: 80-81).

During the period; Syria took efforts to present all problems between Syria and Turkey as problems between the Baghdad Pact and the Arab nations, seeking to maintain Soviet Union's support. In response, the United States of America announced that any intervention against the territorial integrities of Turkey, Pakistan, Iraq or Iran would result in grave consequences. Additionally, even though Turkey spoke of its restrained manners towards Syria in NATO's internal assemblies; Syria remained as a Soviet base of operations in the Mediterranean.

Another long-standing issue between Turkey and Syria would be about water sources. The issue first began with the completion of Keban Dam in 1974 and worsened with the Atatürk Dam's completion in 1983. As both of these dams possess the capacity to hold enormous amounts of water; it meant that Turkey essentially had important leverage over Syria's freshwater access, especially through the Euphrates. It can be said that the water disputes between Turkey and Syria center around the Atatürk Dam. It has been theorized that the reduction of water flow following the completion of the Atatürk Dam in 1983 was intended to intimidate the Syrian government, as it was supporting terrorist organizations. During January 1989, a PKK

terrorist squad of eleven, whom had crossed the Syrian – Turkish border to gain entry, were captured on their way to sabotage the Atatürk Dam. (Pipes and Garfinkle, 1989)

On the other hand, Syria stood with Greece about the Cyprus dispute, while the Iraqi president declared support for the Turkish cause. As the situation in Cyprus worsened day by day, Turkey first sought to find a solution either through the West or the United Nations; but was decidedly left alone. This caused a shock among the Turkish politicians, leading them to reconsider Turkey's international position as they also worried for its security. The period between the end of the 1960's and the beginning of 1970's saw a series of left-wing, anti-American protests; which were in part accelerated by freedoms granted by the new Turkish Constitution of 1961 (Sarıay, 2013: 871). The same period saw a rise in student movements as well as a rise in Kurdish nationalism, whose roots can be traced as far back as 1950. Especially during these years, Kurdish youth studying in colleges were often observed joining Marxist-Leninist organizations, perpetuating separatist movements (Alkan, 2002: 13).

Several Kurdish nationalists left the Marxist-Leninist movements during early 1970's to form the Revolutionary Cultural Eastern Hearths, hereby resuming their operations under this organization. The organization was shut down during the military coup of 1971 with many of their leaders being arrested and sentenced, however, the thought of a mass Kurdish movement was already born (Özcan, 1999: 23-26). It is known that the still operative PKK functions within a Marxist-Leninist framework of thought to present day (Ballı, 1991: 29). The PKK terrorist organization became operational in 1974, first founded as a student association (as Ankara Demokratik Yüksek Öğretim Derneği) by a group of students including Abdullah Öcalan. Mainly active thereafter in eastern and southeastern provinces of Turkey; it is noted that the PKK made an effort of becoming a political party by holding a congress of foundation. Thereafter, the organization was fully formed under the name of Worker's Party of Kurdistan in 1978, and its first notable act of terrorism is an armed attack against the then-deputy of Justice Party Mehmet Celal Bucak. After the military coup of 1980, PKK began training of troops in Beqaa Valley, Lebanon; hereby gaining the characteristics of a military unit. With the formation of the Union of Saviors of Kurdistan, the group first began acting against Turkey in 1984 (Ballı, 1991: 204-206).

The years between 1984 and 1990 are regarded as the most active period of PKK, as the chaotic environment in the Middle East during the gulf crisis, not to mention the support PKK has then received from Syria and other outside forces; allowed the organization to make take impactful action. However, the operations that the Turkish Armed Forces conducted in Northern Iraq in 1992 in combination with the diplomatic resolutions reached with Syria greatly reduced PKK's power and influence. During the following period, the Treaty of Ankara was signed between Syria. Per the treaty, Syria officially recognized PKK as a terrorist organization, hereby deporting Abdullah Öcalan from Syrian soil (Demir, 1998).

The Adana Agreement came to the fore as a result of the ever-growing tensions between Turkey and Syria. However the terms of the treaty would be disregarded afterwards by Syria; the treaty gained its importance as the Syrian Crisis emerged in 2011. The treaty, which was amended in 2010 during the AK Party era, provided the necessary legal framework which allowed Turkey to operate in Syrian soil to ensure its own border integrity. The articles of the Adana Agreement, which was signed on 20 October 1998 between Turkey and Syria, are as follows (Gökcan, 2018: 192-193):

- Abdullah Öcalan, the current PKK leader during the date of this agreement, is not present within Syrian borders and will not be allowed entry.
- The PKK camps that are said to be inside Syria during the date of this agreement do not exist and will not be allowed to operate. (Many PKK members were arrested by Syria and deported into Turkey.)
- The Syrian government will not allow any political, military or economic operation by PKK within its border, and will not permit any propaganda from them.
- PKK is hereby recognized as a terrorist organization by the Syrian government.
- Syria will not permit the PKK terrorist organization to establish camps in order to either shelter or train its members, will not permit any commercial activity by PKK to take place, and will not allow its members passage towards a third country over Syrian soil.

- The Syrian government will take any and all necessary precautions in its border gates in order to not allow Abdullah Öcalan re-entry into Syrian soil.

After the Adana Agreement, Abdullah Öcalan was finally captured in Kenya and was sentenced to life in prison in Turkey. In 2000, the organization held a congress, declaring that it now sought a democratic transformation with Turkey. Another congress in 2002 changed the organization's name into Congress of Freedom and Democracy for Kurdistan (Özkan, 2006: 31).

2.5.4 Turkish - Syrian Relations During Post-Cold War Era

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the beginning of 1990 brought about an international change of regimes in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. Many formerly socialist states switched to a democratic system and/or gained their independence. This marked the end of the 45-year long Cold War era as the United States of America emerged as the sole superpower on Earth. Regarded as a victory of liberty, the rule of law, freedom, democracy and human rights; the new era saw the beginnings of globalization (Sarımay, 2013: 874-875).

During the latter years of the Cold War era, the subject of PKK dominated Turkish – Syrian relations. In 1987, the Prime Minister of Turkey Turgut Özal personally paid a visit to Syria and urged the Syrian government to stop its support of PKK; offering in return the flow of 500 cubic meters of water per second through the Euphrates. The Syrian government agreed to deport the terrorists. Both countries then mutually announced that neither would allow any terroristic activity within their respective borders (Altunışık and Tür, 2006: 232). Despite the agreement however, PKK activity in Syria accelerated, which increased the tension between the two countries again. During the following period Turkey blamed the Syrian government for the attacks, for which the Syrian government denied any responsibility even though it was known that the PKK's leader Abdullah Öcalan resided within Syrian borders at the time (Çağaptay, 2012).

The Turkish government underwent several diplomatic efforts in order to end Syrian support of PKK, to no avail. However, as both countries sided with the United States in 1991 Gulf Crisis, a hope of cooperation for the sake of the region's security

was born. As per the Adana Agreement, the Syrian government had officially recognized PKK as a terrorist organization and both countries seemed to have met in the middle regarding their efforts against terrorism. Despite all, the threat of PKK persisted behind the Syrian border (Öztig, 2019).

On the other hand, the end of the Cold War meant that Turkey's once vital geopolitical position was no longer of that much strategical importance from the viewpoint of the West. Left alone against the threats of PKK and the Armenian problem; Turkey struggled to disrupt the Syrian and Greek support behind these issues. However, the U.S. supported Turkey's attempts of friendliness with the recently independent Turkic Republics, now free from the grasp of the Soviet Union. This can be regarded as a positive development for Turkey during this period.

The most positive development regarding Turkish – Syrian relations during the time, however, would be the Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer's attendance to Hafez al-Assad's funeral. This marked a turning point for Turkish – Syrian relations, as President Sezer's attendance to the funeral, which western statesmen had generally abstained from, was considered an important gesture. Shortly after, Syrian Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam paid back a visit to Turkey (Al-Jazeera, 2014).

The normalization of Turkish – Syrian relations continued after the AK Party took power in Turkey, shaped along AK Party's 'zero problems with our neighbors' policy. The mutual desire of cooperation between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Bashar al-Assad, combined with then Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu's cordial approach; hastened the normalization process. Turkish – Syrian relations can be pointed as the most successful example of AK Party's 'zero problems' policy (Besen, 2019: 57-58).

As positive relations continued to develop, the delicate balances of the Middle East and the Mediterranean were emphasized by Ahmet Davutoğlu, pointing to the exceptional importance of Turkish – Syrian relations. Subsequently, then Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Farouk al-Sharaa personally visited Turkey. The Turkish parliament's refusal of letting the U.S. operate in Turkish soil during the invasion of Iraq warmed the Turkish – Syrian relations even further. A joint agreement against the

possible foundation of an independent Kurdish state was made between Turkey, Syria and Iran in 2003 (Al-Jazeera, 2014).

The rapidly normalizing formal relations between Turkey and Syria continued with more high-ranking visits from one another country. In 2003, President of Turkey Abdullah Gül's visit (concerning the prevention the Iraq War) marked the 27th year since another Turkish president had visited Syria. In return, Muhammad Mustafa Mero became the first Syrian Prime Minister to visit Turkey in person. These mutual visits eventually rose to the presidential level; especially Bashar al-Assad's visit bringing about overwhelmingly positive results. Such as the closure of the Hatay dispute, as Assad accepted that Hatay belonged to Turkey in an accord signed between Turkey and Syria. During his visit, Bashar al-Assad touched on many topics; such as the terror problem and Iraq's territorial integrity, also adding that Syria supported Turkey's entry into the European Union (Hürriyet, 15 January 2004).

The relations between Turkey and Syria followed an upwards trend between 2003 and 2007. During the period, a total of 73 PKK militants were captured and delivered to Turkish authorities by Syria. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's pledge that Syria would benefit more from Tigris's waterflow elicited a positive response from Syria. In 2005, Syria publicly condemned a PKK attack made against Turkey, the first such condemnation between Turkey and Syria (Aras, 2005). In 2007, a joint military operation against the PKK terrorist organization was conducted with Turkish and Syrian efforts, and another operation of Turkey in Northern Iraq against PKK was supported by Syria (Öztig, 2019).

Turkish and Syrian governments reached a consensus regarding many problems during the period between 2000 and 2010; such as economic problems, terrorist organizations operating within Syrian borders, Turkish – Syrian border security, water problems arising as Turkish dams had the ability to reduce water supply in Syria, and so on. In 2009, a joint military exercise were planned and carried out, bringing the two countries to their closest. During the same year, President Erdoğan even referred to Syria as "My second homeland," a statement which marked how far the Turkish – Syrian relations had come. In 2010, thirteen accords were signed regarding the subjects of commerce, tourism and investment, and it was agreed that a dam of friendship

would be built upon the Euphrates. During the same year, Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon formed the Close Neighbors Economic and Trade Association (CNETAC) (Bishku, 2019).

The Arab Spring protests erupted when the Turkish – Syrian relations were at their peak. At first, Turkey generally supported the protesters' demands of more freedom and democratic rights, but within a moderate point of view as not to damage its foreign relations. As the protests went on and the protestors were denied their demands, Turkey began supporting the protests vocally and took a harder stance against the Assad regime, which easily meant that Turkey had picked a side. Therefore, the most positive period Turkish – Syrian relations that had begun with Bashar al-Assad's reign took on a different look. By 2014, the relations were completely broken down (Çağlar, 2017: 29).

Ignoring Turkey's call that Assad make some political reforms, the Syrian government used a disproportionate amount of force against the protestors, attempting to suppress the dissenters with overwhelming brutality. The ever-increasing Iranian influence over the Syrian government is pointed at as a reason why the Syrian government ignored the calls of reform. Turkey was essentially forced into a choice and chose to stand against the Assad regime. Under the light of the developments, the Turkish government updated its policies and started to support the Syrian opposition (Ulutaş et al. 2015: 44).

It can be said that Turkey, under AK Party's reign, re-discovered Syria and the Middle East in the 2000's, not only in commercial, political or economic subjects, but culturally as well. However, this period of warmth was almost instantly turned into animosity in 2011 (Ekşi, 2018: 83-84).

CHAPTER THREE

ARAB SPRING AND THE SYRIAN CRISIS

In the third chapter of this work, the leading causes of the Arab Spring and its subsequent processes have been researched, analyzed and presented from a Syrian perspective. As it is been thought that Turkish – Russian relations had a definite importance on the events of the Syrian Civil War; the actors which appear in the Syrian Civil War and also the Syrian Civil War's impact on Turkish – Russian relations have been discussed, as well as the displacement of Syrian civilians caused by the war.

3.1 The Event That Ignited the Syrian Crisis: Arab Spring

As the Arab Spring events were the catalyst for the Syrian crisis; it is vitally important to know about the intricacies of the Arab Spring when Turkish – Russian relations regarding the Syrian crisis are studied. Therefore, the Arab Spring has been thoroughly analyzed in this chapter.

There were many underlying causes that built up such restlessness within the Arab world; however, a singular event can be pinpointed at as the beginning of the Arab Spring. Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor, was mistreated and humiliated by the Tunisian police, whom seized his cart and prevented Bouazizi from working. Bouazizi then appealed to the local governor to no avail. In protest, he set himself aflame in December 2010, succumbing to his wounds in the January of the next year. His relatives publicly protested his passing, which inspired the Arab Spring uprisings (Başkan, 2011: 2-3).

As stated, the underlying causes of the widespread protests can be pointed to as unemployment, corruption, mistreatment by the authorities, disparity of income and injustice in the Arab world. But of course, the causes such an event with broad repercussions cannot solely be put on economic issues. There are also many political reasons behind the Arab Spring, as much as there are economic ones. Sociological

issues were also pointed at during the start of the process, however, the apparent nature of the protests characterized its political nature. The quick spread of unrest also speaks for the then-characteristics of the Arab world (Çelik, 2015: 36-37).

The Arab Spring affected Egypt just after Tunisia. Self-immolations were noted as thousands gathered in Tahrir Square, Cairo, demanding the resignation of longtime president Hosni Mubarak. Mubarak sought to placate the protestors by bargaining with them, however, he was unsuccessful as protests spread to other cities of Egypt. Left with no other option, Mubarak yielded power to the Egyptian army on 11 February 2011, resigning after thirty years of rule (Al Jazeera and Agencies, 2019). Emboldened by the apparent success of Egyptian protestors after Hosni Mubarak's resignation; the Arab Spring protests spread like wildfire through the Arab world. The most severe of the protests were in Tunisia and Egypt; however, protestors in other countries such as Bahrain, Libya, Syria and Yemen also brought significant disruption and change in their respective countries, with Yemen and Libya also descending into civil war status. Other Arab majority nations were less affected by the Arab Spring, notably Bahrain, whose protestors were subdued with Saudi assistance. Nevertheless, it can be said the Arab Spring as effected Syria the most, as the still-ongoing conflict has reached an international status (Başkan, 2011: 3).

3.1.1 The Conditions Which Facilitated the Arab Spring

At first, it was generally thought that the civil unrest would be contained within Tunisia. Henceforth the counter-governmental protests and movements were collectively named the Jasmine Revolution. However, protests then spread from Tunisia to Egypt and Libya, then throughout North Africa and the Middle East almost completely, which caused multiple long-standing dictators to lose power in their countries. As better quality of life was a common goal between the protestors, the term 'Arab Spring' was coined. (Tekek, 2012).

As the Arab Spring protests spread further and further, the situation sparked discussion; as each nation's protesters had their own reasons to take to the streets, but obviously there were broader problems within the Arab world. Historical problems, as well as externally caused ones can be identified. The suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi

through self-immolation therefore is regarded simply as the straw that broke the camel's back (Çelik, 2015: 36).

After Ottoman power and influence withdrew from the MENA region, its new borders were drawn by the western powers through secret treaties, with little regard to the region's attributes or needs, as the western powers only sought to one-sidedly exploit the region. Therefore, it generally took longer for MENA nations to become independent. These reasons caused regional divides and struggles, which can be stated as internal causes of the Arab Spring (Buzkıran and Kutbay, 2013: 150). As for external reasons; post 9/11 U.S.'s pointing of the Muslim world as an enemy, even going so far as to make crusaderist analogies, combined with its interference to the Middle East can be pointed to as external dynamics of the Arab Spring events (Bayat, 2012: 3).

It can be thought that economic relations, such as income inequality, unemployment, corruption et cetera were the foremost causes of the protests. Although a valid course of discussion, it would simply be too limiting to analyze such widespread and long-lasting protests only within an economic point of view (Öztürkler, 2014: 1-2).

When the causes of the Arab Spring are being studied, they can be listed under four main topics: historical causes, social and psychological causes, economic causes and political causes (Tekek, 2012).

Historical causes: As stated, after Ottoman Empire withdrew from the region, most modern MENA nations were formed by 'courtesy' of western powers which caused a common feeling of lowliness within the populations. Western exploitation and unfair deals followed during the 20th century, which only exacerbated this phenomenon. In addition, Israel emerged victorious from almost any conflict between itself and the Arab nations, as no Arab nation managed to decisively lead the common Arab cause against Israel.

Social and Psychological Causes: Pre-Arab Spring world was mostly ruled by dictators. Their citizens commonly lacked basic human rights, cultural and religious

freedoms, freedom of speech and democracy. The said dictators were usually those who best managed to seize power after a coup; which in itself brought little benefit but plenty of oppression to the everyman.

Economic Causes: It should be no wonder that the catalyst of the Arab Spring was a street vendor's desperate yet ignored pleas. Poor conditions of living, unemployment and poverty are common problems among the Arab nations. Pre-Arab Spring statistics show that Syria had a staggering %25 unemployment rate, while %55 of the college graduates in Tunisia were similarly out of work. The 2008 economic crisis can be stated as a cause here, as even the petrol producing Middle East nations were severely affected by it. Especially Egypt was hit hard as even the prices of bread rose; as its government was already feeding its populace through subsidies.

Political Causes: The foremost political cause of the Arab Spring would be the lack of democratization within the Arab world. The lack of democracy meant inadequate representation of the people's will (especially for minority peoples). As parliamentary systems were superficial ones bordering farcical, voter turnout was especially low. Countries such as Libya and Syria were pretty much run as family companies; their leaders deriving power not from the masses, but rather despite them. Such conditions made corruption and bribery common and weakened relations with the West. The weakened economic gain caused by such systems prevented adequate healthcare, industrialization and therefore progress, causing Arab populaces to lose hope for their very own futures as their rulers lived in splendor. In addition, exchange of power usually either occurred via coups, or from father to son – without any democratic input from the populaces.

3.1.2 The Course of the Arab Spring

As stated, Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in December 2010 become the catalyst of the Arab Spring protests (BBC, 2011). His death inspired the greater Arab world to take action in the name of democracy and freedom, and his funeral was attended by thousands.

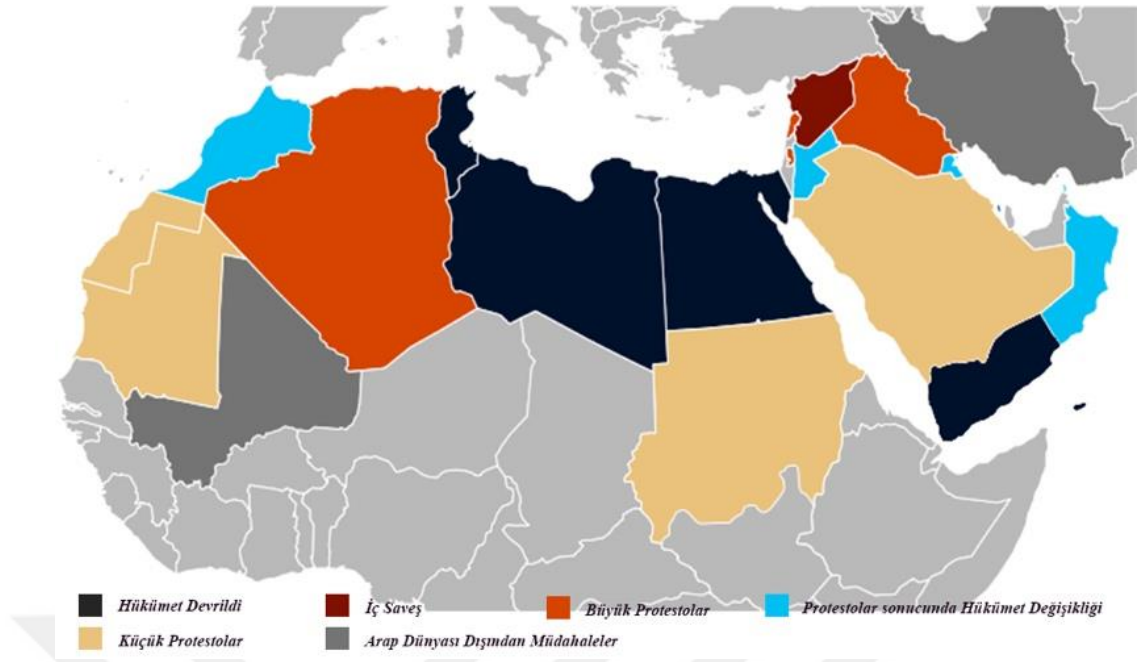


Figure: 3.1: Countries affected by the Arab Spring (Wikipedia, 2019b).

Protests quickly spread through the Arab World; by January 2011 Egypt, Yemen, Morocco, Oman and Syria were affected. In February, the Egyptian protestors succeeded as Hosni Mubarak resigned from power, while similar protests had begun in Libya against Muammar Gaddafi as well (Wikipedia, 2019a).

However, protests continued in Egypt even after Mubarak's resignation, causing Prime Minister Ahmed Shafik to resign in March. During the same period, protests began in Syria as well. Months later, in June, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh was wounded by an assassination attempt but survived. In August, in one of the more important events of the Arab Spring, rebels captured the Libyan capital and overthrew Muammar Gaddafi. In October, the National Transitional Council of Libya was formed, which announced an end to the Libyan Civil War. During the next month, Egyptian Christians protested after a church was demolished, which Egyptian army sought to suppress with tanks in a display of disproportionate power, and protests began once again in Tahrir Square of Cairo. The protestors were demanding a new government to be formed with haste, but armed conflict between the army and civilian protestors caused many deaths and injuries (Wikipedia, 2019a).

The Arab Spring was limited to simple protesting in some countries but caused significant changes in others such as Libya, as Muammar Gaddafi was violently ousted from power during the Arab Spring. While in Egypt, Muhammad Morsi whom took power after Hosni Mubarak, subsequently lost his power after the former Minister of Defense Abdel Fattah el-Sisi staged a coup. Similarly, the Arab Spring protests caused a Civil War to erupt in Syria; thousands lost their lives and millions were displaced. The protests also spread to Bahrain's capital Manama but were violently suppressed during 2011 and 2012. In general, it can be said that the Arab Spring protests took a toll from the Arab peoples, causing many to suffer harm (Boone et al. 2019).

In conclusion, the Arab Spring can be summarized as widespread people's movements during 2010 – 2011 in the MENA regions. Not all of the Arab nations were affected however, even though the name 'Arab Spring' implies otherwise. Countries with Arab populations such as Sudan, Jordan, Algeria, Lebanon or Morocco did not see much protestor activity during the Arab spring, and their regimes were relatively unaffected.

It can be said that the Arab Spring protests failed to attain their initial goals of increased democracy and political stability. As an example, Mohamad Morsi gained power in Egypt after the power vacuum caused by the protests but was ousted after a coup in 2013 by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (Güneş, 2018).

3.2 Syrian Civil War

The Syrian Civil War is the prime reason which has caused Turkey and Russia's intersection within Syria, therefore the civil war itself is of importance in order to study the Turkish – Russian relations regarding the Syrian crisis. In this chapter, the start of the Syrian Civil War, its factions and the following refugee crisis have been discussed and analyzed.

The social, economic and political causes which caused the Arab Spring were also all present in Syria's background. Syria saw many coup attempts between 1946 and 1970. Afterwards it was ruled by an elite class under Hafez al-Assad. Bashar al-Assad took power after his father's passing, and even though he took a moderate

approach to politics, Syria had become a country where its populace had no say in its rulership (Dağ, 2013; Fikriyat, 2018). Syria lacked social and economic justice pre-Arab Spring, as the ruling class lived in pompous magnificence while the general populace suffered from poverty, unemployment and political oppression. In short, it should not be a surprise to anyone that the Syrian populace also rose up in protest during the Arab spring (Demir, 2018: 30).

As stated previously, economic factors were one of the main causes of the Arab Spring protests. The said economic factors can be listed as widespread poverty, unemployment (especially in the younger portion of the population), income inequality, an inability to integrate itself to the world economy et cetera. Inadequate healthcare, education and law systems can also be considered additional factors (Öztürkler, 2014: 11-12). All of these conditions were present in Syria. In addition, illegal housing rate was almost %50 percent (Taşgın, 2018: 2), while unemployment rose from %8,6 to %14,90 from 2010 to 2011 (Trading Economics, 2019).

Similar to many nations which were affected by the Arab Spring, Syria too was ruled by an un-democratic regime for many decades. Therefore, it can be stated that the Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011 and is still ongoing, was mainly caused by a self-enclosed and corrupt statist economy, income inequality, poverty and the initial provoking approach of the government officials.

3.2.1 The Beginning of the Syrian Civil War

The widespread Arab Spring protests in 2011 put the Syrian government under unprecedented pressure. From the start of the protests in 2011 until present day, 470.000 people lost their lives with over a million wounded (Marks, 2018). Per the statistics published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are currently 5,7 million Syrian refugees, while 6,1 million were similarly displaced within the Syrian borders (CNN, 2019). Today, thousands of Syrian refugees live in countries such as Lebanon or Jordan while most refugees were taken in by Turkey; their numbers approaching almost four million individuals (Council of Foreign Relations, 2019).

Syria houses one of the most complicated, most multi-faceted conflicts of the Arab Spring, nearing nine years of struggle, still ongoing. The Syrian Civil War, as

stated, caused great losses and displaced millions. Several internal and external actors have since become involved, further complicating the affairs.

The cascading event of the Syrian Civil War can be traced back to the southern province of Daraa, where fifteen youth were arrested after painting anti-regime graffiti on state-owned buildings. The youth were arrested and subjected to torture. As days went past, the local populace started protesting, demanding the release of their sons. Their protests went ignored by the officials, which caused them to spread further across the nation. As protests grew, Bashar al-Assad ordered regime forces to suppress them (Yacoubian, 2019).

During the following period, the Assad regime was accused of murdering hundreds of protesters, further inflaming the populace against Bashar al-Assad. Many Syrians were calling for Assad's resignation, a proposition which he resisted, splitting the country into two: Assad supporters and dissenters. Then President of the United States Barack Obama urged Bashar al-Assad to let peaceful assemblies be, to release the political prisoners and called for a human rights investigation for the Daraa situation – otherwise threatening isolation and restrictions against the Syrian government. The Syrian government refused, after which the Free Syrian Army was formed to depose the Assad regime, hereby starting the Syrian Civil War (Marks, 2019).

The Syrian Civil War has gone through several distinct phases up until today. Starting from protests and the regime's attempts of suppression, the conflict eventually gained an international characteristic as more and more actors became involved. In the beginning, a diplomatic traffic was started by the United Nations, supported by the U.S. However, negotiations in Geneva came to an impasse. After which Russia began new talks in Sochi and Astana, which included Turkey and Iran as well.

The Syrian Civil War has become one of the most important middle eastern conflicts since World War II, as it is an almost-decade old conflict involving many actors, with far reaching international effects – such as the immigration crisis. As more than half of the Syrian populace were displaced by the conflict, the wave of refugees affected several European countries as well (Yacoubian, 2019).

With the goal of a peaceful end to the Syrian conflict in mind, Ankara, Moscow, Tehran and Damascus began independently developing a new constitution for Syria. The Turkish board convened in Ankara during 3rd of February, and after a period of debate, presented their own thesis at 6th of February during a meeting between Turkey, Russia and Iran. One of the most important points for Turkey was the exclusion of PKK/YPG from conferences, as the conferences were to include representatives from ethnic groups of the area as well. The circumstances of ethnic groups were one of the most topical subjects during the meetings. From the press, and especially the Russian press, it can be inferred that the U.S. and Russia had military and political dialogue with PKK/YPG, during which certain concessions were granted to PKK/YPG. However, Russia states that PKK/YPG's expectance of autonomy is not rooted in promises made by Moscow, and instead was part of the U.S.'s plan during the Obama presidency. Meanwhile Iran also declared that it was against the autonomy and independence of ethnic groups located within Syrian borders; on grounds that it would undermine Syria's central authority. Syria, which was not included in any of the aforementioned discussions and correspondence between states, then declared that a constitution concerning Syrian laws could only be developed by Syrian authorities (Yılmaz, 2019).

Turkey's goal during both the Astana and Sochi talks was the establishment of a safe zone in Northern Syria, a notion which has underwent revisions from time to time, but nevertheless one for which Russia and Turkey have generally cooperated. During that period, the Turkish - Russian relations were on a good track; as evidenced by Erdoğan and Putin often personally meeting, Putin hosting Erdoğan at his private residence at Sochi, and both leaders conversing about the normalization process. Russia, Iran and Turkey had joined forces as guarantor states, and Turkey and Russia determined that they would act together in order to prevent any possible breach of truce. However, the aggressive behavior of the Assad forces, combined with Donald Trump's election to the office of President and his subsequent focusing on Syria led to a period of stillness of the Astana process. Right after assuming the mantle of president, Trump declared a protection of all dissenters against the Syrian regime, which secured PKK/YPG as well. However, Russia sided with the Assad regime, which led support to Turkey's fight against terrorism. Basically, the reason that the

Sochi Summit was held as a trilateral summit during 22nd of November was because the U.S.'s strategy of using PKK/PYD as puppets.

Per Salih Yılmaz, the head of the Ankara Institute of Russian Studies; the importance of the Sochi Summit which was held during 22nd of November is that the U.S.'s abandonment of its allies during the process of democratization in the Middle East, and instead cooperating with terror organizations such as PKK/YPG. Therefore Turkey was left alone against the terror attacks from these organizations, and after FETÖ's coup attempt which also dealt a blow; Turkey began edging closer with Russia and Iran instead. Meanwhile, Russia was also feeling the weight of economic sanctions and the West was attempting to strike at Iran through Hezbollah. Overall, the Sochi Summit can be seen as an answer against the West's offenses against these nations. The process, which began with the Astana conventions, reached a lawful point with Sochi, as Turkey, Russia and Iran became arbiters of the process of Syria's reconstruction. Syria's territorial integrity was also an important point upon which the aforementioned three powers have agreed upon. It can be said that the Astana and Sochi talks have somewhat satisfied the expectations of Turkey, Iran and Russia; as right to representation within the national assembly and strong, regional administrations were planned. In short, what was planned was a democratic solution to the struggles of regional powers (Yılmaz, 2019)

One of the reasons that which caused many different actors to become involved with the Syrian Civil War is the country's religious and ethnic atmosphere. Marks (2018) states that Syria was ruled by a Shiite Muslim minority ruling class while its population was %70 percent Sunni Muslims, which caused internal as well as diplomatic struggles. The involvement of other actors has since further complicated Syria's religious structure. The main supporters of the Syrian government are Russia, Iran and Hezbollah (which is supported by Lebanon). In the meantime, the United States, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other western nations support moderate Islamic groups instead (Marks, 2018). Many other rebelling groups have also appeared since the start of the conflict. The five phases of the Syrian Civil War, starting from its beginning to present day, are stated as follows (Yacoubian, 2019; CNN, 2019):

First phase: Several Syrian youth from Daraa were arrested and placed under torture for painting anti-government graffiti on governmental buildings, inspired by the Arab Spring protests going on in other Arab nations. Local protestors demanded their release, but were denied, which caused the protests to spread further. Bashar al-Assad then ordered regime forces to brutally suppress the protests.

Second phase: The beginning of the armed conflict marks the start of the second phase. This phase went on until Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran began to support the Assad regime and the Lebanese Hezbollah appeared in the battlefield. In 2012, opposing groups including foreign fighters had taken over several northern cities including Aleppo. In retaliation, the Assad regime began to use the Lebanese Hezbollah with the support of IRGC.

Third phase: This phase started as ISIL and its sympathizers rose to prominence. During 2014, almost a third of the Syrian territory was under ISIL control, as the proto state declared itself as the Islamic Caliphate, with its capital in Raqqa. This caused several more fronts to be opened within Syrian territory. During this phase, the USA intervened against ISIL, and moderate Islamic forces began to see support from the USA and other western powers.

Fourth phase: The fourth phase began with Russian military intervention during 2015 and 2016. During the phase, Russia used its air force and advanced armaments against the moderate Islamic groups. With Russian intervention, Iran's and Hezbollah's roles changed as well.

Fifth phase: The fifth and still ongoing phase of the Syrian Civil War sees the Assad regime take control of its territories once again. In 2016, Aleppo and other large cities were taken back and in 2017 the rural areas in between cities were also under Assad's control once more. In 2018, the regime forces assumed control of Damascus and its surrounding areas once again, after five years. Afterwards, Daraa and other regions were similarly taken back, and the Assad regime took control in southwestern Syria.

American policies towards Syria saw significant change after Donald Trump's election in 2016. The U.S. began to arm and logistically support the Kurdish troops and organizations such as YPG/PYD as allies. Turkey opposed this decision to arm them, citing the connections between YPG/PYD and PKK and aspired to establish a buffer zone between northern Syria and Turkey. In present day, a safe zone seems to be established in the regions west of the Euphrates with Operation Olive Branch, but control over the regions to river's east has yet to be fully established (Serafentinidis, 2019).

The Syrian Civil War has gone through ebbs and flows ever since its beginning. International press concerning the Syrian Civil War has been contradictory, and many different actors exist in the conflict. Therefore, it is yet impossible to foresee exactly how the conflict will finally come to an end.

3.2.2 Sides of the Syrian Civil War

There are many internal and international actors taking sides in the Syrian Civil War; some are allied against others, each seeking to display their power and to reap

their own benefits while all interventions affect the local populaces and their living conditions (Borger, 2018). A confusing pattern emerges when all actors in the Syrian Civil War are listed with the actors they oppose portrayed, as seen below in

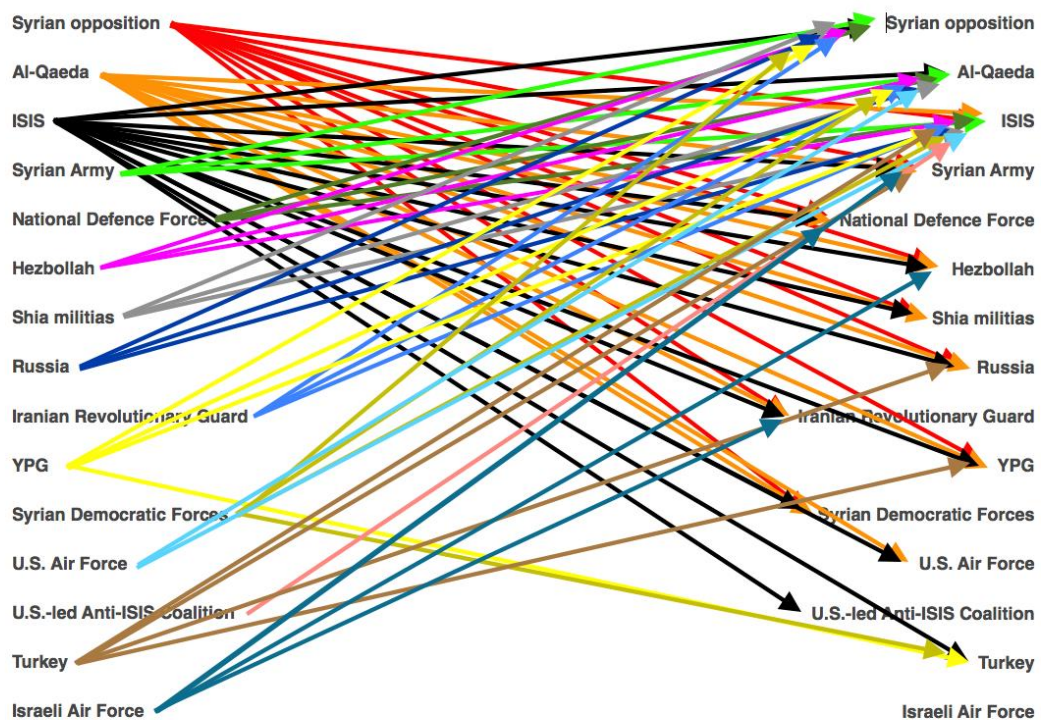


Figure Figure: 3.2 Actors of the Syrian Civil War the other actors they oppose (Serafetinidis, 2019).

Regime Forces: These forces have been vital for the survival of the Assad regime, both keeping control over Assad territory and the protection of the Assad family. However, these forces suffered heavy casualties during the first years of the conflict, necessitating local and foreign militia support and Russian assistance. With their help, the Assad regime recaptured a considerable amount of territory (Laub, 2017). It can be said that Bashar al-Assad and his regime survived until present day thanks to the economic, political and military support it received from Russia, Iran and Hezbollah. Today, the regime has control of the southern regions, along the border of Jordan.

Iran: Syria serves as a natural buffer zone for Iran. A Sunni Muslim regime taking power in Syria would also not be preferable for Iran. And Syrian allegiance allows Iran to maintain geographical contact with the Lebanese Hezbollah. Therefore, it is in Iran's interest that Bashar al-Assad's regime remains standing (Borger, 2018). The contact between the Lebanese Hezbollah and Iran serves as a deterrent to militarily

superior Israel, while also helping Iran to arm Hezbollah as necessary (Laub, 2017). Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, Hezbollah has been an ally of the Assad regime with Iranian support. Also note that the Assad family, with many government and army officials alongside with %12 of the Syrian population consist of Shiite Muslims, the sect of Islam of which Iran has declared itself its defender and protector (Lucas, 2018).

Hezbollah: Hezbollah is an organization which supports anti-terrorist movements in Iraq and Lebanon and has stood with the Assad regime since the inception of the Syrian Civil War. Hezbollah also supports Palestine and other organizations resisting against Israel (Matar, 2019). Hezbollah made efforts to strengthen its relations with Syria and Iran and played an important part in the Assad regime's resurgence alongside Iran. In this, Hezbollah assisted in the organization and development of the regime forces, rather than fighting alongside pro-regime militias. Their efforts helped the Assad regime to broaden its political, ideological and military influences (Hage Ali, 2019).

Russia: Russia also stood alongside the Assad regime since the start of the protests, serving as a diplomatic shield. Russia also provided military support after 2015, assisting regime forces in western and northern Syria, and was especially instrumental in the regime's recapturing of Aleppo. Russia, while citing ISIL as its main reason to intervene, has instead focused on anti-regime organizations and has fought conflicts within civilian residential areas. Russia also began diplomatic peace efforts in Kazakhstan's capital Astana in order to bring about political reconciliation (Laub, 2017).

Russia has not intervened in Syria for solely economic or military reasons. Russia also seeks to forestall radical Islamic movements and to defend Syria against them. Syria's geopolitical location is also of importance to Russia. For these reasons, Russia strengthened its ties with Syria. For example, a deal made between the regimes in 2015 guarantees Russia the right to form military bases in Syria and allows Russian military officers to travel to Syria without needing to obtain a visa (Yulis and Falver, 2017).

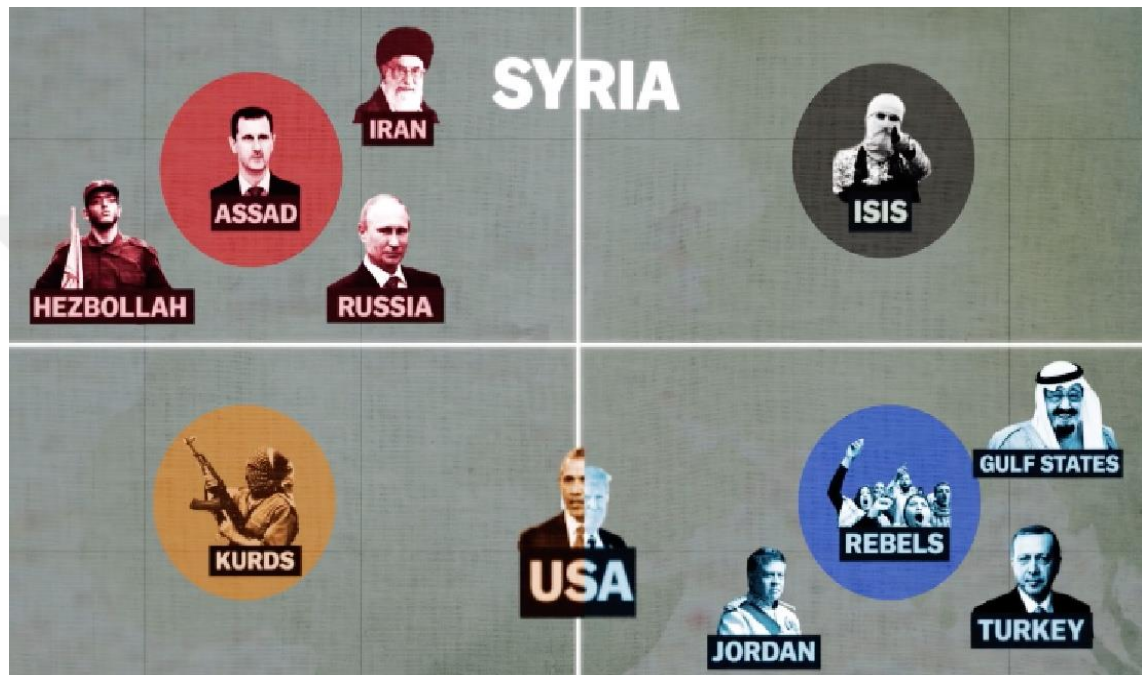


Figure: 3.3 Opposing sides of the Syrian Civil War (Serafetinidis, 2019).

United States of America: Interventions of outside actors into the Syrian Civil War is categorized into two periods, by chronology and methods used. The first period is between 2011 and 2014. During this period, western nations led by the United States and also Turkey concurrently imposed sanctions upon Syria. As Iran and Russia supported the Assad regime, the United States began supporting anti-regime groups in return. After the news of the chemical attacks used by the Syrian regime came to light, USA and its allies sought ways to intervene. However, Russia's support of the Assad regime during the United Nations Security Council caused USA to switch tactics, after which it began supplying anti-regime forces with armaments (Bilgin, 2019: 12).

The second period is considered to be between 2014 and 2018. During these years, ISIL rose in power and Russian forces physically intervened. All other sides

fought against ISIL during the period. The United States began supplying PYD/YPG with armaments and provided air support (Bilgin, 2019: 12). According to its own policy, the United States sought to use the local organizations such as PYD/YPG against the Syrian regime instead of directly intervening with its own forces; essentially fighting a proxy war through its allies (Demir, 2018: 96).

The USA's assistance of Syria is rather regarded as part of its Eastern Mediterranean policies. This region is both important for energy transport and houses rich natural gas sources in the Middle East, North Africa and the Caspian regions. Therefore, the security of these regions is of utmost importance and for this the global powers seek to keep military influence within the area. In addition, the armed conflict in Syria benefits the American weapons industry as well (the largest of its kind in the world), indirectly bolstering the American economy (Bağlama, 2016).

Turkey: During the Hafez al-Assad era, Turkish – Syrian relations were strained due to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan's presence within the Syrian borders. Afterwards the relations became warmer during the Bashar al-Assad rule, up until the Arab Spring. Turkey expressed support for the Syrian protestors, which disrupted the Turkish – Syrian relations and a new era begun between the countries. Bashar al-Assad promised the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmed Davutoğlu that the violence against the protestors would cease, but failed to keep his word. Afterwards, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan personally called for Bashar al-Assad's resignation, and Turkey imposed sanctions against Syria (Demir, 2018: 113).

Turkey opposed the Assad regime and supported the opposition. However, Iran and Russia's support of the Assad regime helped it persevere, even though the regime forces were scattered. In 2012, Turkey expelled Syrian diplomats within its borders after the Houla Massacre. As the conflict further spiraled out of control, Turkish approach to the Syrian Civil War went from picking sides between the regime and the opposition to a more complicated approach (Samur, 2016: 219). In June 2012, Turkey massed its troops near the Syrian border after a Turkish reconnaissance jet was shot down by the Syrian Army. During this time, the Kurdish problem started to become complicated for Turkey as well, as YPG, an extension of PKK, saw Chinese, Russian and regime support and began to establish a dominion in northern Syria (Semin, 2015:

7). In the last few years, Turkey intervened to the east and the west of the Euphrates, attempting to form a buffer zone with Operation Olive Branch and Operation Peace Spring and establishing a significant amount of control.

The Turkish public questions other actors' presences in Syria rather than questioning Turkey's intervention. Russia and the United States are among the most active international actors in the region. As stated beforehand, the U.S. supports PYD/YPG while Russia backs the Assad regime forces. Especially the U.S.'s support of and cooperation with PYD/YPG jeopardizes Turkey's national security, which necessitates Turkish presence in Syria as well, as Turkey rightfully seeks to establish a safe zone throughout its 910-kilometer-long border shared with Syria (Başbozkurt, 2016).

Of course, Turkey's concerns are not limited to PYD/YPG. As a neighbor, Syria's future, the Assad regime's future and the new actors that will emerge after the end of the Syrian Civil War; these all concern the Turkish government as well. As these matters are discussed, Turkey wants a seat on that table as well. Turkey shares its longest land border with Syria and has housed millions of Syrian refugees near the Turkish – Syrian border since the start of the Syrian Civil War. Therefore, it can be said that Turkey has reasonable grounds in its involvement.

Local Groups: Bashar al-Assad had sought to suppress the Arab Spring protests with violence at first, to little success. This caused almost all of the Middle East to call for changes in Syria, putting further stress on the Assad regime. Bashar al-Assad adopted harsher and harsher methods as he felt that he was losing control. In retaliation, the Syrian opposition armed itself, and with the local populace's support, began fighting against the Assad regime in armed conflict. The Assad regime started to lose power at first, as the opposition began to succeed despite its fractured nature (Muslu, 2018: 11). During the course of the Syrian Civil War, many such organizations rose and fell, and many different alliances were formed. It is important to state that jihadist groups came to dominate the Syrian opposition movements. Especially ISIL's rise to power made a considerable effect on the transformation of regime opposing Syrian groups (Ulutaş et al. 2015: 9.)

At the beginning, it wasn't anticipated that the Syrian crisis would go on for many years. Hasan Basri Yalçın, SETA Director of Strategic Research and a Political Sciences and International Relations expert at Istanbul Commerce University, states the following regarding the local groups in the Syrian Civil War: "Not only the Syrian crisis has taken longer to resolve than the other situations that Arab Spring caused; but neither international intervention occurred nor international actors called for the democratization of Syria. From time to time, the regime was accused of deploying chemical attacks, and Bashar al-Assad continued his existence in Syria. In essence, international order and diplomatic principles were ignored by international actors; as these actors use the local groups against one another in struggle against each other (Yalçın, 2016).

ISIL began to fight the opposing powers in 2014, heavily succeeding at first. The local groups, while putting up a decent fight, were ineffective especially in the eastern regions of Syria – where ISIL came to prominence. On the other hand, the Assad regime regained control in cities such as Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, further pressuring the opposing groups (Ulutaş et al. 2015: 9).

Kurdish groups also make up an important chunk of the local Syrian groups. In present day, the Kurdish groups who are in control over eastern Syrian territories are being supported by the United States of America and its allies. The Assad regime, Iran and Russia also support these groups, albeit diplomatically. The U.S. has especially provided the Kurdish troops with significant weaponry and logistical support. On the other hand, Turkey vehemently opposes the support of these Kurdish groups as they are extensions or offshoots of PKK, which puts the U.S. at a dilemma despite its open support of these groups. Recently, it seems that the operations Turkey has conducted to preserve its border identity drew repercussions from the United States, however, it's uncertain that if the U.S. support of the Kurdish groups will persist in the future (Güneş, 2018).

In essence, many rebelling groups emerged to fight against the Assad regime. Free Syrian Army, one such group, was supported by Turkey, United States and several Gulf countries after its emergence and has achieved a significant victory in 2016 by retaking Aleppo. The Free Syrian Army has generally achieved dominance

over a limited territory in northwestern Syria and was supported by Turkey in their joint operations in northern Syria in 2018 and 2019 (Al Jazeera, 2018).

3.2.3 The Refugee Crisis

The Assad regime's violent methods employed in order to suppress the Arab Spring protests, and the civil war situation this approach brought about has displaced millions of Syrian civilians from their homes. While some resettled within Syrian borders, many others sought refuge within other countries. As the conflict is still ongoing to present day, immigration continues as well, with no end in sight. These immigrations cause economic, political and social problems to the countries who receive them (Ağır and Sezik, 2015: 96).

Especially after Aleppo was targeted; thousands of men, women and children were forced on a hopeless march in order to survive. Today, even though Syria has less than %1 of the world's population, one in every three refugees worldwide are Syrian citizens. As per 2018 data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 6.7 million individual refugees were recorded from the Syrian Arab Republic. On the other hand, 6.1 million Syrian were similarly forced to relocate within the Syrian borders, with 819.000 new relocations occurring in 2019, as per the Center for Observing Regional Relocation (Todd, 2019).

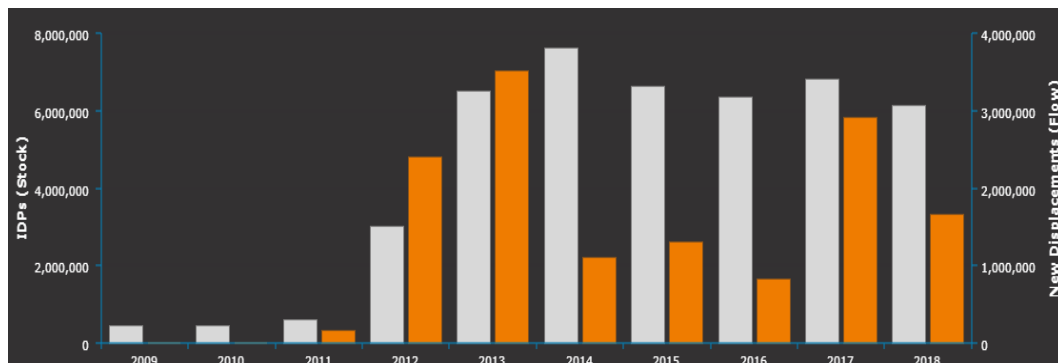


Figure: 3.4 Syrian refugees, and civilians displaced within Syria (IDMC, 2019)

A significant portion of Syrian immigrants remained in the Middle East or Syria's neighbors, while the remaining portion sought refuge in Europe instead. As per United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2019), the largest portion of Syrian refugees currently reside in Turkey, with significant amounts in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt as well. Per UNHCR data, Turkey houses 3.691.333 (%65,2 of total) Syrian refugees, while Lebanon houses 918.974 refugees (%16,2 of total), Jordan houses 654.192 refugees (%11,5 of total), Iraq houses 234.831 refugees (%4,1 of total), Egypt houses 129.159 refugees (%2,3 of total) and other states house 35.713 (%0,6 of total) in total (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019). In addition, Syrian refugees currently reside in several European countries as well, many of whom being illegal immigrants. The number of Syrian refugees in the Middle East and Europe are represented in the figure below:

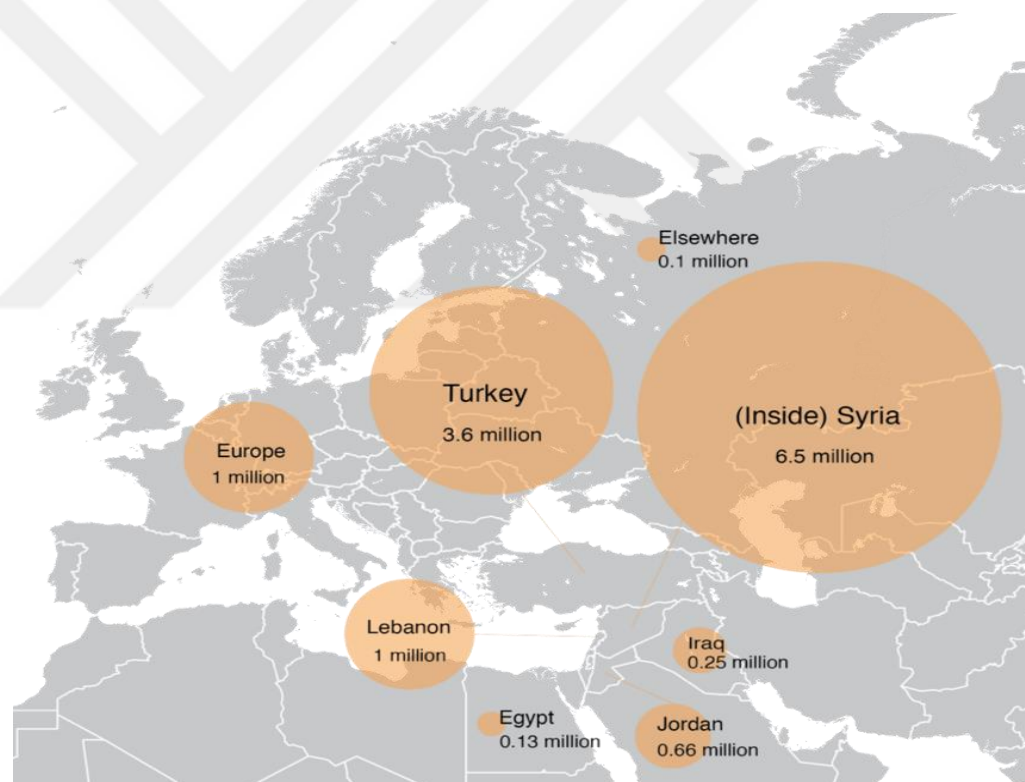


Figure: 3.5 Total Number of Syrian refugees in the Middle East and Europe (World Economic Forum, 2019).

Beyond any doubt, countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan have made great efforts and undergone significant economic sacrifices by lending a helping hand to Syrian refugees. However, struggles still exist for the Syrian refugees abroad, mainly consisting of economic problems and unemployment. While Turkey and other countries who accepted refugees could not immediately answer all of the refugees'

needs, reports indicate that a significant portion of the Syrian refugees are employed and treated fairly by their employers and colleagues. However, many of these employed refugees are working unlicensed, in menial jobs for low pay (World Economic Forum, 2019).

As stated previously, Turkey houses the most Syrian refugees out of all other countries worldwide. Almost four million refugees reside within Turkey, with 3.7 million of them being Syrian refugees. %44 of all refugees immigrating to Turkey were children. Turkey seeks to form a zone near the Turkish – Syrian border for their long-term residency. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan states that villages populated by 5.000 and cities populated by 30.000 will be erected within the safe zones after they are cleared from YPG/PYD (Inglis, 2019).

United Nations official in Turkey and a law professor from Dayton University Shelly Ingles (2019), states that Turkey houses refugees from other countries as well as Syrian refugees, and that many of these refugees seek to immigrate into the European Union over Greece or the Balkans. While Europe houses less refugees in total than Turkey alone does, European nations treat immigration as a crisis and don't want to accept the refugees within their borders, under the framework of rising nationalism and populist politics. Because of this, the European Union promised Turkey financial support and other benefits for housing the largest portion of Syrian refugees but has failed to provide adequate support. This increased Turkey's burden. Many Syrian refugees who immigrated to Europe before the EU struck a deal with Turkey currently reside in Germany, the most among other European nations (Inglis, 2019).

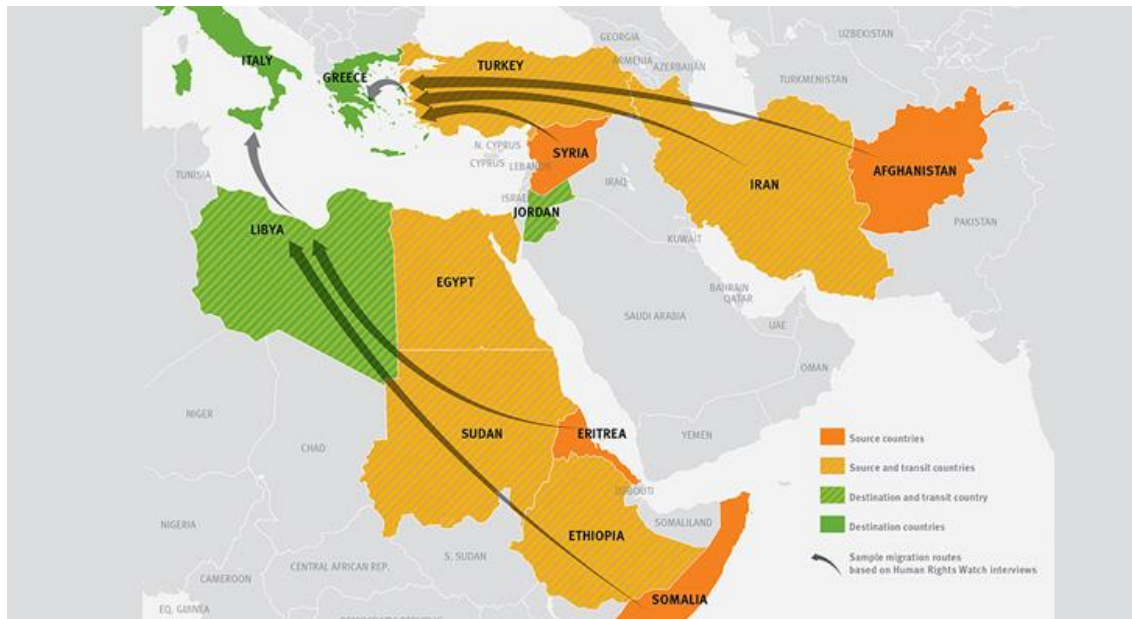


Figure: 3.6 Migration paths towards the EU (Beauchamp, 2017).

This is the largest refugee crisis in history, even surpassing World War II despite its more widespread devastation. While some Syrian refugees sought illegal ways to immigrate into the EU with hopes of a better life, the majority simply preferred countries more stable than their own, as they lacked the resources and connections to successfully immigrate into wealthier countries. In the current situation, medium or low-income countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt house the majority of the Syrian immigrants. While Germany (a country with 4,5 times of Turkey's GNP) houses the most immigrants amongst other EU countries, numerically it houses even less immigrants than Lebanon (Beauchamp, 2017).

3.3 Regional and Global Actors of the Syrian Crisis

The Syrian crisis, which concerns many regional and international actors, was seen as a temporary situation. However, as time dragged on, the crisis has almost become an untieable knot. In order to be able to fully discuss this process, regional and global actors regarding the Syrian crisis have been listed and discussed within this chapter.

While the Arab Spring protests deposed of many dictators previously thought to be immovable, the Assad regime has persevered to this day thanks to its local and

global allies such as Russia, Iran and China (Tepeciklioğlu and Tepeciklioğlu, 2015: 172).

Iran was one of the influential actors assisting the Assad regime up until the Russian intervention in 2015, providing the regime forces with weaponry and intelligence. Studied under this perspective, it is apparent that the Syrian Civil War is not a local conflict simply between the Assad regime and its opposers, but a crisis with global, far reaching effects, as all actors involved have their own separate religious, economic, strategic and military interests. Iran is one such actor, as Syrian territory forms a corridor between Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon. This corridor allows contact between Hezbollah and Iran, which in turn weakens Israel, therefore reducing the U.S. influence in the Middle East (Hein et al. 2018).

Another ally vital for the Assad regime is Russia. Russia first intervened in Syria in 2015, when it was generally thought that the Assad regime had lost the fight. In a sense, Russia opposed those who opposed Assad as well, stepping back onto the world stage as a major actor. Russia also opposed and fought against ISIL, stating that Russia had intervened into Syria in order to fight terrorism. The Assad regime benefited greatly from Russia's help, retaking important cities such as Palmyra and Aleppo. Russia holds veto power in the United Nations as well, and has vetoed 12 plans regarding Syria in total, including plans regarding Syria's alleged use of chemical weaponry (Hein et al. 2018).

While the United States seeks to eradicate ISIL and reduce Iran's influence within the region, it has been hesitant in its policies during the crisis. Its past interventions into Libya and Iraq and the consequences of these events caused the U.S. to take a more cautious approach. Neither during Obama era nor during Trump era did America take a decisive approach. And when the European Union's general approach is analyzed regarding Syria, it is seen that the EU generally aligns itself with the U.S.'s policies. Militarily and operationally, France and the United Kingdom have sided with the U.S. regarding the Syrian crisis (Pierini, 2014).

The AK Party's 'zero problems with our neighbors' policy in the 2000's, combined with Bashar al-Assad's moderate politics had brought about the warmest

period of Turkish – Syrian relations. However, the Arab Spring protests overturned the perfect relations as Turkey stood for the toppling of the Assad regime. Beyond that, Turkey openly supported many opposing groups in Syria, and stood against the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in the region. In the present day, Turkey has conducted operations against YPG, the Syrian extension of PKK, in order to secure its territorial integrity (Hein et al. 2018). It seems that Turkey has strayed from its NATO allies after conducting operations to the west and east of the Euphrates in order to create a safe zone. Despite USA's and its allies France, Germany and U.K.'s opposition of Turkey in this matter, it seems that Turkey has managed to have a say in the restructuring process of Syria.

Today, powerful nations are engaged in a clash of power within the borders of Syria. An example would be the United States; whose increased presence after the 9/11 attacks in Afghanistan, Iraq and now Syria can be regarded as a strategical display of power. As terrorist attacks increased in number and frequency after the end of the Cold War; the media prominently displays militaristic power as a protector against terrorism; the 'War on Terror'. In such an environment, the realism serves to accomplish the interests of powerful nations (Özdoğan, 2019: 12).

Today, the actors within Syria not only are enemies of each other; but have formed several alliances as well, in order to shape the country within their own interests, conduct operations, and acquire intelligence. In their operations, the main goals are establishing security and national interests (Özdoğan, 2019: 13). While proposed alliances which don't mutually benefit both sides obviously appear as pointless; there are several mutually beneficial alliances formed over great distances and effort, such as the U.S. aligning with YPG while Russia supports the Assad regime.

Although there has not been a World War since the early 1940's; there have been many regional conflicts or proxy wars. Since the Arab Spring, Syria has been the theater of a proxy war as well. The ongoing struggles within Syria can be regarded as the attempts of the involved actors to realize their national interests at a higher level. The involved actors attempt to develop politics and act rationalistically in order to serve their interests, as the international diplomatic systems are inherently anarchic

and the actors cannot trust each other to protect their interests (Keyik and Erol, 2019: 26).

As stated, the Syrian crisis has taken on international characteristics since 2011. While Bashar al-Assad still holds his seat and important cities thanks to Iranian and Russian help, armed opposition against the Assad regime is still active in northwestern and southern regions of Syria. While ISIL, one such group, has lost almost all of its territory, the question of ‘What will happen to the remaining ISIL militants?’ is still an international concern. PYD/YPG also continues its existence despite Turkey’s protests, as the U.S. keeps PYD/YPG afloat with logistical support and armaments as a power against ISIL. While ISIL is excluded by default from all peace talks concerning Syria, PYD/YPG have been excluded per Turkey’s request as well, most importantly from the meetings at Astana.

Along with all these actors, political dissent against the Assad regime exists as well, the most important political opposition against Bashar al-Assad’s presidency is the Syrian National Council, albeit fractured. The SNC also represents Syria during the peace talks in Astana. As the Syrian crisis involves many different actors and still remains unsolved; it becomes apparent that all the actors involved have varying expectations and strategies (Deutsche Welle, 2017).

CHAPTER FOUR

TURKISH – RUSSIAN RELATIONS REGARDING THE SYRIAN CRISIS

In this chapter, Turkish – Russian relations have been researched and analyzed starting from the breakout of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. First, the Turkish – Russian relations from 2011 to 2015 are discussed, as the 2015 Turkish shootdown of a Russian jet marks a turning point where the Turkish – Russian relations hit an all-time low. Afterwards, post-shootdown crisis relations, Operation Euphrates Shield, Operation Olive Branch, Operation Peace Spring and the S-400 issue have also been analyzed, working with the latest, most accurate sources and literature available.

4.1 Turkish – Russian Relations During the Syrian Crisis (2011-15)

The Syrian crisis is of great importance if one wishes to fully comprehend the Turkish – Russian relations. As the shootdown crisis in 2015 was a definite turning point for the diplomatic relations between the countries, it is important for the before and after of the crisis to be discussed separately. Therefore, this chapter of this work discusses in depth the Turkish – Russian relations between 2011-15.

The course of the Turkish – Russian relations changed in the 2000's; as the period of cordiality between the 1920's and the 1930's were re-established once more. Turkey hosted the 'Russian Culture Year' events in 2007, and Russia similarly hosted a 'Turkish Culture Year' in 2008. In 2010, scientific and cultural events were hosted between the countries, as celebration for the 90th anniversary of the warm Turkish – Russian relations between 1920-30. After 2010, the relations between the countries started to become more stable and long-lasting, with a focus on strategic cooperation. Economic relations between Turkey and Russia were also deemed of utmost importance by both countries; in 2010, both countries agreed to raise the shared trading volume between Turkey and Russia from \$40 billion dollars to \$100 billion dollars during the next five years (Çelikpala, 2019: 14).

Those who consider the history between Turkey and Russia might adopt a skeptical outlook about the blossoming cordiality between the two countries. As Turkey's friendliness towards the West was well known, some expected the new period of warm relations between Turkey and Russia after the 2000 to end negatively. However, inner disputes and confusion within the West is the main reason which allows Russia to broaden its sphere of activity. Similarly, establishing warm relations with Russia allows Turkey to diversify its diplomatic relations and reduces Turkey's reliance on the West regarding economic, political and military issues (Köse, 2019).

The developing Turkish – Russian relations intersected in Syria in the 2010's. Russia, who possessed a naval base in Tartus, Syria even before the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, became directly involved with the crisis in Idlib and Latakia; as Russia declared that it would fight against ISIL and had historically warm relations with the Assad regime, and was allied to Iran as well (Yüksel, 2019).

As the Arab Spring protests spread in Syria; both Turkey and Russia expressed, although with different approaches, that Syria's governmental authority and territorial integrity should be re-established. Both countries therefore expressing that they had the same intent with different methods regarding the situation in Syria at the beginning of the crisis. The Russian Parliament decreed that Russian troops would be deployed in Syria, citing the Syrian government's invitation and the ISIL as a threat. This decision both started a new era of Turkish – Russian relations and altered the balance of power in the Middle East (Kurban and Cabbarlı, 2019: 109).

Despite Turkey's membership to NATO, the relations between Turkey and Russia rapidly approached strategic cooperation after the 2010's. In October 2012, a Russian passenger plane en route to Damascus was forced to land by Turkey inside Turkish airspace. In the plane, military grade communication devices were found and confiscated by Turkish authorities, afterwards the plane was allowed to take-off for Damascus again. This event did not disrupt the amicable relations between Turkey and Russia, however. After about two months later from this event, Russian leader Vladimir Putin paid a visit to Ankara in order to attend the Council of Advanced Cooperation. In September 2013, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Russia for the G-20

summit, and again in November to attend the Council of Advanced Cooperation (Mehmet, 2016).

Aside from the warming relations between Russia and Turkey, Russia began pursuing more aggressive policies, both near its territory and also globally. These policies proved that Russia and Turkey were not aligning closer thanks to a political vision like Turkey's 'zero problems with neighbors' policy, despite some claims. Especially between 2012 and 2015, Turkish – Russian relations became more complicated as the west changed its approach regarding both countries, despite the political discourse, energy deals and the establishment of high institutions between the two countries (Çelikpala, 2019: 15).

In 2014, Russia began to systemically oppress the Crimean Tatar population, and the Ukraine crisis erupted. Turkey condemned Russia regarding its treatment of the Crimean Tatar population. However, when other NATO member countries decided to impose sanctions on Russia for these actions, Turkey did not participate despite also being a member. In December 2014, despite the Syrian Civil War, Crimean and the Ukrainian crises, Vladimir Putin personally visited Turkey to attend the Council of Advanced Cooperation. During the visit, it was declared that the South Stream project would be cancelled, and the TurkStream project would be focused on instead (Mehmet, 2016).

It was understood that, despite Putin and Erdoğan's differing opinions on matters such as Ukraine and Syria, the economic cooperation between Russia and Turkey would be maintained and further developed. However, these relations and deals did not affect Russia's approach to the Syrian crisis, as Russia did not admit that it had been supporting Bashar al-Assad. On the other hand, the ongoing events in Syria are of utmost importance regarding both Turkey's safety and its internal and external policies, therefore, it would be an oversight to regard Turkish – Syrian relations simply the as relations of two neighboring countries. Turkey's general approach to the Syrian crisis is that Syrian citizens should be able to determine their own future, and that Turkey would spare no effort to establish peace in the region (Demir, 2016: 149).

Problems began to emerge between Turkey and Russia in about June 2015. During this time, Russia's physical intervention into Syria coincided with news of a possible Turkish intervention into Syria as well. Additionally, news regarding the deployment of Russian Air Force war planes in an airport near Latakia began seeing airtime in media organs, which strained the Turkish – Russian relations further (Crilly, 2015). During the period, Turkey opened the Incirlik Air Base to groups opposing ISIL (after talks with the United States); about which Russia expressed its discontent. Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov diplomatically expressed this disagreement between the two countries, which indicated how strained the Turkish – Russian relations had become (Tonkuş and Uzun, 2015).

Another cause of the negativity between Turkey and Russia during this period would be the Russian – Armenian relations. Russia and Armenia had militarily cooperated after the Cold War, after which Moscow began using Armenia as a tool of influence in the Caucasus region (Asker, 2017: 110). In 2015, Vladimir Putin declared a deal concerning a joint Russian – Armenian air defense system. This caused an unfavorable reaction from Turkey, as Armenia's aggressive policies towards Turkey were known, the deal that would grant a significant amount of air defense to Armenia was condemned as a move against both Turkey and NATO (Rehimov and Altuğ, 2016).

After these developments, Turkey and Azerbaijan commented about how Armenia's policy was towards maintaining its demands regarding genocide and territory. And when the deal was evaluated on the Russian side, it was commented that the deal was an attempt of Russian hegemony and was in line with Russia's goal of becoming a global power, and that the deal was also a way of putting a psychological pressure on Turkey and Azerbaijan (Kurban and Cabbarlı, 2019: 10-11).

In September 2015, President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Moscow to attend the opening ceremony of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque (Ulucami). During the visit, the discord between Turkey and Russia regarding the countries' priorities in the Syria also became apparent. During the opening ceremony, Erdoğan began his speech by quoting Tolstoy: *"The most important effort in life is to do good."* Then the Turkish President commented on Russia's support of the Assad regime and the

disagreements in between. Afterwards, Erdoğan remarked that: *“The fire in the Middle East can only be doused with conscience and justice, and if one house is ablaze, it can burn the whole village down.”* He continued: *“We (have) welcomed two million refugees and we have been helping the people in the region for four years. The refugee crisis cannot be solved by closing down borders, but by helping (these people) live in peace at their own homes.”* These statements by Erdoğan were interpreted as an indicator of Turkey’s disapproval of Russian policies regarding Syria (Çelikpala, 2017).

4.2 The Lowest Point in Turkish – Russian Relations: The Shootdown Crisis

Basically, the Turkish – Russian relations were on a positive path right up until the shootdown crisis; afterwards however the relations were plunged into a state of crisis. In this chapter, the shootdown crisis which was a turning point within the Turkish – Russian relations is discussed.

The shootdown crisis is one of the most negative developments between Turkey and Russia. As during the Cold War, even though Turkey and USSR stood in opposing sides, tensions were handled with poise and composure. Afterwards, even though the Georgia problem in 2008 and Ukraine / Crimea problems in 2014 had brought the countries against each other, tensions had not worsened as much. In addition, the shootdown crisis happened during a period of developing relations, economic activity and military cooperation between the countries, therefore affecting not only Turkish – Russian diplomacy, but the very lives of Turkish and Russian citizens as well (Özcan et al. 2017: 11).

Turkish – Russian relations had been positively developing, with both countries disregarding their regional partners, from the middle 1990’s to up until the shootdown event on 24 November 2015 (Çelikpala, 2017). In the background of the shootdown event lies Russian bombing of territories near the Turkish border, an action which increased the tension between the countries all the way to the boiling point, where the shootdown occurred. In its essence, it would be a grave understatement to state that the event, which caused a crisis between Turkey and Russia, was merely a struggle to advance their territories a bit farther (İmanbeyli, 2015: 3).

Vladimir Putin's revisionist international policies are one of the main causes of these events. These policies first demonstrated their negative effects on neighboring countries such as Georgia and Ukraine, and then in the U.S. and Europe. In 2014, sanctions against Russia and the falling oil prices caused economic struggles within Russia, and its position in Crimea and Ukraine diplomatically isolated the country. These events urged Putin to seek a new discourse. Therefore, the Syrian crisis was put at the forefront of Russian politics. And the shootdown crisis occurred in such a tenuous period (İmanbeyli, 2015: 4).

During the fourth year of the Syrian Civil War, Russia decided to intervene to prevent the Assad regime from collapsing. Even though Russia cited ISIL as its reason to intervene, Russia only provided air support to the already existing ground troops. However, the Russian intervention disrupted Turkey's plans of establishing a safe zone near the Turkish – Syrian border. Turkmen Mountain, in northern Syria, is of special importance to Turkey. And the Russian violation of Turkish airspace came to be during the period Turkmen Mountain was being hit as well. In this state of emergency, Russia nonchalantly violated Turkey's legal rights (Yeşiltaş, 2015).

The shootdown event occurred on 24 November 2015. A patrolling Su-24 jet violated Turkish airspace for 17 seconds, and its pilot gave no response to the warnings issued by Turkish authorities. Then, the Russian jet was shot down by F-16 planes belonging to the Turkish Air force. Immediately afterwards Turkey declared that the act was done according to the rules of engagement and international law, but nevertheless faced accusations from the Russian authorities (Kısacık and Denizelli, 2017: 871).

The shootdown crisis was an unprecedented event between the countries, even during the Cold War era. It is also worth to note the previous fifteen years of developing and cordial relations between Russia and Turkey, despite the latter's NATO membership. Vladimir Putin described the event as, "*We have been stabbed in the back,*" and his words put an end to the period of amicable relations between the countries. Per Reuters' (2015) news, Vladimir Putin declared that the Turkish shootdown of the Russian jet was a war crime, and that Turkey would not only be

warned, but would also suffer serious and long-lasting repercussions from Russia (Klimenyev, 2015).

The shootdown was regarded as a Turkish attack on Russia by the Russian press, and the passionately nationalistic leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia Vladimir Zhirinovsky expressed his backlash as follows: *“If this (event) had happened during a different time, Stalin would have destroyed half of Turkey. This attack against Russia must be met with heavy consequences. Kurdistan’s independence must be recognized in order to prevent Turkey’s aggressive plans,”* (Zhirinovsky, 2015). Zhirinovsky also proposed that Russia should assist Armenia, while Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov cancelled his visit to Turkey (Kurban and Cabbarlı, 2019: 111).

The shootdown crisis became Russia’s victimhood card and a tool to divert attention by changing the topic, in which it succeeded. Russia began to list the economic sanctions it would impose on Turkey, seeking to intimidate Turkey away from taking further negative action against Russia (Demir, 2016: 146). The tensions continued until June 2016, and during this period commercial relations between Turkey and Russia saw a %60 reduction in total volume (Mehmet, 2016). In June 2016, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan penned an official correspondence to Vladimir Putin, expressing his grievances regarding the shootdown event and offered his condolences to the fallen pilot. Erdoğan also stated that he viewed the fallen pilot’s family as a Turkish family as well, and that he would take any initiative to reduce their pain (Özcan et al, 2017: 13).

Even though both sides blame each other regarding the shootdown crisis, the trace maps that the Turkish government has published clearly indicate to an airspace violation. However, when Ankara and Moscow’s statements to the media are evaluated together, it can be said that the event became a crisis because both sides sought to establish superiority over one another during a period of time which was already tense and unstable. The fact that Russian planes were bombing the border regions and Turkmen Mountain also support this theory. Because, when looked at from Moscow’s viewpoint, it is seen that the affair could have been settled diplomatically, and the violation was not severe enough to necessitate a shootdown.

Afterwards, the Turkish – Russian relations ended a period of normalization, as both Putin and Erdoğan agreed to rebuild the relations. Erdoğan’s visit to Russia in August 2016 further accelerated the restoration process of the relations which, as the saying goes, had hit rock bottom.

4.3 Turkish - Russian Relations Post-Shootdown Crisis

After the shootdown crisis, which was the lowest point of the relations between Turkey and Russia, the two countries’ relations began normalizing as they began economic and military cooperation once again during the post-shootdown crisis period. This period is discussed and analyzed within this chapter.

The shootdown crisis revealed that neither Turkey nor Russia anticipated such rapid increase in tension after years of cordial relations, and that neither country correctly assessed the other’s level of tolerance. In a sense, vital geopolitical interests outweighed existing economic benefits (Çelikpala, 2019: 18). In addition, the shootdown event also happened after a period of internal tension within Turkey. The fact that Erdoğan got a mere %52 of the vote in the 2014 presidential elections, for which the threshold was at %50, and the subsequent double parliamentary elections in 2015 point to a delicate period of Turkish politics. Also, the terror attacks in southeastern Turkey in addition to neither the U.S. nor Russia supporting Turkey on the matter of YPG/PYD put a substantial amount of stress on the Turkish government.

In May 2016, as the shootdown crisis was still ongoing, the Binali Yıldırım Cabinet was inaugurated as the 65th government of Turkey. The cabinet had a policy of increasing the amount Turkey’s international alliances. This approach helped relax the ongoing tension between Russia and Turkey. At around the same time, it was theorized that Russia and Turkey were deceived and tricked. İbrahim Karagül (17 June 2016), in an article that he authored for Haber7 Online Newspaper; he states that Ankara was held hostage by pitting Russia against Turkey in Syria, which prevented the two countries from forming an alliance, therefore Russia unwittingly went along with their plan and supported the terrorist organizations which threaten Turkey, hereby sacrificing the long-standing friendship of Turkey for terrorist organizations (Karagül, 2016).

As the Turkish – Russian relations calmed down, President of Kazakhstan Nazarbayev and other mediators helped the two countries reconcile through official apologies and compensations. In July 2016, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs met with his Russian counterpart Lavrov in a meeting of Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization; there, Turkey and Russia agreed to cooperate against terrorist organizations. The highlight of the meeting therefore became Turkey and Russia agreeing to cooperate in Syria against ISIL post shootdown crisis (Hacıoğlu, 2016).

An event which made the biggest contribution towards Turkish – Russian rapprochement is the Gulenist coup attempt against Turkey in June 15, 2016. Immediately after the event, Russia offered its support, while the United States under Obama's presidency refused to extradite the perpetrator of the coup attempt Fethullah Gülen. Also, allegations surfaced indicating that American planes taking off from the Incirlik Air Base had provided fuel support to Turkish planes participating in the coup attempts, both of which strained the Turkish – American relations (Karakoca, 2018). The U.S.A.'s two-faced behavior and Russia's open support aligned Turkey and Russia closer again; and it was theorized that the shootdown event in November 24 was perpetuated by the Gulenist Terrorist Movement (Sabah Gazetesi, 5 December 2016). However, this theory was debunked in January 2017 by the Parliamentary Investigation Committee, as then-Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu declared that there was no connection between the Gulenist movement and the shootdown event (Milliyet Gazetesi, 12 January 2017).

Indeed, a lot changed during the year after the shootdown event. During the period, Turkey received inadequate support from the U.S. and the West on the matter of terrorism, and the U.S.'s support of the Gulenist Terrorist Organization and YPG/PYD drove Turkey to reconsider its relations with Russia once again. And the fallout of the shootdown crisis in addition to these matters caused Turkey's diplomatic affairs to seem somewhat grim. On the other hand, Russia itself was in a similar situation. As its aggressive policies caused Russia to become alienated in the international stage and served to sow discord between Russia and the West; Russia too decided that cooperation with Turkey could be beneficial. Also, the problems between Russia and Ukraine made so that Russia needed Turkey to reach the European markets (Çelikipala, 2019: 23).

Turkish – Russian relations entered a period of rapprochement after August 2016 and Erdoğan's visit to Russia, as the U.S., the West and terrorist organizations in Syria necessitated that Russia and Turkey assist each other. U.S.A.'s armament and material support of the YPG/PYD and their joint operations conducted were important reasons that which allowed for this reconciliation (Erem, 2017). Even though the U.S. pointed at ISIL for its reason to intervene in Syria, the U.S. has since consistently sought YPG's alliance. The U.S. reluctance to actually attempt to solve problems in Syria, and its support of the local terrorist organizations put pressure on Turkey brought Turkey and Russia back to talking terms. However, this association was not made to form an alliance, but rather out of dire necessity (İnat, 2018).

This political reconciliation also revitalized the relations between Turkey and Russia, which led to several new partnerships such as the TurkStream project and Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant. The Akkuyu project was labelled as a strategic investment, which meant that the project was not simply a commercial affair, but also important for the regional balance of power. In addition, a joint conference in Ankara was conducted by Russian International Affairs Council and Strategic Research Headquarters of Turkey in order to further develop the cooperation between Turkey and Russia (Karagöl, 2016).

The new era of Turkish – Russian relations had begun on a hopeful note, and both sides sought to accelerate the process even further. One such diplomat was Andrei Karlov, the Russian Ambassador in Ankara, whom had done a significant amount of work to normalize the Turkish – Russian relations after the shutdown crisis. However, just as the relations were on track once more, Karlov was assassinated in Ankara in December 2016. Thankfully, both Turkey and Russia acted within reason, and did not cancel a subsequent meeting that would be between Iran, Russia and Turkey (Karagöl, 2016).

4.4 Operation Euphrates Shield and Turkish – Russian Relations

Operation Euphrates Shield is of great importance both as an answer to the terrorist threats against Turkey, and for its own characteristics. Although the operation was strictly conducted against the terrorist organizations infesting Syria, it can also be

regarded as a political move against other nations trying to establish their influence over the region. In this chapter of this work, the operation itself, which was conducted in order to restore, at least in part, stability and peace in the region, and its effects on Turkish – Russian relations.

Turkey had stated for numerous times that safety of the regions west of the Euphrates were of utmost importance for Turkey's territorial integrity, often issuing severe warnings. However, PYD, which had the open military and material support of the United States, captured Manbij during the same period, crossing a red line in Turkey's eyes in the process (Yeni Şafak, 24 August 2017). Both PYD and ISIL continued their offensive, ignoring all warnings issued by Turkey. These attacks usually targeted Turkish civilian areas near the border, with ISIL especially targeting cities such as Hatay and Kilis with rockets. A street wedding in Gaziantep was targeted, and 59 people lost their lives in a suicide bombing for which ISIL claimed full responsibility. That was the last straw for Turkey (Yeni Şafak, 24 August 2017).

Turkey, invoking its right for self-defense as stated in the 51st article of the Charter of the United Nations, began Operation Euphrates Shield on 24 August 2016. The 51st article of the treaty is as follows (Resmi Gazete, 24 August 1945).

“Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.”

While invoking its right to self-defense, Turkey's main stated goals were pushing ISIL away from the Turkish border in order to establish border security, and to prevent YPG from establishing control over the region. Before the operation, it was decided that the operation would be re-shaped in accordance to developing military and political events, and indeed the process went differently from what was initially

expected. The operation, while a move against the terrorist organizations ISIL and YPG; also became a political action against several actors with confused allegiances and focused on humanitarian aid as much as military action (Yeşiltaş et al. 2017: 10).

Operation Euphrates Shield began, as stated before, on 24 August 2016 and was conducted within the framework of its five main goals (Öztürk, 2017: 192):

- Driving the YPG away from its captured territory in northern Syria in order to prevent the region from gaining independence.
- Driving the ISIL away from the border region cities and settlements of Turkey in order to re-establish safety.
- Stopping the rapid wave of refugees, meeting the coming refugees inside Syria and allowing the Syrian immigrants the means to go back.
- Guaranteeing contact with the Arab world and the Middle East.
- Preserving Turkey's position and political say in the matter for the eventual end of the Syrian Civil War.

Operation Euphrates Shield was conducted in a period of time where Turkish – American relations were worsening as regional issues arose, where the U.S. openly supported YPG with material and arms, where the refugee crisis as ongoing and post-shootdown crisis Turkish – Russian relations had still not healed. Another side of this operation is that it was seen as a tool to solve political problems and defense issues within the area. During the operation, Turkey made various political and diplomatic contacts with Russia and Iran, and talks were held in Astana and Geneva within the scope of the United Nations (Balcı and Göcen, 2018: 345).

It was decided that the regime-opposing organizations fighting in the field should also be able to join the talks at Geneva. During a meeting held in Turkey, it was agreed upon that all sides convene at Geneva; not only the regime-opposing organizations as Russia wished. Before the conventions, Russia brought to front the

notions of federalism and autonomy. However, this notion saw little support as served only certain sides' interests. Another subject for which Russia was issued repercussions was the establishment of parliaments within the areas where ethnic majorities and ethnic majority armed forces were present. Afterwards, Russia responded to the accusations with that Turkey was notified beforehand, however, this claim was not confirmed. Besides, Chechen, Circassian and Turkmen groups were not included in the draft presented by Russia (Yılmaz, 2019: 132).

Numerous meetings were held between Turkey, Russia, Iran and other regional powers/organizations regarding the Syrian Civil War, the ongoing conflict and the drafting of a new constitution for Syria. These meetings and talks are generally listed under the Geneva talks; of which the first convention was held during June 30th, 2012. Along with the permanent members of the UN; Turkey, Arab Union representatives, Qatar, Iraq and Kuwait were present during this convention. Regime forces and opposing organizations were however excluded. During the convention, the main items of the agenda were; the establishment of a transitory government, the drafting of a constitution tailored to Syrian needs, transition to a multi-party democracy and the representation of Syrian women. In the second round of conventions (held between 22nd of January and 16th of February 2015), approximately forty states were invited alongside Turkey, including the regime-opposing organizations but excluding Iran. Afterwards, the conventions were interrupted due to the Assad crisis between the East and the West. With Turkey's, Russia's and Iran's efforts however, the conventions were once more underway after a truce was declared on December 30, 2016. The third round of conventions began at December 23rd 2017, during which the subject of counterterrorism was also added to the items of the agenda (Stratejik Ortak, 2018).

When the conventions regarding Syria at Geneva are examined; it is seen that all attending countries had different priorities during the drafting of a new Syrian constitution, as evidenced by the U.S. not recognizing the Assad regime while Russia defended the Assad regime's right to have a say. As for Turkey, it was vehemently against any agreement or formation inside which YPG/PYD had a place while also focusing on its own border integrity. Turkey also often voiced that the committee that would draft the new Syrian constitution should consist of adequate, knowledgeable and levelheaded individuals (Temizer and Yusuf, 2019).

Russia and the U.S. reacted in different ways to the Operation Euphrates Shield. The U.S., while supplying the YPG, officially recognized PKK as a terrorist organization. With this action, the U.S. sought to maintain its alliance to Turkey while simultaneously green lighting the establishment of an independent Kurdish nation in the region (Ergan and Babacan, 2015). Meanwhile, Russia acted favorably towards the operation, as the fallout of the shutdown crisis had been largely settled after Erdoğan's visit to Russia in August 2016. After the ISIL suicide bombing at Gaziantep where dozens of civilians perished, Russia considered the operation reasonable. And since Operation Euphrates Shield was mainly conducted against ISIL, it brought no problems to Russia whom had intervened as an ally of the Assad regime (SETA, 2016).

The Kurdish factor in Syria and their favorable relationship with the United States disturb Russia too as it disturbs Turkey as well. Also, even though Turkey and Russia disagree about the Assad regime's existence itself, both countries agree that Syria's territorial integrity should be maintained. On the onset of Operation Euphrates Shield, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared that the operation's goal was to end the Assad regime in Syria, for which Russia requested an explanation. This event highlights the differences on Turkey's and Russia's outlooks on Syria. During the following process, it was announced that the operation was not being conducted against a particular person or state (Ateş, 2017: 13-14).

The general consensus regarding Operation Euphrates Shield is that it was conducted with Russia's approval. Indeed, Russia has achieved several benefits by overlooking Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield, with the main benefit being that the operation causing Turkey to align closer with Russia than the United States. After Erdoğan declared that the operation could stretch to Al Bab and Manbij, and from there to Raqqa, the Turkish troops suffered an airstrike, which essentially drew the boundaries of the operation. Afterwards Erdoğan paid a visit to Russia, and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, together with Hakan Fidan, visited Iran.

During Operation Euphrates Shield, Turkey and the Free Syrian Army purged ISIL from Al-Rai, Jarablus and A'zaz. The operation was Turkey's largest military operation since the 1974 invasion of Cyprus, and with the operation Turkey essentially proved that it would have a say concerning the future of the region. However, PYD

influence grew with Russian and American support in territories which weren't included in the field of operations. As these territories were cleansed from terrorist organizations, a wave of migration happened, and Turkey deployed a trained constabulary (Yeşiltaş et al. 2017).

4.5 Operation Olive Branch and Turkish – Russian Relations

Without a doubt, the ongoing instability and the lack of authority within Syria has posed a threat against both Turkey's border integrity and its domestic security. The first step Turkey took in order to secure its borders and interior was the Operation Euphrates Shield. However, as PYD continued to spread in northern Syria and the ISIL's presence did not subside, Turkey then conducted Operation Olive Branch. In this chapter, Operation Olive Branch, which had more lasting effects in Syria, is discussed.

Turkey had generally adopted a moderate opposition regarding the Syrian crisis, and after the July 15 coup attempt and the subsequent push of nationalistic solidarity, Turkey moved to confront the local and global threats against itself. As Turkey's perceived allies failed to provide the necessary support after the coup attempt, Turkey changed its diplomatic preferences and started to work closer with countries such as Russia and Iran. This cooperation had an important effect regarding Turkey in Syria; in December 2016 the process of ceasefire began, and immediately after the Astana process was started (Caner, 2018).

The most important reason that ushered the start of the peace talks was that, as Assad forces were retaking Aleppo in December, Russia and Turkey were playing an important role in removing the opposition's strength to Aleppo's east. Thereafter both countries started to work towards establishing the peace in Syria, which would be achieved through negotiations. A ceasefire was announced (excluding ISIL and the Al-Nusra Front), and after a conversation between Erdoğan and Putin, it was decided that the parties would convene in Kazakhstan's capital Astana in order to negotiate (BBC, 2017).

Progress were made during the Astana negotiations. Four safe areas were picked during the negotiations in September, away from live combat. Idlib was one such area. Per the negotiated terms, Turkey would be responsible from the area as the warrantor state and would keep the area under supervision through the establishment of observation points. An adequate level of surveillance was accomplished (Caner, 2018). However, another operation was becoming necessary for Turkey. As Operation Euphrates Shield was only against ISIL, and even though it prevented the PKK from connecting all its cantons by land, PKK itself was not directly affected. Therefore, Operation Olive Branch carries a vital importance regarding the prevention of terrorism (Özçelik and Acun, 2018: 9).

Operation Olive Branch began on 20th of January against the terrorist organization YPG. Up until the operation, the U.S. had been arming the local terrorist organization seemingly against ISIL, however the ISIL was no longer a threat in any shape or form. This was taken as a show of bad faith by both Turkey and Russia, and the U.S. thus worsened the problem at Afrin. Russia spoke against the arming of terrorist organizations; as Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov expressed Russia's disapproval and emphasized Syria's territorial integrity (Şahin, 2018). During the start of the operation, Lavrov declared in a press conference that the U.S.'s one sided approach had 'maddened' Turkey. This statement indicates Russia's approval of the operation, and its condemnation of the United States (Reuters, 21 January 2018).

Turkey regarded PYD a threat to its nation alongside ISIL and invoked the 51st article of the Charter of the United Nations, pitting international actors against PYD as well, per the framework of Turkey's right to defend itself. Russia also approved Operation Olive Branch as it perceived the U.S. support of PYD as a threat against Russian interests in Syria and conducted operations in order to make Operation Olive Branch more effortless for Turkey (Özçelik and Acun, 2018: 12). Per BBC's (2018) news article, Kiril Semyonov, an official of the Council of International Relations of Russia, emphasized that Russia owed nothing to the Kurdish groups, and stated that Turkey's use of Syrian airspace was allowed simply because of a treaty between Turkey and Russia. Per the same article, Ruslan Pukhov of the Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies stated that the U.S. support of the PYD damaged Turkey's relations with America and the West and therefore Turkey had aligned closer with

Russia; therefore, Russia had allowed Turkey's presence in Afrin (BBC, 22 January 2018).

After the start of Operation Olive Branch, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov spoke with his American counterpart Tillerson over the phone, and narrated Russia's views of the operation that Turkey was conducting. Emphasizing that Syria's future would be decided by no one else but Syrian themselves, Lavrov made Russia's stand against the U.S. very clear (CNN Türk, 24 January 2018). Actually, Russia sought to intimidate PYD in a way by allowing Turkey to conduct the operation, forcing the organization into desperation and demonstrating that the U.S. could not sufficiently be PYD's only warrantor state (Yıldızalp, 2018).

Even though the Russian press reacted negatively to Operation Olive Branch, Vladimir Putin himself held a more favorable view, indicating at the positive atmosphere between Turkey and Russia regarding the operation. After all, the operation was conducted after the air defense system in Syria was shut down and Russian troops near Afrin were pulled back. This cooperation was not only reflected in trade deals, but also helped Putin overcome internal issues and helped to develop the Turkish – Russian relations further. When considered from the Turkish point of view, from Jarabulus to Idlib, and from there to Manbij, almost all territories west of the Euphrates were liberated completely. This strengthened Turkey's hand against other regional actors, and its border security was ensured against the threat of terrorism (Caner, 2018).

4.6 Operation Peace Spring and Turkish – Russian Relations

Turkey has conducted Operation Peace Spring in order to cleanse and secure its border from terrorist organizations, establish security for the northern Syrian population and to provide the Syrian refugees in Turkey with adequate environment to settle back in. Although complete control could not be established by Turkey on its border, Turkey has managed to attain most of its demands. In this chapter, Operation Peace Spring and the eventual agreement and joint patrols between Turkey and Russia is researched and discussed in depth.

Turkey, as it took the necessary precautions in western Syria against PYD, continually spoke against PYD's existence in eastern Syria as well. On the 7th of October, U.S. President Donald Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had a conversation over the phone. During the call, Donald Trump stated that the U.S. would neither get involved nor support the long planned Turkish operation in northern Syria. After the phone call, the operation that would be conducted to the East of the Euphrates was named Operation Peace Spring (Güler, 2019).

Operation Peace Spring, started at 9th of October, also served as an indicator of Turkey's determination towards the PYD/PKK problem, turning the scales of regional and international balance of power once more. Turkey's determined actions brought the United States to the table, as well as Russia, and memorandums of understanding were signed separately between Turkey and the two countries, which drew worldwide reactions. Afterwards, the United States pulled out of Syria while Russia stated that it needed to reassess its policies towards Syria and the Middle East (Tutar, 2019).

As Turkey was fighting against the terrorist cells to the east of the Euphrates however, countries who supported and were cooperating with YPG/PKK began pressuring the Turkish government. The situation proving that Turkey campaigned in many different military and political fronts at the same time. During Operation Peace Spring, Russia, Iran and Syria moved to control the territories that the U.S. left vacant in the wake of its pulling out. Meanwhile, the Arab world broke its long-standing silence on the matters to condemn Operation Peace Spring against the YPG/PKK (Esnek, 2019).

As the talks of a proposed Turkish operation to the east of the Euphrates came to the fore, U.S. official James Jeffrey stated that Russia would oppose such an operation (Duran, 2019). This statement brought into conversation the possible Russian reactions towards the operation. However, the phone call between Erdoğan and Putin on 9th of October, and Lavrov's subsequent statement that expressed Russia's understanding towards Turkey's border safety since the start of the Syrian crisis, indicated that the operation would not cause any issue between Turkey and Russia (Güler, 2019).

Erlich (2019), in an article penned after Operation Peace Spring, states that the Syrian Civil War had many losing parties but only one winner: Russia. After Turkey's insistence on forming a safe zone, the American troops were pulled out of Syria, and Turkey had driven PYD/PKK away from the Turkish border with military operations. Afterwards, as Russia gained influence on both Turkey and Syria, the U.S. declared that 500 U.S. troops would be left behind in order to guard the oil wells against a potential terrorist attack from ISIL. Russia and Syria condemned this action, citing international law.

Russia both gained influence on Syria while also keeping itself from becoming isolated in the region by allying with Turkey, gaining economic advantages as well. Deals between Russia and Turkey also benefit Russia commercially, as Turkey purchases most of its energy from Russia. Besides, Turkey agreed to purchase a Russian S-400 defense system, and after the F-35 deal with the United States fell through, talks began about purchasing Su-35 and Su-37 war planes from Russia began as well (Erlich, 2019).

On the eighth day of Operation Peace Spring, an U.S. committee led by Mike Pence and a Turkish committee led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan convened and reached an agreement. The agreement demanded that YPG to retreat at least 32 kilometers away from northern Syria, with a maximum of 120 hours of preparation and travel time (BBC, 18 October 2019). Afterwards, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Russia and held a meeting with Vladimir Putin in Sochi, where both parties signed the Sochi Agreement which consisted of ten clauses. Per the statement issued afterwards the agreement was signed; YPG would retreat 32 kilometers from the Tell Abiad –

Resulayn region, and Turkey and Russia would take joint patrols within a ten-kilometer area (Euronews, 25 October 2019). The territories controlled by Turkey post Operation Peace Spring are represented as follows:



Figure: 4.1 Territories Controlled by Turkey Post Operation Peace Spring

After the agreement was signed, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs and his Russian counterpart announced the agreement in their respective languages. With the agreement, Turkey and Russia had mutually verified each other's stances on Turkey's safety, Syria's territorial integrity and Syria's political unity (Euronews, 25 October 2019). First the October 17 agreement between Turkey and the United States, then the Sochi Agreement with Russia on October 25 both drew worldwide reactions as both states agreed to Turkey's demands. Turkey's approach led to the U.S. decision to pull out of Syria while prompting Russia to reconsider its political approach in Syria (Tutar, 2019).

Operation Olive Branch, Operation Peace Spring and the agreement signed with Russia indicates that Russia correctly assessed Turkey's apprehensiveness towards terrorist organizations near its border. Russia focused on economic and military cooperation with Turkey, unlike the United States who focused on YPG/PKK, and at least shaped its Syrian policies alongside Turkey. Russia had first pulled his troops back to allow Turkey into Afrin during Operation Olive Branch and continued such cooperation during the following operations. Russia's collaboration with Turkey on the subject of pushing the YPG/PKK units 32 kilometers back reinforced the Russian – Turkish relations (Esnek, 2019).

4.7 Turkish – Russian Rapprochement and the S-400 Issue

The S-400 issue could be seen as a military alliance following political and economic rapprochement between Turkey and Russia, against all objections of the United States and NATO. This chapter analyzes the S-400 issue and its effects on Turkish – Russian relations.

Even though Turkey and Russia had periods of cordial relations, notably in the 1920's and again in the 1990's, their relations have never been more positive than today. Turkish – Russian commercial relations are dated as far back as the Cold War; however, political and military cooperation have become the focal point of the relations. The 2015 shootdown crisis marks a turning point, as the following 8 months saw quite a bit of tension between the states. However, as efforts of rapprochement began to bear fruit, Turkish – Russian military and political relations can be said to have overtaken the commercial relationships in a way (Sapa, 2017).

Fundamentally, Turkish - Russian military and political relations were almost always on a negative note during the Cold War as Turkey was a NATO member sharing a land border with Russia. After the Cold War ended however, NATO's existence was called into question, and subsequently Turkey's place in the organization was questioned as well, until the September 11 attacks. The following period after the attacks saw a rise in military-centered security approach, and the global fight against terrorism became a subject in NATO. Today, Turkey's possesses an increasingly important geopolitical position near the most problematic regions of the Earth, a region which also harbors political and economic interests of many nations. Turkey is also proximate to the Caucasus and Russia's policies of rebalancing the region (Yiğittepe, 2018: 279-280).

On the other hand, the Arab Spring protests, which spread quickly through the Arab world in 2011, drove Turkey to employ new policies and seek new allies in the international stage like never before. The reasons behind this change are the U.S. and the West questioning Turkey's role in post-Cold War NATO, Turkey being left by itself against the terrorist organizations that have emerged post-Arab Spring, and sometimes the West's open support of these groups which are direct threats against

Turkey. Also, promises left unfulfilled by the United States, and the fact that it was sought to linger in problematic regions such as Syria, Libya, Iraq and Yemen caused Turkey to seek alternative alliances (Domazeti, 2017).

Especially during the recent years, NATO's approach to the global struggle against terrorism has been deemed inconsistent. Turkey is at the forefront of the countries who criticize NATO about the subject. Also, Turkey and Russia's crossing paths in Syria, the shootdown crisis and the following reconciliation period helped shape the opinion that Russia's allegiance could be a worthy alternative for Turkey. The crisis between NATO, United States and Turkey in the recent years stems from the fact that Turkey has established connections with Russia and Iran in order to find a solution to the Syrian crisis. And this crisis between Turkey and the West flared up again when Turkey sought to purchase a S-400 surface-to-air defense system (Yiğittepe, 2017: 284).

Turkey's S-400 deal caused Ankara to waver between the United States and Russia as the U.S. threatened to leave Turkey out of its F-35 program. When Turkey decided to follow through with the S-400 deal, the F-35 program was slowed down and the training of Turkish pilots in Arizona was halted (Euronews, 11 June 2019).

While the purchase of the S-400 system was regarded as a matter of security in Turkey, the United States had threatened Turkey with being left out of the F-35 program. Today, it can be said that Turkey follows a multifaceted approach towards international politics, rather than a simple search for alliances. In other words, Turkey has refreshed its outlook on diplomacy after the Syrian crisis to adopt a more versatile approach, which helped Turkey and Russia become close enough for Turkey to purchase a defense system such as S-400 from Russia (Chirciu, 2019).

Turkey was regarded as an ally of the United States and had generally negative relations with Russia during the Cold War, however, nowadays this situation seems to have reversed. Without a doubt, the United States is still the most powerful military force in the world, but Russia has made significant developments in military technology as well. Therefore, Turkey has to analyze its position carefully between these two superpowers (Sapa, 2017). Turkey seeks to purchase the S-400 system even

though it has dire economic costs and the United States threatens sanctions. Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has also stated that: *“There is no sense in purchasing goods just to keep them (forever) in their box,”* illustrating Turkey’s determination (BBC, 27 November 2019).

Actually, air defense systems such as the S-400 also carry geopolitical, economic and even cultural significance along with other military technologies. Turkey’s main concern about the issue is therefore not about its alliances with the United States and NATO, but rather in determining if there is a possible discrepancy in Turkey’s mission.

It is also not of particular importance whom exactly from Turkey purchases the air defense system; as long as the system belongs solely to Turkey and Turkey can oversee the required technical maintenance by itself. Here, the importance of the ownership arises, will the purchase of the system result in a transfer of technology, assisting Turkey to develop its own system? Also, the balance of power in Syria can easily change in a period of time as long as it has been since the S-400 deal was made.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Since the outbreak of the Arab Spring and its spread to Syria, the Syrian crisis has gone through many phases. From a simple struggle between the government and the protestors in the beginning, to more and more actors becoming involved as the crisis worsened. It can be said that the Syrian crisis is one of the most important struggles of the post-World War II world with its numerous actors and global effects. The Astana and Sochi processes which the U.S., Turkey, Russia and Iran had participated, have yet to bring about a conclusive end to the Syrian crisis (Yacoubian, 2019). The ethnic and religious structure of the Syrian geography as well as the plentiful amount of actors involved within the Syrian crisis are cited as reasons which have caused the crisis to go on for nine years and counting. The Syrian government consists of Shiite Muslims while Sunni Muslims make up the majority of the Syrian populace, which is one of the core problems of the crisis. While Russia, Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah support the Syrian government, USA, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other western nations support moderate Islamic groups (Marks, 2018).

Turkey and Russia, whom had already economic ties mainly in the format of energy deals, crossed paths in Syria; which is the main subject of this work. As Russia already had a naval base in Tartus, its good relations with the Syrian government in addition to its alliance to Iran allowed Russia to present the fight against ISIL as the main reason to get involved in the Syrian Civil War over Idlib and Latakia (Yüksel, 2019). Turkey, on the other hand, had four main reasons to become involved with the Syrian Civil War. These reasons are, in order; the neutralization of terrorist organizations such as PYD/PKK and ISIL, re-establishing the border security, the establishment of peace so the displaced Syrian refugees might return to their homes, and rendering the safe areas established in Syria habitable (Duran, 2019).

Commercial relations between Turkey and Russia were already established during the Cold War. An important portion of still operational industrial facilities in Turkey were built with Turkish – Russian cooperation, and thousands of technical personnel were trained. The commercial relations were preserved and improved after the Cold War as well. Especially after the 1990's, Turkey's desires to innovate in the energy field and to reduce external dependence paved the way to energy deals with Russia (Koçak, 2017: 10). The commercial and economic relations suffered a setback after the shutdown crisis, however, the shutdown crisis marked a turning point in Turkish – Russian relations as well, eventually proving that the two countries could not only cooperate economically, but military and strategic cooperation was also possible.

Today, it can be observed that all sides of the Syrian Civil War are set on preserving and protection their current positions against each other. This situation indicates that a short-term solution is impossible for Syria. It can be said that the Syrian Civil War has become a war of attrition. Also, it is thought provoking that the local and regional actors have not particularly incentivized peace talks after Sochi and Astana. When the current situation analyzed, it become apparent that all sides perceive themselves in a strong position, and all believe that a critical event may turn the tide in their favor. However, all sides are continuously eroding (Yalçın, 2016). However might this period might seem similar to all sides, the process that Turkey and Russia have started in Astana is currently still ongoing, and both countries continue to hold meetings about what's happening in the field in order to strengthen their positions in Syria.

It can be observed that Turkey and Russia both seek to establish mutually beneficial areas of cooperation alongside protecting their positions in Syria. Although, a long-standing, positive relation between the countries would depend on a coordinated approach with all risks carefully considered. Russia and Turkey are two important regional powers, without any doubt. But the increasing commercial and military relations between the two countries, like energy deals and the purchase of the S-400 system, risks corroding Turkey's relations with the United States and the West. However, there are many potential areas of cooperation between Turkey and Russia, such as defense, all of which have a tremendous amount of potential.

The Turkish – Russian relations have been generally positive since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War; but the possibility of a negative incident such as the shootdown crisis is always present, as it is clear that Russia seeks to cooperate with the Assad regime, while Turkey prefers a Syria without the Assad regime. Other disagreements have also become apparent, such as some regarding the Idlib Region which was declared a weapons-free zone in the Sochi Agreement.

Russia seeks to sweep the Idlib region clean into a no-man's land, as it has done in other regions in the past. However, such an action would cause the local population to migrate towards the Turkish border, and to make the matters worse, there is the possibility of terrorist members hence slipping through the border unnoticed. It is therefore observed that there is a disagreement between Turkey and Russia, and also implementation of some policies in the Idlib region contradict with the Sochi Agreement (Özkır, 2020). These matters understandably raise the concern of another setback of the Turkish – Russian relations. The reconciliation during the recent years might be hindered by a new wave of refugees, other disagreements regarding Idlib, or a failure to obtain the desired results in the meetings held after 33 Turkish soldiers were martyred in Idlib (Anadolu Ajansı, 29 February 2020). The possibility of *“The Turkish Republic simply cutting its own umbilical cord”* as President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan once stated always exists if new problems arise in the Turkish – Russian relations.

The scope of this work is to analyze the Turkish – Russian relations in regard to the Syrian crisis. For this goal, historic Turkish – Russian relations were examined, local and global actors of the Syrian crisis were researched and the Turkish – Syrian relations were presented within the framework of the existing actors and developments. The fast rapprochement between the Turkey and Russia regarding Syria after the shootdown crisis is the main focus of this work, and the following points were reached in light of all discovered information:

- The fast rapprochement between Turkey and Russia was part due to the moderate diplomatic policies being adopted by both countries. Turkey's 'zero problems with our

neighbors' policy and Putin's moderate politics after coming into power, combined with the developments in the Russian economy have all contributed in this matter.

- Especially after the 2000's, both countries felt shunned from Europe. This brought about concerns of safety, which drove the two countries closer. Both Russia and Turkey are located in a geography which is essentially unstable, which exacerbates their security concerns.

- Turkey's geopolitical position is considered even more unstable than Russia's. In addition, Turkey suffers terrorist threats from the inside and the outside. Turkey is fighting against organizations whom have important supporters such as PKK, PYD/YPG, ISIL and others in the Middle East. The U.S.'s open military support and supplying of PYD/YPG, seemingly against the ISIL threat, drove Turkey to search for another ally.

- Russia possesses a naval base in Tartus, Eastern Mediterranean. In addition, acquiring a warm water port has been a common Russian goal since centuries. Therefore, the threat of an increasing U.S. influence in such an unstable area prompts Russia into caution. When observed from this angle too; it becomes clear that Turkey and Russia needed each other for security and strategical gain.

- Both the United States and Russia cite ISIL as their main reason of involvement within Syria. However, Turkey seeks to protect itself against both ISIL and other terrorist organizations such as PYD/YPG, and also to establish a safe zone in northern Syria. While the United States formed an alliance with PYD/YPG in order to control the oil wells east of the Euphrates, Russia formed an alliance with Turkey whom it already had a multibillion-dollars' worth trade volume with, and supported Turkey during Operations Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch and Peace Spring.

- Both the United States and Russia seek to have greater influence over the Middle East, therefore fighting what has become a proxy war in Syria as a show of power. Russia cooperates with Turkey in Syria in order to develop its economic and commercial ties, and also paves the way to military cooperation such as the sale of the S-400 system.

When the deals and recent relations between Turkey and Russia are examined, it becomes clear that the relations are concerned more with economic ties than safety. As Turkey is an important market for Russia, Russia seeks to preserve its good relations with Turkey in order to protect its interests. And when the Turkish – Russian relations in Syria are examined, it becomes clear that both states require each other's assistance in order to achieve their goals in the Middle East. They have one main disagreement regarding Syria; Turkey has disregarded Bashar al-Assad from the beginning, whereas Assad is the centerpiece of Russia's policy regarding Syria's future.

As of today, the Syrian crisis is still ongoing. As Turkey shares a land border with Syria hundreds of kilometers long, not to mention the terrorist organizations within Syrian borders who threaten Turkey's safety, Turkey is necessarily involved within the conflict. On the other hand, there is a long-standing Russian goal of securing access to the warm waters. Since the main reason of Russian presence in the Mediterranean is the Syrian crisis, Russia will certainly seek to obtain more influence within the region. Cooperation between the two countries has the potential of causing significant effects, and the future developments have critical importance for both the region, and the countries themselves.

After the end of the Cold War, the two-sided world order was no more as Communism was defeated against Economic Liberalism. As the United States moved to establish its hegemony as the world's sole superpower, its inconsistent politics gave rise to concerns. Also, the future of the EU and the political weight of the West in global geopolitics are still points of debate. As chaos rages on in the Middle East and several other regions in the world, countries affected by this chaotic environment such as Turkey move to improve their economies and establish their internal security, undergoing important transformations in both their external and internal politics. On the other hand, global actors re-define other actors during this process where global politics are reconstituted, therefore reshaping their external politics. Today, Turkey and Russia, just as other regional and global actors do, are situated in Libya which is sharing a similar fate to Syria. Turkey, thanks to its ethical and realistic approach, has emphasized that the international system must be more participative and fair. The

accord of cooperation between the Turkish and Libyan governments and its effects were not limited to the two countries alone but felt on the global theater as well. As the ongoing struggles within Syria and Libya rage on, it seems almost impossible to arrive at a certain conclusion in regard to how the international relations will develop.



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