

ATILIM UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS MASTER'S PROGRAM

**INSURGENCY OR TERRORISM: DILEMMAS FROM THE
SYRIAN CIVIL WAR 2011-2015**

Master's Thesis

Necdet Özçelik

Ankara-2017

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Supervisor

Prof.Dr. Hasan Ali Karasar

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ACCEPTION AND APPROVAL

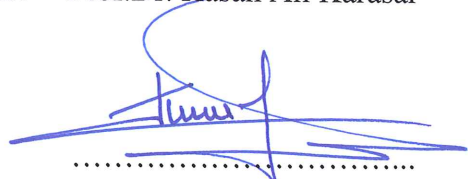
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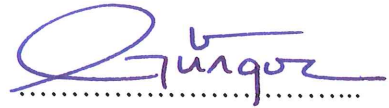
Director: Prof.Dr. Dilaver Tengilimoğlu



Supervisor: Prof.Dr. Hasan Ali Karasar



Examining Committee Member: Prof.Dr. Hasan Ünal



Examining Committee Member: Assoc.Prof.Dr. Uğur Güngör

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- I prepared this thesis in accordance with Atılım University Graduate School of Social Sciences Thesis Writing Directive,
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ÖZ

ÖZÇELİK, Necdet. Ayaklanma mı, Terörizm mi? Suriye İç Savaşından İkilemler 2011-2015, Ankara, 2017.

Bu çalışmada, etki sahibi dört devletin 2011 ile 2015 yılları arasında Suriye İç Savaşında yeralan devlet dışı aktörleri ayaklanmacı veya terörist olarak tanımlanmalarındaki ikilemlerinin araştırılmasını hedeflenmiştir. Çalışma öncelikle, Suriye İç Savaşının tarihsel arka planını aktararak savaşı taraflar arasındaki çatışmanın nedenlerini sunmaktadır. Çalışma, savaşı dört önemli devlet dışı grup ile çatışma üzerinde etki sahibi dört devleti aktör olarak ele almıştır. Çalışmada ilk olarak, ayaklanma ve terörizm yedi parametere üzerinde kavramsal bir çerçeveye yerleştirilmiş, daha sonra devlet dışı aktörler bu parametrelere göre kimliklendirilmiştir. Parametrelerle kimliklendirilen devlet dışı aktörler, belirlenen dört devletin tanımlama yaklaşımları üzerinden karşılaştırılmış ve devletlerin dört devlet dışı aktörü ayaklanmacı veya terörist olarak tanımlamalarındaki ikilemleri ortaya konulmuştur. Çalışma, devletlerüstü seviyede kapsayıcı parametrelerle geliştirilmiş ortak bir terörizm ve ayaklanma tanımının gerekliliğini önermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: devlet dışı aktörler, ayaklanma, terörizm, meşruiyet, tanımlama

ABSTRACT

ÖZÇELİK, Necdet. *Insurgency or Terrorism: Dilemmas From Syrian Civil War 2011-2015*, Ankara, 2017

It is aimed to study the dilemmas of the state actors recognizing the non-state actors in Syrian Civil War between 2011 and 2015 as insurgent or terrorist. The study suggests a historical background of the Syrian Civil War to illustrate the relevant causes of the conflicts between the belligerent armed non-state actors. The study focuses on four major armed non-state actors and four influential states in the conflict. First, insurgency and terrorism is conceptualized on seven parameters, and then four non-state actors are profiled in accordance with the concepts of insurgency and terrorism in this study. The profiled non-state actors are compared within the state actors' considerations in definition, and then the study presents the dilemmas of four state actors on four different armed non-state actors in defining them as insurgent or terrorist. The study suggests the necessity of a concerted definition of terrorism and insurgency on wider parameters at supranational level.

Key words: armed non-state actors, insurgency, terrorism, legitimacy, definition

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATGM: Anti-Tank Guided Missile

CT : Counter-terrorism

DAESH: Arabic expression of “Islamic State of Iraq and Sham” (al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham)

FSA : Free Syrian Army

HDP : People’s Democratic Party

IED : Improvised Explosive Device

IRGC : Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps

IS : Islamic State

ISI : Islamic Sate of Iraq

ISIL : Islamic State of Iraq and Levand

ISIS : Islamic State of Iraq and Sham,

JTWJ : Organization of Monotheism and Jihad (Jama‘at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad)

KCK : Kurdistan Communities Union

KRG : Kurdistan Regional Government

LIC : Low intensity conflict

LLC : Local Coordination Comites

MANPADS: Man-portable Air Defense Sytems

MSM : Mujahideen Consultative Council (Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen)

MSM : Mujahideen Consultative Council (Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen)

NDF : National Defense Forces

PKK : Kurdistan Workers' Party

PYD : Democratic Union Party

SIF : Syrian Islamic Front

SVEST: Suicide Vest

UAE : United Arab Emirates

UAV : Unmanned air vehicle

VBIED: Vehicle borne improvised explosive device

YPG : People's Defense Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel)

YPJ : Women's Protection Units (Yekiniyan Parastina Jin)

I. INTRODUCTION

Scholars, intellectuals, politicians and other relevant actors have not predicted outcomes of the Syrian Civil War concretely during the violence. Actors and the geopolitical strategies diversified the situation in the Syrian Theater of Operation. However, the situation in Syria between 2011 and 2015 has brought a lot of considerations for the theorists of insurgency and terrorism. Use of excessive violence in Syria turned the country into a Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) environment where the multiple actors confront each other below the conventional warfare. Multilateralism in small conflicts caused many local and foreign actors to shape armed alliance or to stand alone against the others. As the number of actors increased, crisis turned into different forms of conflict: a civil war among Syrian Baath Regime and its people, a sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shiites, an ethnic war between Arabs, Turkmen and Kurds, a proxy war between foreign state actors and finally a war against terrorism between the terror organizations and anti-terror coalitions. No matter that who fought with whom, the sole fact is that Syria turned into a theater of LIC.

Regional and international powers either supported or opposed the local armed groups during the course of the crisis between 2011 and 2015. Disputes over the armed groups brought a discussion whether to define certain groups as terrorist organizations and some others as the insurgents or legitimate armed oppositions. However, disputes concentrated on the status of the armed groups who were legitimate or illegal. Real cause behind the uncertainty of defining a group as terrorist or legitimate armed group is due to lack of a common definition of terrorism on international ground. The United Nations does not have a certain definition of terrorism or legitimate use of force by the insurgent groups.

This research focuses on current definition of terrorism amidst the realistic aspects of sovereign countries to bring the parametric disputes and aims to suggest a paradigm shift in definition of the terrorism and legitimate armed groups. This

research is aimed to reveal the discrepancies over identifying the non-state armed groups in Syria as terror organizations or legitimate insurgents.

1.1. Status of the problem

The environment of the LIC is mostly created by the local weak non-state rivals against a state authority. Those rival groups are supported by the foreign actors in politically, ideologically, economically and militarily. Players of the rival groups include, but are not limited to political oppositions, insurgents, guerrilla fighters and terrorists. Since there is a violent conflict in groups' activities, there is a need for a concrete definition of who is performing under what category in Syrian Civil War.

In Syria, no implementations of peacetime contingency operations and peace operations were experienced. However, conflict was interpreted at different phases by the different state actors including the Syrian government. However, pluralities of the armed factions in Syrian LIC caused state actors to confuse in two different definitions; insurgency and terrorism.

Insurgency contains more legitimacy in the perception of use of violence, while the terrorism evokes the idea of illegality and violence. In Syria, some state actors were interested in the idea of supporting the certain groups as insurgents, while the other state actors recognized the same groups as terrorists.

1.2. Thesis Statement

There are important dilemmas and paradoxes in identifying the armed groups in Syria as terrorist organizations or insurgents by the state actors.

Ideologies drive the nature of conflicts. Therefore, it is hard to theorize warfare. Apart from the conventional warfare in which the nation states or alliances confront each other, problem lies in the scope of irregular warfare. Terrorism and the insurgency play frontier role in irregular warfare. There is, however, a disputed thin line in authentication of one from the other. Since the ideologies are quite dominant in irregular warfare, terrorism and insurgency are both political. Treatment of both terrorism and insurgency by the external actors are also political, and the terrorism and insurgency turn into a proxy that is used by the major ideologies or the interests.

Legitimacy of the use of violence is another factor to discriminate insurgency from terrorism. Violence is used by terrorists and insurgents to coerce the current authority to force for change, or to gain partial or full control of the government or the country. Justification of the violence is proved by the legitimacy of the cause. Although there is a correlation between the cause (ideological) and the use of violence (methodological), it is hard to suggest that all ideologies have right to pursue goals with the use of violence. Legitimate use of violence has different parameters other than the ideology; strategies and the tactics of the violence are key elements to evaluate the implementation of the violence.

Ideology and the legitimate use of violence are two pillars of identifying armed groups as terrorist or insurgency. Hence, disputes over the armed groups in Syria are beyond ideology and legitimacy.

Local people's support for a non-state actor was also taken in consideration as a parameter to categorize the group on the basis of legitimacy. State actors are quite insistent on recognizing whether an organization is terrorist or not that is based on the facts that group has solid connections with a terrorist group which was already identified. However, the major problem in this fact is how convincing the concrete proofs are. Another parameter is the method of the use of violence and this primarily focuses on the use of chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear (CBRN) activities and other means of mass destruction in armed program of the group. Mass cleansing methods against the opposite groups like forcible relocations, mass killings and

coercion were also taken as another parameter of identifying the organization. Group's threat to regional and global security is the final parameter which is suggested.

1.3. Literature Review

Literature has been reviewed through three different sources; political, academic and security. While the academic and security sources have common principles, the disputes seemed to arise within the political sources. Since the political sources pose a hub for different interpretations of terrorism and insurgency, this research will focus on the political sources more than the others.

The Geneva Convention in 1947 and its additional protocol in 1977 serve as the primary political source due to the nature of its supranational perspective. Arguing the common paradigms at the United Nations level, it is aimed to suggest the possibility of an international definition on non-state actors.¹ However, aside from the pros of the Geneva Conventions and its additional protocol, it is also aimed to present the facts that illustrate how the convention and protocols are unsuitable for the national security and why some nations are reluctant to take part in the definitions.

Secondary political sources are taken as the parliamentary legislations of the interventionist nations over the definition of non-state actors in Syria. It is emphasized that how national sovereignty, domestic security issues, and the national interests play a role to form the national legislations.

National principles of identifying the terrorism are based on the domestic issues that the national institutions perceive as threat against national security and the

¹ UN Protocol, No:17892, "Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949", <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%201125/volume-1125-i-17512-english.pdf> , 04 January 2017

unity. National parliaments are primary institutions to bring up with a broad definition of terrorism.

1.4. Purpose of the research and Its Importance

This research focuses on the current definition of terrorism and insurgency through the realistic approach of sovereign countries to bring the parametric disputes. It also aims to suggest a paradigm shift in definition of the terrorism and insurgency. This research also focuses on the discrepancies over identifying the non-state armed groups in Syria as terrorists or legitimate insurgents.

Syrian Civil War elicits the requirement of additional paradigms identifying the terrorism and insurgency. Current paradigms lack a perspective to bring state actors on a common ground on identifying the terrorism and insurgency. It is aimed to suggest new and additional identifying parameters with the help of findings of this research through literature review.

1.5. Method of the Research

The background of the Syrian Civil War was given to suggest the involvement of foreign state actors, and the belligerent domestic and foreign non-state actors in Syrian Civil War. Four major non-state actors were listed in Syrian Civil War in accordance with their ideology, objective, armed program and the responses from other actors in the concept of low intensity conflict. Four external influential actors and their relation with the local armed groups were also suggested in a matrix. Discrepancies of the identification of terrorism and insurgency are also given in another matrix to understand the group's correlation with the definition of insurgency and terrorism.

Descriptive research is applied with documentation through literature reviews and careful observations via reliable reports, news sources, and interviews. The

causes and the forms of discrepancies will be examined by analyzing the phenomena through explanatory research (Bhattacharjee, 2012). No empirical methods will be applied.

1.6. Limitations

The research is a descriptive analytical study based on the findings which were obtained from political, academic and security sources as well as the reports and media coverage. The limitations are the lack of interviews with all armed groups in Syria and the reluctance of information sharing by many-actors. The research also assumes that ideological approaches from the foreign state actor are the main determining factor to identify a group under the concept of insurgency and terrorism.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

2.1. Syria as an Independent State: 1946-1970

Syria became an independent state after the French troops withdrew and the France gave up the control of the country on 17 April 1946. Soon after the independence, Syria faced two major developments; foundation of Arab Socialist Baath Party and the formation of Israel state.

The United Nations voted to create two different states in Palestinian territory - under British mandate at the time- on 29 November 1947 leading to the establishment of Israel.² Arab countries, including Syria, opposed the plan and sent armed groups to blockade Jerusalem, but Jewish military carried out large-scale offensive against the British forces and the Arab armies in May 1948 and defeated the Arabs. The war ended in March 1949 and the defeat had many negative impacts on Syrian politics exposing a series of military coups.

Michel Aflaq and Salah-al-Din al-Bitar found the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party with an ideology of secular Arab nationalism, Arab socialism, pan-Arabism, and militarism which is called as Baathism. Syria experienced a series of major military coup d'états in 1949. First was on 30 March 1949 by Mashall Husni al-Zaim and the second was a counter-military coups 14 August 1949 by Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi for the favor of People's Party. A third coup was led by Colonel Adip al-Shishakli and resulted with the establishment of a new government and a parliamentary system

² UN Resolution 181 , "Resolution Adopted of the Report of Ad Hoc Committee on the Palistianian Question" , 29 November 1947, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7F0AF2BD897689B785256C330061D253> 11 January 2017

which is favorable for the Nationalist Party. Adip al-Shishakli, after becoming a general, organized another coup d'état on 2 December 1951 blaming the parliament of being inefficient to perform the reforms and replaced the parliamentary system with a presidential regime. He became the president with a referendum in 1951 and stayed in the power until a popular uprising in February in 1954. It was not until 1954 election that Ba'ath Party became a prominent political actor in Syria. Despite the overwhelming victory of independent parliamentary members, Ba'ath was able to become the part of coalition government with the National Party and People's Party. Baath Party is believed to owe its election success to Egyptian support and anti-imperial standoff. Coalition government lasted until 1958 and Syria made rapprochements with Egypt amidst Suez crisis. Egypt and Syria signed a joint agreement on October 1955.³ Outcome of the Suez crisis was the end of the British and French influence in the Arab countries creating a foreign power. The US quickly reacted to take advantage of situation and to block the Soviet influence in both countries by proclaiming Eisenhower Doctrine⁴ offering assistance. Following the rejection of doctrine Egypt and Syria- Syrian coalition government had disputes on the doctrine before rejection-, the US intimidated Syria with military aggression along Turkish border in the northern Syria and the US stress caused the situation to evolve into a crisis between Syria and Turkey in 1957.⁵

The Syrian crisis caused the unification process between Egypt and Syria to accelerate under the name of United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958. The UAR developed and survived until September 1961 when another military coup in Syria terminated the republic due to fundamental disputes like inequality in sharing the state power and Egyptian dominance. However, the extension of the Arab Socialist Baath Party took the power with another coup on 8 March 1963. Baath Party was able to establish itself as the only legal political party in Syria with 1963 coup and it

³ Joint Defence Agreement between Syria and Egypt, Damascus, 20 October 1955
<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20247/volume-247-I-3461-English.pdf> , 5 January 2017

⁴ Special Message to the Congress on the Situation in the Middle East,
<http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/eisen.html> , 5 January 2017

⁵ Arda Baş, "1957 Suriye Krizi ve Türkiye", **History Studies**,
<http://atif.sobiad.com/sobiadfiles/sobiadarsiv2//History/Dergi/426.pdf> , 5 January 2017

has been called as 8 March Revolution by Baathist since then. Amidst the rise of socialist Arab nationalism in Syria, Internal disputes led 1966 military coup and then the 1970 military coup when Air Force General Hafez al-Assad seized power.

Hafez Assad sustained his power by dividing and personalizing the state institutions to hold the state together so that no possible successors would control those institutions. Assad appointed a People's Council to draw a constitution. The Council composed of 173 members (87 were Baathist and 86 others). Assad was named as the first president of the Syria who was not a Sunni Muslim in March 1971. Hafez Assad focused on a serious of economy policies in his early presidency and raised the income per capita ratio %11 in 1972.⁶ Despite his economic improvement of the country, he was also attempted with military coup in 1972, but he was able to defeat coup. Public opposition against Assad was first felt when the constitution draft was protested in early 1973. Protest turned into a riot in the rural area of Syria because of its lack of Islamic codes. Assad had to revise the draft and made some amendments. Even if the constitution was accepted by %97.6 public votes in March 1973, more riots continue in the Sunni-populated areas in April. Assad tried to have good relations with the Arab countries through his normalization effort in 1970s, but he failed to have a stable relation with Jordan over Syrian military engagements attached to Palestinian cause. Assad's Baathist policy of Arab nationalism, socialism and secularism, and the state-centric economic policies raised the concerns of those who followed the Muslim Brotherhood ideology that denies all above. Rooting with Islamic sectarianism, ideological disputes in Syria continued in 1970s and early 1980s.

⁶ Malcolm H.Kerr, "Hafiz Asad and the Changing Patterns of Syrian Politics", **International Journal**, Vol. 28, No. 4, The Arab States and Israel (Autumn, 1973), pp. 689-706, http://www.ou.edu/mideast/Additional%20pages%20-%20non-catagory/Kerr_1973_HafizAsad_SyrianPolitics.pdf, 11 January 2017

2.2. 1982 Hama Insurgency

Hama has been the stronghold of Muslim Brotherhood in Syria due to its conservative and Sunni nature of the population. The major Sunni standoff against Syrian government took place when Syria invaded Lebanon in 1976. Hafez Assad, fearing the partition of Lebanon, claimed that Syria and Lebanon were one state and fought against Sunni Muslims and Christians in Lebanon. Sunni Muslims in Syria, under the organization of Muslim Brothers, fought against Syrian Baath regime in Syria and Lebanon since invasion of Lebanon in 1976. Syrian Government forces came under militant attacks when conducting an operation against a Muslim Brotherhood militant leader in February 1982. The militant reaction to government force also mobilized the people against government institutions and Baathist assets in Hama leaving more than 70 government officials dead and militants claimed Hama as a free city. Syrian Baathist Regime has sent around 12,000 soldiers, armed militia and armored units to the city and carried a military campaign. It is estimated that 20,000 civilians, Muslim Brotherhood Sympathizers, and the armed Sunni militants were killed during 27 campaigns by heavy shelling and mass executions.

Baathist experience in Hama uprising has consolidated Assad power in Syria and led the insurgency groups split and fell apart.

2.3. Syria and Terrorism

Lebanon has been area of operation for almost all left-leaning international terror organizations since Syrian occupation in 1976. Beqaa Valley in Lebanon has become a common safe haven for the terrorist organizations. Groups, which were recognized as terrorist organization by many countries, including Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) used Beqaa Valley as a stronghold for their armed and training activities during the Syrian control of Lebanon after 1976. The US

government recognized Syria as a state who sponsors the terrorism in 1979.⁷ Turkish government pressed on Syria over to cut its support for PKK and gave an ultimatum of military incursion to stop PKK activity in Syria in 1998.⁸

2.4. Death of Hafez Assad

Hafez Assad died on 10 June 2000 due to a heart attack and left a capable deep state in Syria. Assad has militarized the Baath Party ideology after he took over the party leadership in 1970 and suppressed the population through his intelligence (*Muhabarat*) and the militia (*Shabbiha*) organizations. The question was who would be the successor of Hafez Assad during his long-run dictatorship legacy. It was believed that Bassel Assad, Hafez Assad's eldest son, would be the next Syrian President despite the Sunni opposition of a dynastic way of succession. But, the succession turned into a crisis when Bassel Assad died in a car accident in 1994.⁹

Bashar al-Assad was assigned as his successor after Bassel's death by Hafez al-Assad and he began an accelerated course of familiarization with the state affairs in military, publicity, and the ruling institutions.¹⁰ He studied military college and became an army officer in armor units then became tank battalion commander and a colonel in 1999.

2.5. Transition under Bashar al-Assad

Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father after his death in 2000 and was expected to change his father's dictatorship legacy. Meeting with the expectations, his

⁷ List of States Sponsoring the Terrorism, US State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/list/c14151.htm> , 6 January 2017

⁸ Rüçhan Akıncıoğlu, Tarihe Düşen Notlar, Süleyman Demirel Yasama Yılı Açılış Konuşmaları, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, Aralık 2011, p.114
https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/yayinlar/cumhurbaskani_genel_kurul_konusmalari/CB_konusmalari_cilt_2.pdf

⁹ William E.Smidth, "Assad's Son killed in Auto Crash", **The New York Times**, 21 January 1994, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/01/22/world/assad-s-son-killed-in-an-auto-crash.html> a.d 6 January 2017

¹⁰ Flynt L. Leverette, "Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial By Fire", Brookings Institute, (2005)

reformist policy was first seen with an amnesty for 600 political prisoners -mostly Muslim Brothers- and closing down an infamous prison.¹¹ Bashar also seemed to try his own inner circle to put his influence on the government institutions. However he seemed to have a balance between old and his current policy by assigning the traditional figures in the leading positions and the reformists to his personal inner circle as the advisors. Ayman Abd al-Nur, a private sector engineer, became his personal economics advisor. He also included the advisors from academic and business circles. It was not only the economic that Bashar Assad tried to put his own influence, he also replaced the important figures in security institutions to grant his power. Asif Shawkat became his head intelligence officer and Ghazi Kana'an became the interior minister. It was the armed forces and Baath Party when Bashar Assad faced serious obstacles in changes. Mustafa Tlas, defense minister, reluctantly retired from the position in 2004; however, he was one of the most important figures who lead the smooth transition of power since 2000.

Despite Bashar's smooth transition of the power in state institutions, the social fragmentations remained the same as during his father's autocratic rule and he was not able to create a civil society. When the US occupied Iraq in 2003, Kurds in Syria resurged against Syrian government and the Iraqi Sunni resistance in Iraq had also an influence over Syrian Sunni population. Lebanese Rafiq Hariri's assassination in 2005 and Hezbollah-Israel War in 2006 strengthened the relation with Iran and Hezbollah causing the Syrian Sunni society criticism over Bashar al-Assad government. Soon after Bashar Al-Assad was elected as the president for the second term of seven years in 2007, he withdrew Syrian troops from Lebanon and came under heavy criticism. Bashar al-Assad seemed to follow a relatively stable policy amidst the allegation of human rights, social and religious discriminations until the society was influenced by the Arab Spring in 2011.

¹¹ "Syrian Prison Turn into a Hospital", **Assosicated Press**, 21 November 2000, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/2000/Syrian-Prison-To-Turn-Into-Hospital/id-1a9f10d85cec9021b051615ba19614f1> , 7 January 2017

2.6. Syrian Civil War

Arab Uprising against the authoritarian and dictatorial governments in northern African Arab countries also inspired the majority of people who suffered from poverty and unemployed in Syria in early 2011. It was neoliberal economic policies of the Syrian Regime that caused the social unrest due to privatized state-owned businesses resulting with high unemployment rates, food price inflation and income inequalities. Government pressure on the society also outmatched with establishment of political opposition, free trade activities, unions and independent civil institutions. In this respect, the main cause of the Syrian Civil War had no different social sources than Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. The social problems ranged from poverty to inequality of representation in the politics. In addition to the lack of democracy and freedom of speech, ideological sources of the conflict like ethnic and religious disputes also contributed to disputes, but these factors had a deepening effect on the rivalry and led the demonstration turn into violent conflict. As the demonstrations, the protests and the government reactions introduced more violence, the character of the conflict turned into a civil war with different ideologies, methods and actors.

Protests in Syria began in Daraa following the detention of seven school children who wrote anti-Assad slogans on the walls. Owing to strong tribal ties, people of Daraa organized quickly and took the streets reacting the the detention angrily. Protests in Daraa became more resilient after two proctors were killed by the security force and spread in to Damascus and other parts of Syria by mid-2011. Even if Assad regime tried to ease the situation by lifting the state of emergency, letting the religious and ethnic leaders to criticize the government on a TV Program, and giving the certain number of Kurds citizenship rights, it was not perceived as genuine and satisfying steps and the anti-government sentiment remained strong. The protests seemed peaceful –not comparable to Ghandi type protests- within first eight month of the demonstrations. A common idea of opposition lead to establishment of Local Coordination Comites (LCC) composed of almost all social circles in Syria including religious conservatives, leftists, liberals, and secularists. However, the LCC, without a shared ideology and leadership had nothing to do but

to sustain the protests. Soon after the break out of the protests, soldiers in Syrian Army also began defecting and they announced the formation of Free Syrian Army (FSA) in July 2011. This was the inevitable move of the Syrian opposition to turn into a violent insurgency movement.

Violence in Syria continued with the assassinations of prominent and ordinary figures from different religious and ethnic background revealing the ideological deterioration. Attacks against the Syrian security forces by FSA related groups in November and December 2011 replaced the civil protests with armed conflict and uprising become a civil war with multiple ideologies, actors and methods. In early 2012, Syrian Forces initiated a large-scale military offensive against the FSA positions in Damascus, Daraa, Homs and Idlib and re-captured the considerable territory by April 2012. Despite the UN's peace process mediations, the violence from both Syrian Army and the FSA has increased and the peace talks have failed. Syrian opposition element has started a surge western, northern and eastern Syria and took the control of important locations between Syria and Turkey, and Syria and Iraq. These developments even paved the way for the foreign fighters to take part in the armed violence from different countries. The foreign fighter figures in Syria by June 2012 are estimated by 1.400 which is 7% of the Syrian opposition forces.¹² Zelin, in his study, suggests that foreign fighters have not only affiliated with FSA but groups like Fatah al-Islam and Abdullah Azzam Brigades also fought in Syria with their own motivation. On the other, he also suggested that there were no evidence of that Jabhat al-Nusra has recruited foreign fighters in 2012. Democratic Union Party (PYD) armed elements mobilized against the Syrian government forces in late 2012 and carried a serious armed attacks in Afrin, Qamisli, Malikiyah and Ayn al-Arab.

Parallel to the diversity in armed groups, violence in Syria has also increased and the groups started to fight each other under different ideologies by the end of

¹² Aaron Zelin, "Foreign Fighters Trickle into the Syrian Rebellion", Policy Watch 1950, Washington Institute, 11 June 2012, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/foreign-fighters-trickle-into-the-syrian-rebellion> , 4 January 2017

2013. The methods of the armed campaign that the parties applied had a different dimension of the civil war. Both the Syrian regime forces and the opposition elements were accused of using chemical weapons each other.¹³ The US government, as the game planner, became reluctant to support moderate oppositions and started to pursue new local partner which had no religious ideology in Syria in 2013. Despite the Syrian opposition territorial gain in Syria, neither of them was able to defeat each other and ISIL entered the Syrian conflict area as a new actor and changed the course of Syrian Civil War in 2014. Foreign actors started to focus more on Islamic State (IS) threat than the disputes, conflicts and confrontations between the Syrian Regime and the opposition in 2014. The IS surge in Syria inspired the self-radicalization through the world and the IS call for jihad under the name of self-declared caliphate drew more foreign fighters in Syria. The IS advance in Syria escalated the violence and brought a new aspect of sectarian and ethnic conflict. Priority of the pro-opposition foreign actors including the US and Britain shifted from ousting Assad authority to defeating the IS in Syria. Iran and Hezbollah, pro-regime actors, had a chance to reinforce the Assad forces amidst the inadequate military support for opposition forces in Syria. It was the PYD which benefited the most from the IS presence in Syria; the PYD gained substantial territory by the help of US military support and an international sympathy by fighting against the IS. It was the US that performed the main game planning role in Syria until Russian military intervention in September 2015; then Russia complicated the US political and military role. Syrian Regime Forces have started a major military offensive against the opposition strongholds since October 2015 and the conflict continued until the end of year with an escalation on the favor of Syrian government.

¹³ UN Final Report A/68/663 S/2013/735 “United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic”, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/663 , 04 January 2017

III. LOCAL AND FOREIGN ACTORS OF SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

Actors in Syrian Civil War could be categorized in two groups; non-state and the state actors. Both non-state and the state actors have played substantial role to create a complicated security environment in Syria since 2011. However, it was the non-state actors who shaped the chaotic security situation in Syria. State actors were the only the supporting factors of the complexity of war. Complexity caused by the diverse ideologies which was followed by the groups in Syria. Groups in Syria preserved a strong loyalty to their religious, ethnic and tribal identities in the lack of nationhood allegiance. While the separatism idea is driven by the ideological sentiments, the authoritarianism of the Syrian government had another aspect to react the different social groups against the state authority and the other groups. The role of the non-state actors in Syria is the main focus of this study.

3.1. Armed Non-State Actors in Syria

This study focuses on the IS, PYD, Jabhat al-Nusrah and Ahrar al-Sham as four different armed non-state actors that employed the violence in Syrian Civil War between 2011 and 2015. When choosing the non-state actors, it was considered that each of the four actors should act in an opposition role against the Syrian Regime authority, to have prominent role in Syrian Civil War, have different ideologies and objectives, and none of these four actors should act on behalf of Syrian Regime. A similar study is also recommended for the pro- Syrian Regime non-state armed actors for those who are interested in studying a similar case.

While studying the each group, certain analytic parameters were used for a better understanding and comparing the actors. The parameters included background,

ideology and objective, armed program (*modus operandi*) of each actors and the response of the state actors and the population to each actor.

There have been different umbrellas for the different armed groups following the eruption of the civil war in Syria; However, the FSA was not able to provide a homogenous structure within its organization and various independent armed groups have emerged on the opposition side. While the independent armed groups of opposition got radicalized due to lack of a single control mechanism for all, foreign fighters have also started to join the ranks of different armed groups which are ideologically attractive for them. On the other hand, Iranian and Shiite foreign fighters' involvement in Syrian Civil War has also created multiple sectarian dynamics within the opposition and more radical fractions have reacted among the armed opposition groups.¹⁴ Ideological and military dominance of the foreign fighters among the armed opposition groups became the most important barrier against the unitary armed campaign of Syrian Opposition. Diversity in armed groups has led the armed fractions to shape different alliances. During the formation of the different alliances of Syrian Opposition, the most drastic development is that the Jihadist groups dominated the opposition armed campaign considerably; this was the key determinant for the state actors to review their stance with the opposition groups.¹⁵

Emergency and rise of the IS in Syria has also become a critical factor in transformation of the Syrian opposition armed groups. As the IS gained a considerable territory including Raqqa and Deir ez-Zur in Syria, Islamic Front¹⁶ and

¹⁴ Phillip Smyth, "The Shiite Jihad in Syria and Its Regional Effect", **Policy Focus**, Issue 138, Washington Institute, February 2015, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-shiite-jihad-in-syria-and-its-regional-effects> 11 January 2017

¹⁵ Elizabeth O'Begy, "Jihad in Syria", Middle East Security Report 6, Institute for the Study of War, September 2012, <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Jihad-In-Syria-17SEPT.pdf> 11 January 2017

¹⁶ Aaron Y. Zelin, "Rebels Consolidating Strength in Syria: The Islamic Front" Policywatch 2177, Washington Institute, December 3, 2013 <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/rebels-consolidating-strength-in-syria-the-islamic-front> 11.11.2016

the Jabhat al-Nusra Front become the most effective armed groups with their single control organization and the homogeneity of their structures.

3.1.1. Ahrar al-Sham

3.1.1.1. Background

Ahrar al-Sham was founded as an insurgency groups in Aleppo City in the late 2011 by Hassan Abboud and co-actors following a series of organizing efforts after his release from a Syrian Regime prison with the general amnesty signed in May 2011. As a small rebel group in Idlib, Ahrar al-Sham expanded its military activities in Aleppo province owing to its Sunni support. Ahrar al-Sham has become a prominent opposition actor of Syrian Civil War and was able to unite other opposition elements under the Syrian Islamic Front (SIF) in 2012 and organized up to 70.000 insurgents.

Ahrar al-Sham faced serious disputes over with IS leaders' criticism over the other Islamist groups discriminating them infidels. Together with other groups including Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham attacked the IS positions in Raqqa City and seized the city from IS in early January 2014. However, IS recaptured the city in one week after the lost during its surge 15 January 2014.¹⁷ Prominent leaders of Ahrar al-Sham including the founder of the organization, Hasan Abboud and Abu Kalid a-Suri, were killed by IS suicide car bomb attack in Idlib.¹⁸ Following the recovery of Ahrar Al-Sham after its major loss, the organization was able to continue its attacks against both IS and Syrian regime. In June 2015, Ahrar al-Sham

¹⁷ "Rakka IŞİD'in kontrolüne geçti", **Al Jazeera Turk**, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/rakka-isisin-kontrolune-gecti> , 28 December 2016

¹⁸ "Suriye'de Ahrar-u Şam'ın lideri öldü", **Al Jazeera Turk**, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/suriyede-ahrar-u-samin-lideri-oldu> , 28 December 2016

established the *Jays al-Fatah* (Army of Conquest) and forced Syrian Regime Forces out of Idlib.

Despite its rejection and reluctance of involvement of the non-combat opposition actors outside Syria in negotiating with Syrian Government, Ahrar al-Sham played a political representative role during the peace talks until the end of 2015.¹⁹

In addition to its combat operations, Ahrar al-Sham played a crucial role in negotiating ceasefires with the Assad Regime in 2015 despite its original resistance to peace talks. Ahrar al-Sham initially opposed negotiations with the Assad Regime in August and September 2015. Ahrar al-Sham withdrew from the peace negotiations in Riyadh in December 2015 because of the oppositions offers were neglected and the disagreements between the opposition groups.²⁰

3.1.1.2. *Ideology and Objective*

Ahrar al-Sham has also an objective of establishing an Islamic State after overthrowing Assad Regime. Even though Ahrar al-Sham is facilitated with Jihadist and Salafi Ideology, its jihadism is limited with Syrian territory and based on Syrian people. Ahrar al-Sham has also acted together with Jabhat al-Nusrah militarily against Assad Regime forces, but their objectives and the ideologies differ from each other in regard with the populist involvement. Ahrar al-Sham acts more democratically than Jabhat al-Nusrah, while both refuse the secularism. Ahrar al-Sham also underlines the importance of the minorities taking part in the ruling authority under the condition of Sunni Muslim dominance. Ahrar al-Sham condemns the act of Al-Nusrah against the minorities.²¹ Despite its tactical partnership with

¹⁹ Mariam Karouny, "Resilient insurgent group Ahrar al-Sham to play big role in Syria", **Reuters**, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-syria-crisis-ahrar-insight-idUSKCN0RM0EZ20150922> , 23 April 2016.

²⁰ "Ahrar'uş Şam Suriyeli muhaliflerin görüşmelerinden çekildi", **BBC Türkçe**, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/12/151210_ahrar_sam_suriye , 28 December 2016

²¹ "Syria: Nusra's massacre of Druze villagers condemned", **International Journal of Social Renewal**, <http://links.org.au/node/4478> , 27 December 2016

Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham was able to maintain itself as a moderate opposition group with the help of the US and Turkey.

3.1.1.3. Armed Program (Modus Operandi)

Ahrar al-Sham has targeted the Syrian regime forces, Hezbollah and PYD elements between 2012 and 2014. Its primary method of armed activities was using the roadside Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and armed attacks against the Syrian military bases. Ahrar al-Sham is also believed to attack the Regime supporters of Alawite civilians Ahrar al-Sham cooperated with Jabhat Al-Nusra during its military activities against the Regime forces. Ahrar al-Sham operates both in military formations and small unit tactics of guerrilla warfare. Below is list of important military activities of Ahrar al-Sham;

- 1 November 2012: Coordinated with Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham attacked the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas and killed 7 Syrian soldiers.
- December 2012: Ahrar al-Sham rescued NBC correspondent Richard Engel from the North Idlib Falcons Brigade, a Sunni militant group associated with the Free Syrian Army that had taken Engel as a hostage.
- March 8, 2013: Ahrar al-Sham and al-Nusra seized Raqqa from government forces, making it the first provincial capital to come completely under the control of opposition forces.
- August 4, 2013: Ahrar al-Sham, the IS, Al-Nusra, Jaysh Muhajireen wal-Ansar, and Suqqor al-Izz attacked Alawite villages as part of a Latakia offensive. They killed 190 civilians, while Ahrar al-Sham only lost 3 fighters. IS and Jaysh Muhajireen wal-Ansar took 200 hostages and killed 193 of them.
- January 6, 2014: Ahrar al-Sham coordinated with al-Nusra, Islamic Front units, and battalions from the Supreme Military Council to drive IS out of Raqqa. IS retook Raqqa in July 2014 (100 killed).

- June 9, 2015: Ahrar al-Sham coordinated with the Jaysh al-Fatah umbrella organization to drive the Syrian army out of Idlib governorate (45 killed).
- August 7, 2015: Ahrar al-Sham and al-Nusra clashed with Assad Regime forces in al-Qarqor near the Idlib governorate. The militants killed Ali Kan'an, a prominent Syrian army field commander.

3.1.1.4. *Response*

Ahrar al-Sham has been an actor of providing social services and distributing the humanitarian aids to people which is welcomed by the local population.²²

Despite the UN Security Council has tried to make a common list of terror organization in Syria, it was not able to assemble such a list. Since December 2015, the UN Security Council has been trying to assemble a list of terrorist groups in Syria. Russia, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, and the UAE support classifying Ahrar al-Sham has been stressed to be as a terrorist group, but they have not been able to achieve a unanimous consensus.²³²⁴

Ahrar al-Sham is not designated a terrorist organization by the United Nations, the US and the European Union.

3.1.2. **Jabhat al-Nusrah (Nusrah Front)**

3.1.2.1. *Background*

²² "Ahrar'uş Şam lideri Ebu Cabir'den Timetürk'e özel açıklamalar", **Timeturk**, <http://www.timeturk.com/tr/2015/03/20/ahrar-us-sam-lideri-ebu-cabir-den-timeturk-e-ozel-aciklamalar.html> , 28 December 2016

²³ "Ahrar al Sham" Stanford University, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/523#note86> a.d. 28 December 2016

²⁴ UN Security Council Meeting Report SC/12171, 18 December 2015, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12171.doc.htm> , 28 December 2016

History of the Jabhat al-Nusra goes back to 2011, soon after the IS infiltration into Syria has first started in August 2011. It was created as the Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham min Mujahidi al-Sham fi Sahat al-Jihad, or The Support Front to the People of the Levant by the Mujahideen of the Levant on the Fields of Jihad. Al-Nusra initially established itself on the support of revolutionary opposition in Syria, not emerged as a popular movement.

However, the armed capability against the Syrian Regime Forces made al-Nusra as the leading armed group in opposition forces by 2012. Following the initial support by and close affiliation with IS during 2011 and 2012, Jabhat al-Nusra cut its ties with IS and become an independently operating dominant group in and around Aleppo City, then turned into a nationalist popular armed group. Amidst the IS surge in Syria in 2014, al-Nusra became the target of international aerial campaign due to its ties with IS and ideological orientation with al-Qaida.

Powerful emergence of al-Nusra in Syria is associated with its network in IS cell houses in Damascus, Homs, Idlib and Aleppo.²⁵ Its area of operation also expanded into Raqqa, Deir er-Zur and Daraa in 2013. Based on the military capacity and ideological strength, al-Nusra facilitated an idea that revolution could only survive on al-Nusra's survivability. Al-Nusra also cooperated with the dominant opposition group of Ahrar al-Sham.

Jabhat al-Nusra and IS have disputed whether al-Nusra was the branch of IS in Syria or not. Amidst the disputes between al-Nusra and IS over merging under the name of IS, al-Nusra together with Ahrar al-Sham fought with IS in Raqqa in early 2014.

The US started to target the al-Nusra front in September 2014 due to its alleged ties with IS's Khorasan Group in Idlib province of Syria. Despite the US efforts to split the al-Nusra from moderate FSA elements, al-Nusra was able to

²⁵ Charles Lister, Profiling Jabhat Al-Nusra, The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, Analysis Paper, No.24, July 2016

strengthen the ties with Ahrar al-Sham, Ferliq al-Sham, Jaysh al-Sunnah, Jund al-Aqsa and other small groups, and then to push the Syrian Regime Forces out of Idlib City in March 2015. This success also made the ties between al-Nusra and the other insurgent groups become more powerful. In response to the US efforts to keep al-Nusra within the radical identity, al-Nusra began targeting the US-affiliated individuals in northern Aleppo. The US completely stopped training and equipping the Syrian opposition groups in October 2015 blaming the al-Nusra activities.

In December 2015, the moderate FSA groups began negotiating with Assad Regime but al-Nusra was excluded due to US pressure. However, al-Nusra kept dominating the Idlib province in ideologically and militarily.

3.1.2.2. Ideology and Objective

Jabhat al-Nusra (currently Jabhat Fatah al-Sham) has an objective of establishing an Islamic state with the religious law in Syria after overthrowing the Syrian Assad regime. The Jihadi ideology of the al-Nusra is the strongest parameters to influence the widespread social group in Syrian Opposition, and its sunni-orientation is attracting the public support against the Shiite expansionism in Syria. However, the US and other state actors believe that the al-Nusra is affiliated with al-Qaida and it has no ideological split from Al Qaida's Jihadi ideology and IS's salafi orientation. Al-Nusra's argument of split from IS and al-Qaida is taken as a strategic move to strengthen al-Nusra appeal in Syrian Sunni Society.

3.1.2.3. Armed Program (Modus Operandi)

Al-Nusra has concentrated on attacking the mainly against the Regime Forces and its affiliates. The target selection of Al Nusra helped to keep close relations with other Syrian opposition elements like Ahrar al-Sham and the Syrian Sunni

Society. It started to its armed campaign in Syria carrying suicide and vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attacks against the regime forces. Major military targets became the airports and check points of the regime forces. Al-Nusra acted in conventional formations when carrying the offensive attacks against regime forces. The group also targeted some of the representatives of other opposition armed groups when the group was suspected of helping the US efforts to restrain al-Nusra in the definition of radical terror organization. The attacks against other armed groups, regime militias and the non-Sunni civilians have been carried in unconventional tactics of kidnapping and assassinations. Below is the list of Jabhat al-Nusra's important armed activities;

- 23 December 2011 double suicide bombing against military facilities in Damascus; 40 deaths.
- November 2013: Killing 22 civilians in the Syrian Alawite village of Masyad al-Hesari.
- 22 February 2014: Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device Attack (VBIED) on an army checkpoint in the Lebanese town of Hermel.
- 31 July 2014: Kidnapping of two Italian aid workers, holding them hostage until January 2015 when, according to media reporting, a ransom was paid.
- 28 August 2014: Kidnapping of 40 Fijian personnel from the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. The hostages were released on 11 September 2014.
- 1 December 2014: Jabhat al-Nusra posted pictures of an attack on two Shia towns in Aleppo Province.
- 21 January 2015: Attacking the Shia town of al Fu'ah in Idlib Province with missiles.
- 24 November 2015: Execution of 42 Syrian soldiers who had been taken prisoner who were taken hostage during attack against Abu al-Duhur Military Airbase in Idlib Province in September 2015.

- 8 December 2015: Jabhat al-Nusra claimed responsibility for a suicide operation and other attacks in the villages of Khalasa and al-Humayra, Aleppo Province, Syria.

3.1.2.4. *Response*

Charles Lister describes the methodology that how Al-Nusrah turned into a popular movement as *a strategy of gradualism*²⁶. In his remarks, Lister emphasizes on two systematic methods of Al Nusrah strategy; acceptance of Al Nusrah by the population first, and then gaining the popular support for Al-Nusrah movement similarly to al-Qaida. The local Sunni people of Syria considered Al Nusrah as the protector against the Regime and Shiite dominance in Syria and Al Nusrah was perceived as the armed attachment of the popular movement.

Driven by the UN Security Council Resolution 1989 (2011)²⁷ on 17 June 2011, all state members of UN were urged to update the terror lists which was created in resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1333 (2000).

However, -despite the UN Security Council Resolution in 1989 (2011)-, the four major state actors have determined Al-Nusrah as a terrorist organization in different times. This phenomenon suggests either Al Nusrah has not been recognized as al- Qaida affiliates, or the UN resolution had not a wide spectrum to lay out how to manifest the ties between Al-Nusrah and Al-Qaida.

Jabhat al-Nusrah has been listed as a terrorist organization by Canada, France, Iran, New Zealand, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the UAE, the United Kingdom and the US.

²⁶ Ibid p.5

²⁷ UN Resolution 1989 (2011), 17 June 2011, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1989%20%282011%29 11 January 2017

3.1.3. Democratic Union Party (PYD)

3.1.3.1. Background

Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan-PKK), which is a recognized terrorist organization, has increased its influence over Syrian Kurdish population since Adana Protocol was signed between Turkey and Syria on 20 October 1998 that led the pledge of Syria not to support the PKK activities. The PKK established Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria as reaction to Syrian-Turkish relations to maintain its geopolitical presence in Syria.²⁸ The PYD was chaired by Fuat Omer between 2003 and 2010. The PYD has not been welcomed by the Syrian Regime due to its close ties with PKK and hundreds of PYD activists were forced to flee to PKK base camps in northern Iraq. PYD has divided in two different groups in 2004 due to disputes within PKK, and Demokrat a Kurdiya Suri (Rekeftin) has splitted from the PYD. However, the founder of Rekeftin has been assassinated and killed by the PKK in northern Iraq in February 2005 and Rekeftin was not able to survive. Salih Muslim Muhammed has been the chairman of the PYD since 2010.

Revolutionary movement against Syrian Regime has also been supported by the Kurds in Syria; Islamist Kurdish groups and Kurdish Future Movement –led by Mashaal Temmo- had played an important role of revolting against the Syrian Regime. However, Mashaal Temmo was assassinated and killed in Qamisli on 7 October 2011. It was Syrian Regime, Iran's Quds Brigades and PYD/PKK which were suspected of his killing.²⁹ The PYD was accused of playing a role his killing and cooperating with the Syrian regime. Following the death of Temmo, Kurdish protestors against Syrian regime have lost their efficiency and the PYD dominated the Kurdish political circles in Syria. The PYD joined the Kurdish Patriotic

²⁸ “The Kurdish Democratic Union Party”, Carnegie Middle East Center, 1 March 20112, <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/48526?lang=en> , 26 December 2016

²⁹ “Assad ordered killing of Kurdish activist Mashaal Tammo: Leaked files”, *Al Arabiya*, 10 October 2012, <https://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/10/10/242928.html> , 27 Decemeber 2016

Movement in May 2011 following the eruption of Syrian Civil War in Syria; nevertheless it declined to join the Kurdish National Council (KNC) which was composed of the other Kurdish opposition parties in October 2011. Instead of being an active member of National Coordination Body for Democratic Change in Syria, the PYD acted together with People's Council of Western Kurdistan which is also affiliated with PKK.

As a part of Kurdistan Communities Union's (KCK) Democratic Confederalism road map, suggested by PKK's jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan, the PYD declared a Democratic Autonomous Administration and organized local administrations as cantons in Cizire (*Hasakah*), Ayn al-Arab (*Kobane*) and Afrin regions in northern Syria in January 2014.

As armed wing of PYD, it was the People's Defense Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* –YPG) and its Women's Protection Units (*Yekiniyan Parastina Jin*-YPJ) have been organized and acted against the other opposition armed groups. The YPG has been organized under a military council of 55 members which was chaired by Feyman Huseyin who was also one of the PKK's armed wing leaders.

3.1.3.2. *Ideology and Objective*

The PYD states its objective in its internal bylaw as to establish an autonomous administration in northern Syria on the basis of PKK's jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan's ethnic separatism within the framework of the KCK organization. The PYD's basic ideology is driven by the Kurdish nationalism, and has no perfective of religious mindset. Despite the anti-religious actions, no statement of secularism is mentioned in PYD's bylaw. The PYD describes itself as a political, mass social and populist party.³⁰

³⁰ "PYD İç Tüzüğü", PKK'nın Kuzey Suriye Örgütlenmesi Raporu, SETA Vakfi, Ankara, 2016, pp 37

3.1.3.3. *Armed Program (Modus Operandi)*

YPG and YPJ have fought against Syrian Opposition groups, al-Nusra and the IS until the end of 2015. During its armed surge, the YPG units carried out assassinations, VBIED attacks and the hybrid tactics in military formations. As a local armed actor, the PYD has been an alternative for the US Government since 2013, and acting as a hybrid (both conventional and unconventional) armed actor. The PYD is also caused the other different ethnic groups to displace after securing the places from other armed groups. The YPG enjoyed the arms and equipment provided by Assad Regime and no major confrontations have been reported between the YPG and Syrian Army. The YPG also took the advantage of PKK's conflict know-how by the attachment of PKK militants to its tactic organizations. On the other hand, the YPG units have also been equipped, armed, trained and directed by the US Army Special Forces soldiers to fight against the determined enemies. The YPG now fight against IS, Syrian Opposition Groups and Turkish Forces in Syria. The PYD also created an influence over the PKK supporters in Turkey for retirement and the PKK oriented People's Democratic Party (HDP) to gain political support. The PYD is also believed and accused of supporting the PKK terror activities in Turkey via direct actions or supplying with the arms, ammunitions and military equipment distributed by the US and other anti-IS coalition countries. Below is the list of IS's important armed activities;

- June 2013: Armed attack against the protestors in the town of Amude in northeastern part of Syria.³¹
- February 2015: Demolition of the Husseniye Village of Tal Hamees by YPG.³²
- 22 April 2015: Assassination of two Assyrian commanders, David Gindo and Elias Naser³³ were shot.

³¹ "Syria Report: Deadly Clashes Between Kurdish Groups in Amuda", <http://eaworldview.com/2013/06/syria-report-deadly-clashes-between-kurdish-groups-in-amuda/> , 27 December 2016

³² "Forced Deployment and Demolitions in Northern Syria", Amnesty International, London, October 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/2503/2015/en/> 11 January 2017

- June 2015: Forcibly displacement of Arabs, Turkmen and opposition Kurds in Tal Abyad.³⁴

3.1.3.4. *Response*

The PYD is believed to become de facto dominant Kurdish actor of northern Syria due to intense foreign support and connections with PKK assistance. While PKK gained the support of local Pro-PKK population (overwhelmingly Kurdish), other ethnic groups and the Kurdish population with religious sensitiveness oppose the PYD's active political and armed role. The United States, Russia, Iran and European countries do not recognize the PYD as a terrorist organization. Turkey and Saudi Arabia determine the PYD as terrorist.

3.1.4. ISLAMIC STATE (IS)

3.1.4.1. *Background*

The Islamic State (IS), also called with four more acronyms in accordance with chronological evolution: Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), ISIL-Islamic State of Iraq and Levand (ISIL), ISIS- Islamic State of Iraq and Sham, DAESH- *al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham* (Arabic expression of Islamic State of Iraq and Sham), has experienced a long evolution course following its emergence in Iraq soon after the full spectrum of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Under the leadership of Abu Mussab Ar-Zarkawi, the group of Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad (JTWJ-

³³ "Assyrian Federations Accuse YPG Kurds of Assassinating Assyrian Military Leader", **AINA News**, <http://www.aina.org/news/20150522205619.htm> , 27 December 2016

³⁴ "Syria: Kurdish YPG accused of 'ethnic cleansing' of Arabs in battle for Tel Abyad", **International Business Time**, 15 June 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/syria-kurdish-ypg-accused-ethnic-cleansing-arabs-battle-tel-abyad-1506198> , 27 September 2016

Organization of Monotheism and Jihad) which was ideologically Sunni and practically insurgent took the lead of resistance against the US invasion and become the most prominent armed group in Iraq. However, the Zarqawi's loyalty pledge to Bin Laden on 17 October 2004 paved the way for the Sunni Insurgency to transform into a broader influence in Iraq. While Zarqawi's aggressive armed program created more enemies in Iraq and it was also effective to consolidate the likeminded other Sunni groups. The tie with al-Qaida had been established with this pledge, but the strategic disputes between Al-Qaida and Zarqawi revealed. Zarqawi's aggressive armed program had not targeted only the US military forces in Iraq, but the Shiite population in Iraq also had become target, undermining the nature of Iraqi Insurgency and turning it into a sectarian violence. Months after the death of Zarqawi on 7 June 2006, al-Qaida merged five armed groups under the name of Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen (MSM- Mujahideen Consultative Council) on 15 January 2006. After gaining the political dominance in Sunni region of Iraq, MSM announced that had dissolved itself and established the ISI on 15 October 2006.

The ISI has pursued to establish a government structure fighting to expand its territorial gains within the Sunni region of Iraq since its establishment. During ISI military efforts, its brutal tactics were exploited by the counter-insurgency (CT) experts and the military planners, and ISI has suffered because of the US backed local Sunni movement of Sahwa. The ISI's setback between 2007 and 2009 caused two major outcomes; losing the legitimate cause of being the representative of all Sunni population in Iraq, and ending its territorial expansionism.

Prompted by Status of Forces Agreement with Iraq³⁵, the US Forces has started to withdraw from Iraq since 30 June 2009 and the majority of the withdrawal has completed by December 31, 2011. It is also believed that the Sahwa movement has lost its power because of the withdrawal of US forces and ISI has started its recovery taking the advantage of withdrawal. Amidst the withdrawal of the US forces, alienation of Iraqi Sunni population under the government of Nouri Al-Maliki should

³⁵ Status of Forces for Iraq Agreement, Article 24, 17 November 2008, Baghdad, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/122074.pdf> 11 January 2017

also be considered as another factor that ISI had an influential ground in Sunni area paving the way for the recovery.

The ISI took the advantage of the early stage of Syrian Civil War and exploited the turmoil in Syria to help its policy of expansionism covering the Sunni area of Syrian territory. Syria had become the main supply route for Iraqi insurgency against the US invasion since 2003 and ISI and its early formations have kept the relation with the affiliates since then. The US Department of Defense report to US Congress also suggests that the Syrian territory was the primary gateway for the foreign fighters for Iraqi insurgency.³⁶ The ISI's first organizational appearance in Syria is believed with Abu Muhammad al-Jowlani's deployment to Hasaka City of Syria in August 2011. Jowlani is believed to establish the ISI cells in Syria.³⁷

Year 2012 was the time for local Sunni militants with similar ideology of ISI who fought against Syrian Regime and the new group of Jabhat al-Nusrah was established by Jowlani. Gaining a prominent military capacity, al-Nusrah claimed that it had no ties with ISIS and operates independently. By the early 2013, group became one of the most dominant armed actors against the Syrian Regime, mostly in Daraa, Damascus, Aleppo and Idlib. Amongst the reputation disputes, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISI leader, announced that ISI has changed its name into ISIL and al-Nusrah was the branch of ISIL on 9 April 2013.³⁸ Territorial expansionism of ISIL also caused the dissidence with al-Qaida and al-Qaida leader Ayman Al Zawahiri urged ISIL to keep in Iraqi territory only. ISIL has rejected the al-Qaida urge and the mediations with other ideologically like-minded groups and announced that it had cut its ties with al-Qaida on February 2014. Owing to offensive military activities, ISIL has grown and gained a large territory in Iraq and Syria. ISIL expansionism and growth had not an influence against Iraqi and Syrian governments but it also intimidated the other local armed actors such as FSA elements in Syria and Kurdistan

³⁶ Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, The US DoD Report to Congress, p.14, 2 March 2007, http://archive.defense.gov/home/pdf/9010_March_2007_Final_Signed.pdf, 11 January 2017

³⁷ Charles Lister, "Profilin Islamic State", Brookings Doha Center, Numbered 13, November 2014, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/en_web_liste.pdf, 11 January 2017

³⁸ Bahgdadi Statement, <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/al-baghdadi-statement.pdf>, 12 December 2016.

Regional Government of Iraq (KRG) in Iraq. Following the capture of Raqqa city in Syria in 15 February 2014³⁹ and Mosul in Iraq in 11 June 2014, ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi publicly declared that ISIL was renamed as Islamic State and he also declared himself as Caliph on 30 June 2014.

As the IS continued to expand its territory in Syria, the US government called for an international coalition against IS referring to UN Chapter VII.⁴⁰ Following the setup of the anti-IS coalition, the US-led coalition air force intensified the airstrikes in Raqqa City, Hasakah and Kobane town of northern Syria during late September, 2014 and IS territorial expansion was stopped by in November 2014. It was not only the airstrikes against IS positions to stop the IS, but the controversial YPG elements, who were armed, equipped and motivated by the US Army Special Forces, played a key role on the ground against IS military activities. Despite the territorial loss in 2014 and 2015, IS was able to hold its strongholds Anbar and Mosul in Iraq, and Deir ez-Zur, Raqqa, Manbij and Al-Bab in Syria.

The IS, while fighting to keep territorial gain in Iraq and Syria, was also able to attract the allegiance from like-minded armed groups across the globe in 2014 and 2015; Ansar Beit al-Maqdis in Egypt⁴¹, Boko Haram in Nigeria⁴². Owing to allegiance and the claim for Caliphate, the IS has expanded its area of operation to northern Africa and kept its attacks beyond Iraqi and Syrian territories. Attacks in Egypt, Libya, Europe and Turkey have prompted more international military reaction against IS entities in Syria and Iraq, and the attacks legitimized the state actors to interfere in Syria what so ever.⁴³

³⁹ “Rakka İŞİD’in kontrolüne geçti”, **Al-Jazeera Türk**, 15 Ocak 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/rakka-isidin-kontrolune-gecti> , 12 December 2016

⁴⁰ United Nations Charter, Chapter VII, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-vii/> 12 December 2166

⁴¹ “Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis pledge allegiance to ‘Islamic State’”, **Egypt Daily News**, 10 November 2014, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/11/10/ansar-beit-al-maqdis-pledge-allegiance-islamic-state/> 12 December 2016

⁴² “Nigeria's Boko Haram pledges allegiance to Islamic State”, **BBC**, 7 March 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31784538>, 12 December 2016

⁴³ “Putin vows payback after confirmation of Egypt plane bomb”, **Reuters**, 17 November 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-crash-russia-blast-idUSKCN0T60PS20151117>, 12 December 2016

3.1.4.2. *Ideology and Objective*

The IS ideology is based on the Salafism and the Jihadism within the Sunni sectarian ground of the Islam. Driven by its political thought of Salafi-Jihadi ideology, IS has focused on achieving an objective of setting a Caliphate.

Theological aspects of Salafism is the primary base on which the IS ideology rises; the IS's interpretation of the *tawhid* (Allah's Oneness) and *shirk* (idolatry) is suggested to alienate all others who are not the true believers of Islam.⁴⁴ Among those who are not the true believers might be considered as non-Muslims, Shiite Muslims and the Sunni Muslims to be *tağut* (persons who try to set Islamic base different than Allah's). While the strict alienation of IS Salafi ideology attracts the likeminded radical followers, it contrasts with the claim of Caliphate of all Muslims. The final practice of the Caliphate was the Ottoman Empire, and the Caliphate was dissolved after the establishment of Turkish Republic in 1924.⁴⁵

The first claim for the Caliphate after 1924 could be suggested as made by the Muslim Brotherhood. Even though, there are many distinctions between the ideologies of Muslim Brotherhood and IS ideology, the common share is to be against the basis of nation-statehood among the Muslim society that is a total rejection of western democratic understanding. Comparing to IS idea of Caliphate to Muslim Brotherhood ideology, the IS is more radical, controversial and violent against the ones out of its ideas.

⁴⁴ Cole Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State", Brookings Institute, Analysis Paper No:19, March 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-ideology-of-the-Islamic-State.pdf> 11 January 2017

⁴⁵ "Hilafetin ilgasına ve Hanedanı Osmaninin Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Memaliki Haricine Çıkarılmasına Dair Kanun", https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc002/kanuntbmmc002/kanuntbmmc00200431.pdf, 15 December 2016

3.1.4.3. *Armed Program (Modus Operandi)*

Based on the multiple weapons systems, warfare experience/know-how, recruitment, and supply and logistics means IS has introduced a hybrid armed program of conventional and non-conventional. ISI's military strategy in Syria should be placed in a context of its armed strategy in Iraq since 2012.

Strategically, the ISI has been observed to follow three phases during its armed surge since 2012; I. Sustaining the sectarian conflict in Iraq and exhausting the authority forces, II. Offending the urban areas with irregular military formations and gaining the territory, and III. Defending the gains and stabilizing the territories.

3.1.4.3.1. Sustaining the sectarian conflict in Iraq and exhausting the authority forces

The ISI owed its military initiative in Iraq to the “Breaking The Walls Strategy”⁴⁶ in July 2012. Through this strategy ISI has employed high number of VBIED and Suicide Vest (SVEST) attacks against the mobile and stationary security, government and civilian targets to destabilize and exploit the security environment in Iraq. On the other hand, ISI has also carried a serious armed attacks against the prisons to release the jailed militants. The wave of VBIED (either suicide or remotely controlled) attacks and prison raids were not centralized in a certain geography of Iraq, but it was dispersed throughout Iraq from Basra to Mosul. During the execution of the surge effort in Iraq, the ISI was awarded by tactical supremacy over the Iraqi counter-terror activities and strengthen its human network and intelligence capacity via the released prisoners. On the other hand, the attacks in the Shiite populated cities helped ISI consolidate its popular support in the Iraqi Sunni society. The ISI's VBIED and SVEST attacks have been observed to target the government institutions and Shiite militias in Iraqi capital of Baghdad in early 2013 and the ISI's territorial gain has been obvious since then. The ISI also took the

⁴⁶ Jessica D.Lewis, “Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, The Breaking The Wall Strategy Part I”, Understanding The War, Washington, DC, September, 2013, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/AQI-Resurgent-10Sept_0.pdf , 11 January 2017

advantage of the VBIED, SVEST and prison attacks in Iraq to continue its military evolution.

3.1.4.3.2. Offensing the urban areas with irregular military formations and gaining the territory

Despite the ISI's military surge, no formation of the regular military units have been observed during its offensive patterns against to capture the city centers. Irregular ISI offensive organizations with mobile and lightly arm capabilities help ISI become effective against the Iraqi Security Forces and the non-state armed elements in Syria. During the offensive activities, the ISI have strategized its military tactics on mass killings and territorial gain. The ISI have taken the control of Syrian Raqqa City with the help of a serious of simultaneous offensive actions against the Syrian rebel groups by 13 January 2014.⁴⁷ Owing the mobility, swiftness and irregularity, the ISI took the cumulative efforts of irregular but coordinated military capabilities against the other non-state armed groups in Syria. The gains let the ISI to expand its territory both in Syria and Iraq and the final territory gain was made along the Turkish border in northern Syria and Mosul City in Iraq by mid June 2014.

3.1.4.3.3. Defending the gains and stabilizing the territories

Unlike the irregularity in resurgence and offensive phase, the ISI has showed and a regular nature of defensive military activities in and around the city centers. The mass use of forward guard posts, mobile defense tactics, obstacles and mines, conventional arm positions and air defense systems were the regular parameters of the defensive military operations. Employment of the conventional military weapons like tanks, artillery guns, anti-aircraft weapons, Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS), and anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM) are the merits of ISI conventional defensive. On the other hand, use of the civilians as human shield was the traditional irregularity of ISI in military extend. In the wake of defensive ISI

⁴⁷ Charles C. Caris & Samuel Reynolds, "ISIS Governance in Syria", Institute of Studying War, July 2014, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISIS_Governance.pdf, 11 January 2017

activities, the local ISI law enforcement applications have also seen to contribute the stability in the city centers.

While ISI carried a hybrid military strategy to achieve its objective in Iraq and Syria, the tactical means that the ISI have employed were the means of terrorism. Those tactics included VBIED attacks, armed attacks, kidnapping and assassinations to coerce the state and non-state actors and emplace the fear on the civilians. Below is the list of IS's important armed activities;

- March 21, 2012: AQI claimed responsibility for attacks across eight cities in just under six hours. Shiites, police, security forces and government officials were targeted in Karbala, Kirkuk, and Baghdad (46 killed,)
- July 22, 2013: AQI attacked Abu Ghraib and Taji prisons in Iraq, freeing approximately 800 prisoners with Al Qaeda affiliations. (26 killed).
- September 14, 2013: ISIS took control of an air defense base in Hama, Syria.
- June 10, 2014: ISIS took control of Mosul.
- June 17, 2014: ISIS attacked Baji oil field, although the Iraq Army reported that it successfully drove out ISIS within two to three days of fighting.
- June 23, 2014: ISIS seized border crossings at Qaim, Waleed, and Trebil, gaining control over the border between Iraq and Syria and the border between Iraq and Jordan.
- July 2014: ISIS takes control of Raqqa, Syria.
- August 2014: Over a period of two weeks, ISIS executed 700 members of the al-Sheitaat tribe in the Deir al-Zor province, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The tribe and ISIS began fighting in July. (700+ killed)
- August 19, 2014: SIS beheaded American captive James Foley and releases a video of the murder. The video garnered international attention and ISIS would proceed to behead more British and American hostages in the coming months.
- October 29, 2014: ISIS publicly executed a number of members of a Sunni tribe, the Albu Nimr, that had been resisting ISIS's advance in the Anbar province. Reports on the number of dead range from forty-six to over three hundred, and differ on whether or not women and children were killed along with men. (46+ killed) .

- January 6, 2015: ISIS began to carry out its first assaults on U.S. bases in Iraq, conducting mortar attacks against a training base. According to senior U.S. defense officials, the attacks have been completely ineffective against the base.

- May 15, 2015: ISIS seized Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province, from Iraqi security forces, which were supported by Shiite militias and American airstrikes. ISIS had controlled areas around Ramadi for almost a year and a half before taking the city. (500+ killed).

- November 13, 2015: Eleven members of the Islamic State killed 130 civilians and injured 100 more in a series of attacks in Paris, France. Gunman and suicide bombers attacked a concert hall, a soccer stadium, restaurants, and bars in the French capital. Within the days following the attack, nine of the IS operatives were killed. One operative remained on the run until he was captured in Brussels on March 18, 2016. According to French President Hollande, the attacks were planned in Syria organized in Belgium. (130 killed).

- On November 13, 2015, eleven members of the Islamic State killed 130 civilians and injured 100 more in a series of attacks in Paris, France. Gunman and suicide bombers attacked a concert hall, a soccer stadium, restaurants, and bars in the French capital.

- On October 31, 2015, a Russian plane was brought down by IS over the Sinai Peninsula, killing all 224 people on board.

3.1.4.4. Response

Based on the UN Resolution the US designated and recognized ISIL as a terrorist organization on 17 December 2004.⁴⁸ The US Executive Order 13224 signed by former US President George W. Bush gives the authority to government agencies “to impede the terrorist activities and funding. The Order authorizes the U.S. government to block the assets of individuals and entities that provide support, services, or assistance to, or otherwise associate with, terrorists and terrorist

⁴⁸ Foreign Terror Organizations, The US Department of States, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>, 15 December 2016

organizations designated under the Order, as well as their subsidiaries, front organizations, agents, and associates.”⁴⁹

3.2. Foreign State Actors

3.2.1. United States of America (USA)

The US imposed sanctions and take series of actions against Syrian Government and its senior officials over the human rights abuses with US president’s executive order 13572 on April 17th, 2011.⁵⁰ The US president officially called Bashar Assad to step down on August 18th, 2011.⁵¹ The US has closed its Embassy in Damascus on 6 February 2012 due to the security concerns and serious of aggressive US measurements were taken against Syria including a red line that can prompt a military action if Syrian Regime uses chemical or biological weapons. The US started to aid the Syrian rebels with military equipment, arms, ammunitions and training while it was skeptic to aid the all opposition armed groups. The US designated Jabhat al-Nusrah as a terrorist organization suggesting the US concerns over the extremism 10 December 2012.⁵² The US President recognized the Syrian National Coalition⁵³ as the legal representative of Syrian People on 12 December 2012. The US administration has focused on two major aspects in Syrian Civil War in 2013; use of chemical weapons and the emergence of extremism in Syria. The US has started to look for alternative local non-state actors while keeping the current moderate opposition groups in control via Turkey. Despite the concrete proofs for Syrian regime to use chemical weapons, the US has not intervened in Syria militarily

⁴⁹ The US Executive Order 13224, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/122570.htm> , 15 December 2016

⁵⁰ US President Executive Order 13572, 17 April 2011, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-05-03/pdf/2011-10910.pdf> , 7 January 2017

⁵¹ White House Statement, “oday, President Obama called for the President of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, to step aside and took the strongest financial action against the Syrian regime thus far”, 18 August 2011, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/08/18/president-obama-future-syria-must-be-determined-its-people-president-bashar-al-assad> , 7 January 2017

⁵² The US State Department Updated Foreign Terrorists Organization List, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm> , 7 January 2017

⁵³ Official Web Page of Syrian National Coalition <http://en.etilaf.org/about-us/goals.html>

and its reluctance raised the concerns over US policy in Syria. The US government acted to prioritize its policy on confronting ISIL rather than taking down Assad Regime in Syria and opted PKK affiliated PYD forces to Syrian National Coalition in 2014. The US has started to drops arms and ammunitions to PKK-oriented groups in Syrian Ayn al-Arab (Kobani) and Iraqi *Sinjar* to stop the imminent ISIL advance in the last four months of 2014 and the US Congress started to negotiate on a law to directly arm Kurdistan Regional Government and other groups in 2015⁵⁴. Russian military involvement in became another turning point in September 2015 for the US and the government seemed to reinforce its military presence under name of fighting against ISIL. The US government declared to send US Army Special Forces soldiers to co-operative with local armed Kurdish groups on October 30th, 2015.⁵⁵ The balance of power in Syria shifted on the favor of Syrian Government after Russian involvement and the US became one of the parties of peace talks for a possible political solution between the Syrian Regime and the opposition groups.

3.2.2. Republic of Turkey

Turkey had a tense relationship with Syria during Hafez al-Assad administration over his crackdowns with Syrian Sunni activists and the Syrian support for PKK. However, Turkish-Syrian relations turned into a positive track after Bashar al-Assad took the power and the relations between two countries flourished following the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council on 13 October 2009.⁵⁶

Turkey tried to cooperate with Syria politically by trying to convince Syrian government to make social and political reforms in order to prevent the growing

⁵⁴ “A Bill to provide for a temporary, emergency authorization of defense articles, defense services, and related training directly to the Kurdistan Regional Government, and for other purpose”, The US Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/1188/text>, 7 January 2014

⁵⁵ The US White House Daily Press Briefing by the Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 30 October 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/30/daily-press-briefing-press-secretary-josh-earnest-103015>, 7 January 2017

⁵⁶ Relationship between Turkey and Syria, Republic of Turkey Misinistry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey%E2%80%93syria.en.mfa>, 7 January 2017

popular protests in April 2011.⁵⁷ Turkish Foreign Minister made a series of visits to Damascus – the last one was on 8 August 2011- and the parties had no agreement on the Syrian reformist action and Turkey took the rebellion side and recognized it as the legitimate aspiration of Syrian people, and finally started to help the defectors from Syrian Arab Army to form the Free Syrian Army in July 2011.⁵⁸ Turkey followed an “open border policy” to host the Syrian refugees in Turkish territory and granted their rights with a law.⁵⁹

The FSA units started their armed aggression against Syrian Regime Forces along Turkish border late 2011 and they were alleged to infiltrate from Turkish territory. Syrian Air Defense units shot down a Turkish F-4 fighter jet that caused Turkey to change its rule of engagement along the border and the Turkish artillery have responded whenever a military aggression from Syria is reported.

Extremist and terrorist groups also took advantage of the conflict environment and started to infiltrate in Syria via several routes; the most active route became Turkey due to its open border policy. Refugee problems and the foreign fighters’ activity caused Turkish security more vulnerable to different forms of the terror attacks. Two major car bombs hit and the Border Crossing at Cilvegözü and Turkish border town of Reyhanlı leaving 69 people dead in 2013. Muhabarat, Syrian Intelligence Agency, was blamed behind both attacks. Turkish Air Force shot down a Syrian MiG 23 fighter jet in 2014 over Turkish-Syrian border in retaliation on 23 March 2014 and this was perceived as a retaliation action to F-4 incident in 2013. Turkish government kept supporting Syrian opposition forces in 2014, the US reluctance in supporting the Syrian opposition forces left Turkey alone and the disputes over the armed organizations started between Turkey and the US.

⁵⁷ Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkish Foreign Minister, Press Conference, 6 April 2011, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-bahreyn_-katar-ve-suriye_deki-temaslarina-iliskin-yaptigi-basin-toplantisi_-6-nisan-2.tr.mfa , 7 January 2017

⁵⁸ Lucas Winter, A Modern History Of The Free Syrian Army in Daraa, Foreign Military Studies Office US Army Training and Doctrine Command, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Free-Syrian-Army-Daraa.pdf> , 7 January 2017

⁵⁹ Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu, 6458 Numbered Law, 4 April 2013, <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2013/04/20130411-2.htm> , 7 January 2017

Turkish Air Force shot down an Iranian unmanned air vehicle (UAV) over Hatay province in May 2015 and Cumhuriyet Newspaper released news over Turkish covert operations sending weapons to Syrian opposition forces on 29 May 2015. Amidst the security vulnerabilities, Turkish Air Force shot down a Russian SU 24 jet fighter over Turkish-Syrian border on 24 November 2015 causing more tension in the region.

Turkey kept supporting the Syrian opposition but recognized Jabhat al-Nusrah and PYD as terrorist organizations due to their ties with other terror organizations. Turkey also became one of the parties of peace talks in late 2015.

3.2.3. Islamic Republic of Iran

Syria has been an indispensable ally for the Islamic Republic of Iran for years owing to its Alawite leadership and important Shia sectarianism Baathist ideology. In addition to its geostrategic location against Israel, Syria has an important gateway to Hezbollah affiliates in Lebanon for Iran. Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has been the executive institution in Syrian policy since the beginning of Syrian Civil War in 2011. IRGC started to establish its political influence in Iran when Mohammed Khatami was elected as Iranian President in 1997 and the influence kept growing during presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad between 2005 and 2013. Despite the IRGC influence has been criticized as a barrier for Iran to integrate international system by President Hassan Rouhani since 2013, this policy was opposed both Office of Supreme office and IRGC.⁶⁰

Iran involved in Syrian Civil War in 2011 by providing technical and financial assistance via Quds Force which is the extraterritorial military apparatus of IRGC and led by Qasem Solaimani. Quds Force helped Syrian regime to create National

⁶⁰ Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi and Raffaello Pantucci, "Understanding Iran's Role in the Syrian Conflict" Royal United Services Institute, August 2016, https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201608_op_understanding_irans_role_in_the_syrian_conflict_0.pdf, 11 January 2017

Defense Forces (NDF), a paramilitary organization with up to 100,000 fighters from mostly the Hezbollah, Shabbiha and other circles in 2012. Iran also sent its own IRGC and the Law Enforcement Force to train, advice and support Syrian forces logistically. According to an interview with a senior Iranian official in Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi study, Iran provided HM-20 Hadid 122 mm Multiple Launch Rocket Systems, Rocket Propelled Grenades, DShk machine guns and ATGMs to NDF elements.⁶¹ Iran steadily shifted its position to area of combat operation by 2013. Iran has coordinated its supportive and operational activities with Russia since 2013 and focused on the political settlement in 2014 and 2015. Iran considers IS and al-Nusrah as terrorists organizations but had no such intention on Ahrar al-Sham and PYD. Iran's priority has been the Salafi extremism in designating the terrorist organizations.

3.2.4. Russian Federation

Russia, as long-term ally of Syria, was perceived to involve in Syrian area of operation for several reasons; protecting an ally, diverting the international attention from ongoing Ukraine campaign, protecting its port in the Mediterranean, seeking to be a global player; fighting the domestic terrorist beyond its borders, and confronting US and NATO presence in Middle East. Despite Russian existing military affiliation with Syrian Government in Syria, its military presence was felt by Russian intense air campaign in September 2015. Russian air campaign has provided a series of advantages for Syrian Regime by taking the strategic rebel areas in the north of the country. Russia has both downgraded the influential role of other state actors such as the US and Turkey and also undermined the NATO alliance by intimidating the Turkish fighter jets with air-defense system after Turkey downed a Russian SU 24 fighter jet on 24 November 2015.⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid, p.7

⁶² Russian President Putin' press statements following meeting with President of France Francois Hollande, Moscow, 26 November 2015, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/50792>

Russia has become a major game changing actor in Syria with its military intervention and calls Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIL as terrorist organization, it also insists on designating Ahrar al-Sham as terrorist due to its al-Nusra affiliations. Russia has no consideration of PYD as terrorist organization.



IV. DISCREPANCIES OF RECOGNIZING THE ARMED GROUPS AS TERROR ORGANIZATION IN SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

Ulrich Schneckener points out three characteristics when defining the armed non-state actors; a) capability of using violence, b) non-integration of military formations of state armed institutions and c) possessions of autonomy at certain level. He also suggests that the non-state actors might be supported by state actors or involvement while the involvement of state officials in the activities of non-state actors might be possible because of the ideological reasons.⁶³ While suggesting the three characteristics of armed non-state actors, Schneckener also points out the grey areas between certain characteristics and he also suggests the possibility of involvement of the state officials in the non-state actors' activities. These grey zones or the gaps between the characteristics originate the disputes due to the absence of clear cut in between and cause the dilemma of defining an armed non-state actor under what category.

The relationship between the state and the non-state actors are based on the sharing the sovereignty; non-state actors pursuit more shares on sovereignty while the state acts to keep the status quo.

4.1. Insurgency

Schneckener categorizes the armed non-state actors in eight different classifications; out of eight categories, rebels or guerilla fighters are suggested to be the groups who seek liberation of a social group or a nation. Rebels or guerilla fighters are also considered as the future army of the liberated population. The armed campaign is made as an instrument of social-revolution or ethno-nationalistic movement to achieve the political objective. In this aspect while Schneckener's

⁶³ Ulrich Schneckener, "Armed Non-State Actors and the Monopoly of Force", Revisiting The State Monopoly on Legitimate Use of Armed Forces, Geneva Center For The Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Policy Paper No:24, <http://www.wulf-herbert.de/DCAFPP24Wulf.pdf>, 11 January 2017

suggestion of the rebels or guerilla fighters definition complies with the David Killcullen's definition of insurgency. Killcullen defines insurgency as "a struggle for control over a contested political space, between a state and group of states confronting one or more (internal or external) non-state challengers."⁶⁴ He also adds that "insurgencies are popular uprisings that grow from, and are conducted through pre-existing social networks (village, tribe, family, and neighborhood, political or religious party) and exist in a complex social, informational and physical environment."

Charles V. Gvynn defines the insurgency as "based on the coordination of the civil (popular) and military (guerilla forces), insurgency is the primacy of the civil power, albeit it is an irregular armed phenomenon. The irregular armed campaign of insurgency should employ the minimum use of force with a firm and timely action."⁶⁵

Klejda Mulaj points five typology definitions of the violent non-state movements including separatist movements, insurgency guerilla bands and terrorist groups.⁶⁶ Although Mulaj suggests that separatist movements differ from insurgency bands, both categories have shared characteristics in political objective and armed program. Both categories seek for autonomy or independence from the ruling authority and the methods of their armed program seek for destroying the authority power with a protracted way based on the asymmetric armed engagement against the state forces. Thus, Mulaj's categories of separatists and the insurgency guerilla bands are considered as the insurgency in this study. Insurgency basically focus on the following parameters; popular character of the uprising, non-state challenge, and existing in social, informational and physical environment.

⁶⁴ David Killcullen, Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency, US Counterinsurgency Conference, Washington DC, 28 September 2006

⁶⁵ Charles V.Gvynn, Imperial Policing, London, 1939,
http://lib.uofk.edu/multisites/UofK_lib/images/stories/libpdf/sud.lib.imperial%20policing.pdf 11
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⁶⁶ Klejda Mulaj, Violent Nonstate Actors in World Politics, Hurst&Company, London (2010), pp.3-6

4.2. Terrorism

Terrorism is considered to have an objective and subjective elements in definition; objective element is called as criminal offense up to a certain extent and the use of physical violence against the persons. The subjective element requires the terror and the fear in population.⁶⁷ It is clear that all violent actions cause terror and fear in almost every population, therefore the subjective elements of terrorism has no obligations to be taken in consideration in defining the terrorism. However, the problem lies in the objective elements of the definition; criminal offense and the physical violence vary in different organizations and methods, and target different entities. Therefore the level of use is not certain in the area of violent activities where the variables are too many. On the other hand, in a dynamic social environment, where the terrorism is rooted, ideological and operational priorities have an enormous effect on defining terrorism.

Definition of terrorism focuses on the typology when considering the objective, subjective of an organization and the priorities of a state actor. According to Schneckener's typology, terrorists aim to spread panic and fear in societies in order to achieve political goals based on the social-revolutionary, nationalistic or religious ideologies. In typology, it is definitely the ideology of the organization that has the most important gravity of an organization in definition. Strategic objective of an organization has another sign in defining the organization. Objectives and ideology support each others, especially when directed by a determined leadership. However, the actual outcomes are normally hidden in the program of the organization; the concept, strategy and the methods which is called as the *modus operandi*. Terrorism, in current literature, basically focus on the following parameters; political purpose, creation of fear, threat of violence, existing in social, informational and physical environment.

⁶⁷ Christian Walter, "Defining Terrorism in National and International Law", https://www.unodc.org/tldb/bibliography/Biblio_Terr_Def_Walter_2003.pdf, 11 January 2017

It is suggested to make the comparison of insurgency and terrorism on the basis of the character of the organizational program. The program characters are broken down in seven characters; objective, strategy, motivation, environment, orientation, subjective mean (subjectivity) and the impact.

The suggested program objective is to support the ideology and the philosophy of the organization to achieve the utmost desire while strategy concentrated on the methodological application of the program to confront the authority and the society. Insurgency and terrorism has similar objectives in general, however insurgency looks for partially or complete revolutionary change in state system. On the other hand, terrorism forces the authority to have limited changes on the certain area of state policy or support the state to suppress the society for maintaining the status quo. Strategy of an organizational program also differs in insurgency and terrorism; insurgency pursuits total collapse of the authority militarily, economically, physiologically and politically. Hence, terrorism follows a strategy of terrorizing the authority and people. Motivational character is political and the same both in insurgency and terrorism because their social nature, but insurgency and terrorism differ in environment nonetheless. Insurgency has a territorial boundary while terrorism has no aspiration of limiting itself in certain territory. In orientation, insurgency focuses on the people to mobilize mass population, but terrorism mainly focuses on the enemy. Insurgency concentrates on physical subjectivity (obviousness) while terrorism acts psychologically (covertly). The impacting character of the insurgency and terrorism also has a close relation between all other characters. The impact of insurgency mostly contained in the domestic and regional territory, but terrorism can cause domestic, regional and global (international) impact without borders.

Table 1: Conceptual Comparison of Insurgency and Terrorism

Conceptualizing the Organization Characters							
	Objective	Strategy	Motivation	Environment	Orientation	Subjective Mean	Impact
	Revolution or Change	Subversion or Terror	Political or Economic	Territorial or Non- territorial	Mass population or Enemy-centric	Physical or Psychological	Domestic, Regional or International
Insurgency	Revolutionary	Subversion	Political	Territorial	Mass population	Physical	Domestic and Regional
Terrorism	Change	Terror	Political	Non-territorial	Enemy-centric	Psychological and Physical	Domestic, Regional and International

Table 2: Profiling Four Non-State Actors in Syrian Civil War on the Concepts of Insurgency and Terrorism

Non-State Group	Objective Revolution or Change	Strategy Subversion or Terror	Motivation Political or Economic	Environment Territorial or Non-territorial	Orientation Mass population or Enemy-centric	Subjective Mean Physical or Psychological	Impact Domestic, Regional or International
Ahrar-al Sham	Revolution	Subversion	Political	Territorial	Mass population	Both	Domestic
Jahbat al-Nusrah	Revolution	Both	Political	Territorial	Both	Both	Domestic
PYD	Revolution	Both	Political	Non-territorial	Both	Both	Domestic and Regional
IS	Change	Terror	Political	Non-territorial	Enemy-centric	Both	Domestic, Regional, International

Table 3: State Actor's Considerations of Defining the Non-State Actors

Non-State Group	Ideology	Popular Support	Legitimacy of Violence (Self-defense aspects due to threat from authority)	Connection with other organization	Method of he use of violence (CBRN and mass destruction methods)	Threat to regional and global security
Ahrar al-Sham	Revolutionary Sunni-Islamist	Domestic Sunni Arabs and Turkmen	Considered as representative of Syrian people	Affiliation with other rebel groups. Early affiliation Jabhat al-Nusrah (cut the ties in 2014)	None	None
Jahbat al-Nusrah	Salafi- Jihadist	Domestic Sunni Arabs	Not considered as a popular representative	Affiliated with IS and al-Qaida	Suspected	The US, Russia, Europe, Turkey and Iran
PYD	Secularist, National-Separatist	Domestic and Regional Kurds	Considered as representative of certain Kurdish population in Syria	Ideological, organizational and operational ties with PKK	None	Turkey, Iraq and Iran
IS	Salafi-Jihadist	None in Syria	Not considered as a popular representative	Ideological, organizational and operational ties with al-Qaida. Currently hub for jihadi many organizations in the world	Suspected	Each and every state entities in the world.

4.3. Dilemmas of the Insurgency and Terrorism Parameters

Although the insurgency exists in social, informational and physical environments based on the popular uprising driven by non-state actors, the state of complexity brings new actors in the conflict environment which is called “conflict ecosystem”⁶⁸ Insurgency itself evolves on the population, adversaries and the environment. However, it is not only the population, adversaries and environment help the insurgency survive or collapse; other factors are also involved with its evolution. Ideological and methodological compatibility of insurgency with the current world order frames the descriptive morality of insurgency. Additionally, empiric variability of the insurgency with the methods of using the violence or employing the foreign fighters and agencies of state-actors helps the insurgency to keep the noble bearings.

The most powerful leverage effect for an insurgency to be legitimate, dominion or illegitimate is the role of state actors in the conflict ecosystem. Supporting or countering efforts of the state actors for an insurgency attempt could determine the insurgency to achieve its goal or fail totally. While the supporting efforts of the state actors for a certain insurgent group might result in more legitimacy and dominance over others, the countering efforts might lead the insurgency group into a terror organization. On the other hand, imbalanced states support for different insurgent groups or imbalanced countering efforts against others mostly likely cause to increase the conflict ecosystem to be more destructive. Moreover, imbalance between supporting and countering efforts even cause the conflict ecosystem be more complex and last longer.

⁶⁸ David Killcullen, “Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency”, US Counterinsurgency Conference, Washington DC, 28 September 2006

The United Nations has no clear definition of terrorism despite a common idea of need for a consensus on terrorism.⁶⁹ The United States defines terrorism as international and domestic terrorism referring to (i) intimidating and coercing a civilian population, (ii) influencing the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, (iii) affecting the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.⁷⁰ Practical approaches of defining a non-state armed group as a terrorist organization was not referred in US law. Russia on the other hand stress on the ideology and the terrorist activity which is against the Russian government policies pointing out the northern Caucasus.⁷¹

Turkey defines the terrorism in its 3713 Anti-Terror Law (1991).⁷² In Turkish law, definition of the terrorism focuses on the act of methodology, the target (state and public order) and the code of the criminal action. The law also refers the organizational initiative of the act.

Iranian Islamic regime has committed to a jihad for propagation of Islam and export of revolution and its criminal code system is based on the Islamic sharia sources. A clear definition of terrorism in Iran has not been found in this study during the literature review. However, it is known that all crimes against Iran's security are prosecuted at revolutionary court in accordance with the Iranian criminal code. On the other hand, Iran is known to cooperate with the international community on struggling with the terrorism during and after the nuclear talks.⁷³

⁶⁹ The UN Press Release, GA/L/3276, 7 October 2005, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2005/gal3276.doc.htm> , 10 January 2005

⁷⁰ The US Criminal Code, Title 18, Chapter 113B, Section 2331, <http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title18/part1/chapter113B&edition=prelim> , 10 January 2017

⁷¹ Russian Federal Law on Counteracting Terrorism of 6 March 2006 , <http://www.memo.ru/2008/09/04/0409081eng/part11.htm> , 10 January 2017

⁷² 3713 Sayılı Terörle Mücadele Kanunu, 12 Nisan 1991

⁷³ "Parliament amends 2010 anti-terrorism law", **IRNA**, 22 July 2015, <http://www8.irna.ir/en/News/81691518/> , 11 January 2017

V. CONCLUSION

Non-State actors in Syrian Civil War have dominated conflict intensity by acting either as a low intensity conflict apparatus or conducting large scale hybrid military operations. No matter what military formations the armed groups had, state actors had certain criteria on defining the groups' role to lead legitimacy or illegitimacy. Discrepancies between the states in Syrian Civil War mainly concentrated on recognizing the groups as terrorist or rebellion over their identity. Therefore, the controversies evolved around the concepts of terrorism and insurgency.

This study focused on the approaches of the state actors who had controversial opinions in defining the certain armed groups as terrorists or insurgents. The US and Turkey have been selected as two pro-Syrian opposition state actors while Iran and Russia were the pro-Syrian government states. Each and every state has been proactive actors in Syrian Civil War who made significant contributions on the role of non-state actors until the end of 2015. Ahrar al-Sham, Jabhat al-Nusrah, PYD and IS were the major non-state actors who shaped the security environment in Syria significantly. State controversies and sometimes the agreements have mainly evolved around these four organizations.

The study first suggests that historical background of Syrian Civil War include the fundamental problems of the ideological conflicts in Syria. Historical course of Syrian State and the social, religious and political diversity in Syrian society is suggested as the roots of security instability in Syrian Civil War. Autocratic state system, failure in nation statehood, lack of democracy and reforms are assumed as the causes of inequality in representation in Syria that drives the continuous instability in security environment with diverse public circles. Consequence of the continuing instability security environment is also perceived as the multiplicity in armed non-state actors that also attracts the global and regional state actors who pursuit geostrategic interests.

In Syrian area of operation, non-state actors stressed on certain characters when conducting their politicized armed campaign. Those characteristics have been used to conceptualize the groups' profiles in this study. Seven different categories of the organization characteristics were used to differ the insurgency concept from terrorism; objective, strategy, motivation, environment, orientation, subjectivity and impact.

Insurgency could be described as a popular-centric, politically-motivated, revolutionary, subversive and physical use of organized violence in certain territory which has domestic impact. Terrorism could be described as a politically-motivated unlawful use of physical and psychological organized violence with no territorial boundaries which has domestic, regional and global impact to instill fear and coerce governments and societies forcing for change. Therefore it is possible to profile the four non-state actors in Syria in accordance with the conceptual descriptions above. Ahrar al-Sham could be described as a popular and politically revolutionary movement which employs subversive, physical and psychological use of organized violence in certain territory within Syria to gain the governmental control.

Jabhat al-Nusrah could be described as a politically-motivated organization which employs the unlawful physical and psychological use of organized violence in and out of Syria with the historical and current organizational and ideological ties with other terrorists groups that has domestic, regional and global impact to instill fear and coerce certain Syrian societies and international governments forcing for change.

The PYD could be described as a politically-motivated organization which employs the unlawful physical and psychological use of organized violence in and out of Syria with current organizational and ideological ties with other terrorists groups that has domestic and regional impact to instill fear and coerce certain Syrian and regional societies as well as Syrian and regional governments forcing for change.

The IS could be described as a politically-motivated organization which employs the unlawful physical and psychological use of organized violence in and

out of Syria with historical and current organizational and ideological ties with other terrorists groups that has domestic, regional and global impact to instill fear and coerce all Syrian, regional and global societies as well as Syrian, regional and global governments forcing for change.

State actors in Syria have been observed to follow a real political way in profiling the non-state actors in Syria rather than the conceptual limitations. State actors considerations included ideology of the organization, people's support for the organization, legitimacy of the group's violence, connections with the other illegal organizations, method of the use of violence and the organization's threat to regional and global security.

The Salafi and the Jihadi ideology has been observed as the most effective alienation pattern of an armed group from an insurgency nature that has more legitimate parameters while the secularist and nationalist separatism has the most moderate way for a non-state actor to be insurgency. In this respect, it is suggested that the groups who had religious orientations had little chance of to be identified as insurgency by the US and Russia as global actors. This is suggested due to correlation between the ideological threat perceptions of the US and Russia and the ideological risks rooting from al-Qaida and the radical Caucasian groups. However, Iran and Turkey – as the regional state actors- have been more pro or against in defining a group as terrorist or insurgent in ideological way. The proximity of both states to Syrian sphere of interest has a concrete controversial approach of defining the groups as terrorist or insurgent in ideological perspective. Iran has been observed to name all non-state actors but PYD as a terrorist organization due to the Sunni background of the opposition. However, Turkey has been observed to label the Sunni-Islamist groups under the revolutionary ideology. Both Iran and Turkey was observed to name the radical Salafi groups as terrorists. The most controversial stance among the state actors is the one about the PYD. The US and Russia have been observed to support PYD's secularist ideology. Iran, as an Islamic Republic, has also been observed to be reluctant defining the secularist PYD as a terrorist organization. Turkey, on the other hand, as a secular state had no interest on

emphasizing the secularity of the PYD for appeasement. Ideological aspirations of the non-state actors have also been observed to be used by the state actors to assign the non-state actor as a threat to region and the world. Salafi-Jihadi ideology of the non-state actors has been observed to raise the concern of attracting the foreign fighters in Syrian area of operation that can have a recoil effect in the origin country of the foreign fighters. Involvement of the foreign fighters in Salafi-Jihadi organization was also observed to help defining the organization as terrorists.

However, the foreign fighters' involvement in PYD has not been considered as an easing aspect to name the PYD as a terrorist organization by the US and Russia, mostly because of the radicalization dimension in secular foreign fighters is different from the Jihadi ideology. However, foreign fighters' involvement in Syrian domestic political struggle on the rank of a non-state actor had suggested a perfect chance to name an organization as a terrorist due to the ideological and organizational ties of the individual with a terrorist organization which was already recognized. Individuals who had acted in Jabhat al-Nusrah was perfectly used to prove and realize the hypothetical narrations that the group has a direct connection with IS and al-Qaida by the US. However, no state actors but Turkey was observed to prove the connection between the PYD and PKK. The IS and Jabhat al-Nusrah were recognized as terrorists organizations by all four state actors in regard with the organization's connection with al-Qaida which is already a terrorist organization. Therefore there no further empirical suggestion for these organizations was observed to require calling them terrorists. Oddly, the PYD was refused to be as terrorist organization due to lack of satisfying concrete proof of its connection with the PKK by the US.

The study suggests that the state actors in Syrian Civil War intended to look for some empirical parameters when the descriptive paradigms were insufficient in defining an armed non-state actor as terrorist or insurgent.

Popular support for the armed organization has also been observed as a parameter that a state actor stuck with. Popular support was assumed to be the most important instrument for a non-state actor to rationalize the legitimacy. Ahrar al-

Sham was observed to have a common idea over the popular support by all state actors including Iran despite its ideological rejections. The IS and Jabhat al-Nusrah even have not been considered as the representative of a certain society by the state actors due to groups conceptual and descriptive match to terror organizations. However, PYD -the most disputed non-state actor- also represent certain ethnic and political groups. When considering the methodological use of violence, Ahrar al-Sham and PYD are observed more conventionally because of the training that they obtained from state agencies and the foreign state security elements embedded in these organizations. On the other hand, Jabhat al-Nusrah and IS were observed that they also proved themselves as a terrorist organization with their methodological means of mass killing, executions and the suspected use of chemical weapons.

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CIRRICULUM VITEA

Name and Surname : Necdet ÖZÇELİK

Date of Birth : 12 April 1975

Education :

Degree	Field	University	Year
Undegraduate	Bussiness Adminstration	Anadolu University	2008
Garduate	International Relations	Atılım University	2017

Work Experience :

Work Place	Position	Year
Turkish Armed Forces	Sergeant	1993-2014
Private Consultancy Company	Owner	2015-now

Foreign Language: English

Publications:

PKK Terörünün Yeni Dinamikleri: Radikalleşme ve Şehir Savaşı, SETA, Ankara, Nisan 2016

PKK and Car Bomb Attacks, SETA, Ankara, December 2016

e-mail: necdetozelik@yahoo.com

Date: 29 May 2017

Turnitin Orijinallik Raporu

Tez Necdet Özçelik tarafından



ÖDEV 2 (SBE TEZ 1) den

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