

ASTANA PROCESS IN CONTEXT WITH IRANIAN, RUSSIAN AND
TURKISH FOREIGN POLICIES ON SYRIAN COMPLEXITY

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ABSTRACT

ASTANA PROCESS IN CONTEXT WITH IRANIAN, RUSSIAN AND TURKISH FOREIGN POLICIES ON SYRIAN COMPLEXITY

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This thesis is based on explaining the dynamics that led the Iran, Russia and Turkey to initiate Astana Process within the framework of the Syrian Civil War's changing dynamics. The theoretical part intends to combine neorealism with the "complexity" paradigm. Neorealism's linear ontology is problematic in explaining the changing dynamics. The complexity paradigm explains non-linear processes derived from its ontological foundation. Especially the variety and diversity of actors, their interconnection, interdependence, and adaptation to the situation can be a solution against the reductionism of this phenomenon. Actors in the Syrian crisis are very diverse, and it can be observed that actors like ISIS can profoundly affect the policies in this process, and the Syrian issue can affect varied actors' security and foreign policies that are also based on power competition. At the same time, it can be seen

that with the emergence of ISIS and Russian activism in the Syrian complexity, especially her intervention in Syria as well as other actors' policies on this complexity, the regional and global powers have also co-adapted their policies on the changing dynamics. In order to comprehend this process, the Complex Adaptive System model was improved to apply in the changing dynamics in Syria and actors' positions as well as interconnected interactions involved in the area. This co-adaptation also derives from the intertwined causalities in the complexity which is between the order and disorder. The Astana process is also an expression of this co-adaptation in Iranian, Russian and Turkish policies in Syrian Complexity.

Keywords: Astana Process, Iranian Foreign Policy, Russian Foreign Policy, Turkish Foreign Policy, Syrian Complexity

ÖZ

SURİYE KARMAŞIKLIĞINDA İRAN, RUS VE TÜRK DIŞ POLİTİKALARI BAĞLAMINDA ASTANA SÜRECİ

Mehmet İlbey Çoban

Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

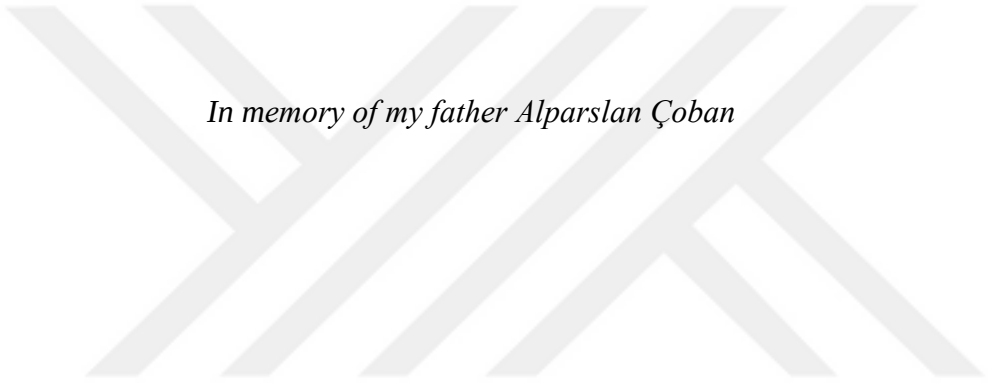
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Bu tezdeki asıl soru Astana sürecinin tanımlanması ve garantör ülkelerin Suriye iç savaşının değişen dinamikleri çerçevesinde böyle bir süreci başlatmasına neden olan dinamikleri açıklamaya dayanmaktadır. Teorik kısım, neorealizmi hem doğa bilimlerinde hem de Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplinde yeni yeni kullanılan “karmaşıklık” paradigmasıyla birleştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Teorik kapsamda savunulacak durum, doğrusal bir ontoloji izlerken neorealizm devletlerin dış politikalarındaki değişen dinamikleri açıklamakta sorun yaşayabileceği yönündedir. Karmaşıklık paradigması, ontolojik temelinden kaynaklan doğrusal olmayan süreçleri açıklar. Özellikle aktörlerin çeşitliliği ve çeşitliliği, aralarındaki bağlantı, karşılıklı bağımlılık ve değişen çevreye uyumun bu fenomenin indirgenmesine karşı bir çözüm olabileceği öne sürülecektir. Nitekim Suriye krizindeki aktörler çok

çeşitlidir ve IŞİD gibi aktörlerin bu süreçteki politikaları derinden etkileyebildiği ve Suriye meselesinin devletlerin güvenliği ve aynı zamanda güç rekabetine dayalı dış politikalarındaki değişikliğin birçok aktörü de etkileyebileceği görülebilir. Bununla birlikte, Suriye karmaşıklığında IŞİD'in ortaya çıkması ve özellikle Suriye'ye müdahalesi ile birlikte Rus aktivizminin yanı sıra diğer aktörlerin bu karmaşıklığa ilişkin politikalarının bölgesel ve küresel güçlerin de değişen dinamikler karşısında değişen dinamikler karşısında etkileşimli olarak politikalarını uyarladıkları görülebilir. Bu süreci anlamak için, Karmaşık Uyarlamalı Sistem (CAS) modeli, Suriye'deki değişen dinamiklere ve aktörlerin pozisyonlarına ve bölgedeki birbiriyle bağlantılı etkileşimlere uygulanacak şekilde geliştirilmiştir. Bu birlikte adaptasyon, aynı zamanda, düzen ve düzensizlik arasındaki karmaşıklıkta iç içe geçmiş nedenselliklerden de kaynaklanır. Astana süreci de Suriye Karmaşıklığında İran, Rus ve Türk dış politikalarında bu eşgüdümlü karmaşık uyarlamanın bir dışavurumudur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Astana Süreci, İran Dış Politikası, Rus Dış Politikası, Türk Dış Politikası, Suriye Karmaşıklığı



In memory of my father Alparslan Çoban

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ÖZ	vi
DEDICATION	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS	xi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xv
CHAPTERS	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POWER COMPETITION IN THE SYRIAN COMPLEXITY	8
2.1.Neorealism.....	10
2.2.Ontological Shift: Complexity	15
2.3.Varied and Diversified Actors in the Syrian Complexity	20
2.3.1.The US	25
2.3.2.The EU	28
2.3.3.Saudi Arabia	29
2.3.4.Israel.....	30
2.3.5.Hezbollah	31

2.3.6. Al-Nusra.....	32
2.3.7. ISIS.....	33
2.3.8. YPG.....	35
3. FOREIGN POLICIES OF RUSSIA, TURKEY AND IRAN ON SYRIAN CIVIL WAR.....	38
3.1. Russian Foreign Policy on Syria	38
3.1.1. Global Calculations.....	43
3.1.2. Syria-Ukraine Nexus.....	45
3.1.3. Tartus Port and Beyond.....	46
3.1.4. The Problematique of Regime Change	47
3.1.5. Jihadist Terrorism Threat	50
3.2. Turkish Foreign Policy on Syria.....	52
3.2.1. Activism in TFP	57
3.2.2. Syrian Refugees	61
3.2.3. Border Security	63
3.3. Iranian Foreign Policy on Syria.....	66
3.3.1. Axis Of Resistance.....	70
3.3.2. ISIS And Beyond	74
4. ASTANA PROCESS	76
4.1. Initiatives of the UN (2012-2016)	77
4.2. The Role of Kazakhstan.....	82
4.3. Ground Dynamics for Tripartite Talks	85
4.3.1. Impartiality Status	85
4.3.2. Tripartite Relational Dynamics	87
4.3.3. Dynamics in the Area.....	92
4.4. Astana Talks (2017-2019)	94

5. CONCLUSION	109
BIBLIOGRAPHY	113
APPENDICES	
A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TRKE ZET.....	150
B. THESIS PERMISSION FORM / TEZ İZİN FORMU	163



LIST OF FIGURES

Fig.2.3.1.Elliptical Billiard Balls Model in Syrian Civil War.....	21
Fig.2.3.2.Complex Adaptive Elliptical Billiard Balls Model in Syrian Complexity (2017-2019).....	23
Fig.4.4.De-escalation Zones in Syria.....	97

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AL	Arab League
AQ	Al-Qaeda (The Foundation)
AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
CAS	Complex Adaptive System
EU	European Union
FSA	Free Syrian Army
FSB	Federal Security Service (Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации)
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (Organization for the Liberation of the Levant)
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JDP	Justice and Development Party
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
ME	Middle East
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFA	Minister of Foreign Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PJAK	Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Free Life Party)
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PM	Prime Minister
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Democratic Union Party)

R2P	Responsibility to Protect
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SNC	Syrian National Council
TAF	Turkish Armed Forces
TFP	Turkish Foreign Policy
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
YPG	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Protection Units)



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

While the wounds of the tragedy of Syrian civil war, which has been going on for about 9 years, have not yet been healed, referred as the “worst man-made disaster since World War II¹” the Syrian Civil War brought us numerous discussions and many dilemmas and one of the great breaking points in the contemporary world system. While expecting the development of democracy as part of the “Arab Spring” in the MENA region, the demonstrations against Bashar Al-Assad converted into a bloody civil war in Syria as well as increased instability in the region.

Young Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi’s burning himself initiated the mass demonstrations against the Tunisian regime that resulted in transformation to a democratic regime by the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia; moreover, the mass demonstrations in Tunisia emboldened the protests and uprisings in the various Arab

¹ This reference was made by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in 2017 to criticize world leaders and the Assad regime on the massive human rights abuses: United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. *Syria worst man-made disaster since World War II* - Zeid. March 14, 2017. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21373&LangID=E> (accessed April 27, 2020).

countries inspiring from that fall of the Tunisian regime.² Repressive and corruptive regimes, socio-economic hardships such as high inflation, inequalities, and unemployment augmented by the 2008 economic crisis were demonstrated as the main reasons for the “Arab Spring” in the MENA region.³ Catalyzers of the events were global (mainly Western powers and Russia) and regional powers’ response to the demonstrations and uprisings, the accelerating and mobilizing role of the social media in those events, regimes’ response to those demonstrations and the role of the armies in which had a significant impact on the future of the autocrat leaders; for instance, the Tunisian army did not intervene in the protests in Tunisia and the regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted, on the other hand, the Egyptian army first sided with the Hosni Mubarak’s regime and then converted its behavior in favor of protesters to overthrow Mubarak and later staged a coup against elected president Mohamed Morsi in Egypt; however, the Syrian army sided with Assad in favor of the Syrian regime from the beginning.⁴

As the dynamics accelerated to spread to Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria from the Tunisian “spring,”; autocrat leaders had stated that their future would not be determined by the incidents in the same manner as in Tunisia.⁵ Autocratic regimes allied with the West (Egypt and Tunisia) in the MENA could not make the “scapegoat” for the stability of their regimes that “if their regime fell, the radical

² Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin, “Rethinking the ‘Arab Spring’: The Root Causes of the Tunisian Jasmine Revolution and Egyptian January 25 Revolution.” *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 13 (June 2018): 69–79. doi:10.24035/ijit.13.2018.007.

³ Fakhr-UI-Islam Asfandiyar and Muqaddas Ullah, “The Arab Spring Genesis: Implications for Global Politics.” *Dialogue* (1819-6462) 13, no. 4 (October 2018): 1–16. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=135652038&site=ehost-live>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Fouad Ajami, “The Arab Spring at One.” *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 2 (March 2012): 56–65. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=71912445&site=ehost-live>.

Islamic regimes would be established in order to destabilize the region”; the West generally sided with protestors⁶; in addition, Syrian regime which was included in “the axis of evil” list were directly the target of the Western powers. Actually, in the beginning, the foreign powers did not apply clear policies on the uprisings due to the newly emergent of the events; however, the Libyan case which ended with the regime change by the NATO’s intervention in context with the humanitarian intervention demonstrated itself as one of the scenarios that would probably be also implemented on the Syrian case in context with the departure of Assad regime by the Western intervention (which would probably change the regional dynamics in favor of the West); thus the Libyan experience accelerated the power competition between Russia and the West in addition to regional power competition in Syria.⁷

In March 2011, the demonstrations against the (Syrian) Baath regime began in Daraa, shortly after it spread to the other cities due to the regime’s repressive response to the demonstrations. The regime’s response to the protests, diverse ethnic composition, sectarian dynamics, as well as foreign funding and support to the different sides have enhanced the polarization of the social and political dynamics which later caused the civil war in the country.⁸ “Syria’s multilayered social and political structure is the main reason behind how small protests in Syria turned into chaos. In such a diverse and complex social strata, a sparkle from the Daraa would be enough to fire the whole country.”⁹

⁶İhsan Dağı, “Editor’s Note.” *Insight Turkey* 13, no.2 (Spring 2011): III-IV. <https://www.insightturkey.com/file/664/editors-note-spring-2011-vol13-no2>.

⁷ Vitaly Naumkin, *Moving From The Bottom Up And Back Down Again*. September 24, 2011. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/moving-from-the-bottom-up-and-back-down-again/> (accessed February 27, 2020).; Jolyon Howorth, “Humanitarian Intervention and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in the Post-Cold War Era: A Provisional Balance-Sheet.” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 2 (June 2013): 288–309. doi:10.1080/09557571.2013.790584.

⁸ Adam Baczko, Gilles Dorronsoro, and Adam Quesnay, *Suriye: Bir İç Savaşın Anatomisi. Translated into Turkish by Ayşe Meral*. 32-63. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2018.

⁹Hüseyin Bağcı and Şuay Nilhan Açıkalın, “From Chaos to Cosmos: Strategic Depth and Turkish Foreign Policy in Syria” in *Chaos, Complexity and Leadership 2013* edited by: Şefika Şule Erçetin Erçetin, & Santo Banerjee, 11-26. Springer International Publishing, 2015.

Apart from the external powers, the conflicting parties in the civil war have been diversified and varied in the area; the local participants are mainly differentiated as: (1)The Baath regime that declared all the opposition forces as terrorists and ignored the civil war reality in Syria; but the war against “terrorists”, and establishes pragmatic relations with the YPG while also opposing its demands, (2)The opposition forces which is composed by many diversified groups, demanding the end of the Baath regime that also signified in their flag (the usage of old Syrian flag (1930-1958) before the Baath party’s coup d’etat in 1963), (3)Kurdish forces which mainly seek for autonomy in Syria, (4)Radical Salafist groups, such as ISIS and Al-Nusra.¹⁰

The foundation of the opposition’s military faction (Free Syrian Army) took nearly half a year since the demonstrations started, and the anti-Assad foreign powers’ attempt to unify the divided opposition groups in the political arena resulted in the formation of the Syrian National Council in October 2011, Istanbul, and then the establishment of the National Coalition of Revolutionary and Oppositional Forces in Doha in November 2012 (this platform was recognized as the only legitimate platform of the Syrian people by the powers that are part of Friends of Syria Group in order to add more pressure on Assad); these events also added a new phase to the civil war in Syria.¹¹ However; as mentioned above the local actors were not only composed of opposition and the regime, but more diverse political and social structures have also been efficient in the area besides local support to Assad has also been prominent in the area; moreover similar formation as Libyan Transitional

¹⁰Matthew Ayton, *Amid US uncertainty in Syria, Kurdish YPG eyes bolstering ties with Russia*. March 23, 2020. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/amid-us-uncertainty-in-syria-kurdish-ypg-eyes-bolstering-ties-with-russia/> (accessed June 06, 2020).; Flagmakers. *Flag of Syria - A Brief History*. n.d. <https://www.flagmakers.co.uk/flag-history/syria/> (accessed June 06, 2020).; Andrew Osborn, *Assad adviser rejects idea of granting Syrian Kurds autonomy*. February 19, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-adviser/assad-adviser-rejects-idea-of-granting-syrian-kurds-autonomy-idUSKCN1Q81QA> (accessed June 06, 2020).; SANA. *The interview that Italian Rai News 24 refrained from broadcasting...President al-Assad: Europe was the main player in creating chaos in Syria-video*. December 09, 2019. <https://sana.sy/en/?p=180156> (accessed February 23, 2020).

¹¹Carsten Wieland, “A Decade of Lost Chances: Past and Present Dynamics of Bashar al-Asad’s Syria.” *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 4, no. 2 (January 2013): 9-29. https://www.orsam.org.tr/d_hbanaliz/1.Carsten.pdf.

National Council in the Libyan civil war before the regime change in the country caused the enhancement of the support to Assad from the pro-Assad external powers that also prolonged the civil war while misleading mainstream analyzes and calculations that Assad would fall in a short-term period.¹² This situation also reflected on the peace negotiations and diplomatic efforts by the UN, where the power struggle was decisive on this subject, leading to a deadlock, especially on the future of Assad and on a permanent political solution in Syria.

The dynamics in the area have been determined by regional power competition and local disorder intertwined with the global power struggle in the three-layered complex system. These interwoven layers lead to complexity and uncertainties in the Syrian Civil War; thus, calculations are inclined to disproportionate results and spilling over the insecurities. Local dynamics in the civil war, especially transboundary armed groups such as ISIS, bring about spilling over insecurities and mass migration across the region and the world that has made borders more penetrable.¹³ The global power struggle is mainly between the US along with the EU and Russia, the regional power struggle in Syrian complexity is mainly composed of Iran vs Israel or Saudi Arabia and Turkey. While the local disorder is emanated from the struggle among opposition, Assad regime, Kurdish groups and radical jihadists. However these three layers are not separated from each other, but interconnected and interrelated in which the interactions among them more diverse and varied that cause many feedback loops in the interactions.

Disorder in Syria is not only subject to fill the power vacuum by state actors, but also local factors and foreign fighters change the course of the war. The causes of the crisis in the global power struggle emanated from multi-factors that regime changes in the post-Cold War era connected to power competition and norm contestation. The

¹² Kamal Alam, "Pax Syriana: The Staying Power of Bashar Al Assad." *Asian Affairs* 50, no. 1 (March 2019): 1–17. doi:10.1080/03068374.2019.1567099.; Christopher Phillips, "The International and Regional Battle for Syria." In *The War for Syria: Regional and International Dimensions of the Syrian Uprising*, edited by Raymond Hinnebusch & Adham Saouli, 37-49. New York: Routledge, 2020.

¹³ Raffaella A. Del Sarto, "Contentious Borders in the Middle East and North Africa: Context and Concepts." *International Affairs* 93, no. 4 (July 2017): 767–87. doi:10.1093/ia/iix070.

prolongation of the civil war has been also caused by power competition, the power vacuum in the region created by the 2003 Iraq occupation by the US, local armed groups, and foreign fighters. However, the causes have resulted in various and non-proportional effects. What shaped the crisis and determined its characteristics would be found in its dimension of power competition and explain better with the help of the complexity paradigm to describe the non-linear characteristics of the developments in the area.

The global, regional, and local dynamics based on power struggle enhanced the fire in the country while the peace initiatives organized firstly by the Arab League, then via the UN, and because of this power competition, ceasefire efforts remained temporary. Nevertheless, the declaration of nationwide ceasefire (excluding radical jihadists and YPG) in December 2016, Syria, under the guarantors of opposition (Turkey), and the regime (Russia) which are also rivals that support conflicting sides has led the new phase in the conflict management measures in the country.¹⁴ That ceasefire led the Astana Process -that aims to manage the conflict between conflicting sides and enable ground for the coordination between Iran, Russia and Turkey- under the guarantee of (rival powers) Iran, Russia, and Turkey since January 2017. Surely Astana Process has been another causation and the Parties' request of changing dynamics in the crisis. Because of that, what is the place of Astana Process and events in this crisis will be described and explained to have a better analysis in this research.

How can we describe and explain the emergence of Astana process based on the exploration of the changing dynamics in Syria? The research question seeks to describe and explain the Astana process based on the exploration of the changing dynamics in Syria in context with Russian, Turkish, and Iranian foreign policies on the civil war with the help of complexity paradigm in combination with neorealism. This research does not ignore power dynamics but broadening the horizon of power politics and based on power dynamics while it is averted to question "world order", on the other hand, the research is pertaining to "disorder" in Syria between the order in the global politics. Nevertheless, complex systems are between the order and chaos

¹⁴BBC News. *Syria conflict: Ceasefire agreed, backed by Russia and Turkey*. December 29, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38460127> (accessed August 20, 2020).

in context with its ontology. The non-linear characteristics derive from this disorder while pursue of self-interest and its limits demonstrate the continuity in the system. The literature is poor on the Astana Process due to its up-to-date characteristics; at the same time, the complexity paradigm is currently developing in IR. These features pose both disadvantages and advantages to the research. Because of poor literature and current dynamics of the event in context with the newly developing paradigm, the data and theoretical framework is minimal. Nevertheless, that is also an advantage for the research given the contributions of exploratory research of the complexity paradigm in IR in context with one of the initial researches on the Astana Process.

The following chapter explores the utilization of the complexity paradigm with the neorealism perspective as well as describing the variety and diversity of actors in the Syrian complexity. What are the implications of Syrian complexity in context with power competition and security perception among regional and global powers? Answering this question is essential for us to understand the civil war in Syria and the Astana Process. Chapter 3 elaborates on the foreign policies of the Astana Process' guarantor states in Syria. The question of "what are the main drivers of the guarantor states' main policies and priorities in the Syrian complexity" in context with Chapter 3 will clarify the distinctions, roles, and conflicting interests of these actors comparatively. And Chapter 4 describes and explains the Astana process by answering the questions of "why the initiatives of the UN fail?", "why the process initiated in Astana", "what are the ground dynamics that initiated this process and the role of the process in changing dynamics in the Syrian complexity?". By answering those questions above, this thesis is also distinguished as one of the initial research on the Astana process in addition to the exploration of the complexity paradigm in IR.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POWER COMPETITION IN THE SYRIAN COMPLEXITY

The Civil War in Syria has established a suitable ground for the power struggle; both regional and global powers are struggling to create or promote their influence, secure their area and strengthen their position on global and regional issues, trying to turn the Syrian crisis into an opportunity and minimize the adverse effects of the crisis; indeed, this power competition also constitutes one dimension of the prolongation of the civil war.¹⁵

Although power politics can be best understood through the lens of the neorealist approach,¹⁶ neorealism *per se* is not able to explain or predict the changing dynamics in the Syrian complexity because of its foundation on the linear static ontology. On the other hand the complexity paradigm benefit and complement in the understanding of power politics, competition, and cooperation dynamics in the Syrian complex and Astana process.

¹⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion, Liberal Dreams and International Realities*. E-book. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.

¹⁶ Tim Dunne and Brian C. Schmidt. "Realism." in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, edited by John Baylis & Steve Smith & Patricia Owens, 99-112. 6th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

The complexity paradigm is not necessarily to replace other theories; however, the complexity may complement other IR theories in order to reach a better framework as well as regarding uncertainties in the changing dynamics.¹⁷ This research will also benefit from the paradigm of complexity for better understanding and description in applying given neorealism assumptions that states pursue their interests and they are willing to maintain their security as well as increase their power in the dynamics of the Syrian case which demonstrates itself as a disorder in the system. Indeed, neorealism is founded on the assumptions of “order” and stability in the dynamics in order to have coherence with the theory, on the other hand, the complexity paradigm offers the fractals in the order emanated from disorder and focused on change and co-evolution in the dynamics.

The system in neorealism illustrated as simple, static in which few actors (closed units) interact with few feedback loops that may foresee predictable results in the outcome of the activities; on the contrary, complexity approach assumes system as complex, more dynamic and living that many actors (which are not exogenous as closed units) interact with many feedback loops; thus the outcome of the events may not be predicted.¹⁸ IR is impacted by many various parameters and variables which are interconnected and interdependent, indeed, also the main actors in the system cannot be limited by only states which are socializing and affected by the structure in their interactions considering the critical impact of the substate factors, transnational

¹⁷ Kai E. Lehmann, “Unfinished Transformation: The Three Phases of Complexity’s Emergence into International Relations and Foreign Policy.” *Cooperation & Conflict* 47, no. 3 (September 2012): 404–13. doi:10.1177/0010836712454274.

¹⁸ Neil E. Harrison, “Thinking About the World We Make” in *Complexity In World Politics: Concepts and Methods of a New Paradigm*, edited by Neil E. Harrison, 1-24. New York: State University of New York Press, 2006.; Dylan Kissane, *Beyond Anarchy: The Complex and Chaotic Dynamics of International Politics*. Stuttgart: ibidem, 2011. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=nlebk&AN=732185&site=eds-live>.

terrorist groups, and many other variable causes as well as their interactions in the international changing and co-evolutionary dynamics.¹⁹

Because of that neorealism per se, have difficulty in demonstrating and explaining the changing dynamics in the events, while complexity approach in combination with neorealism has a better understanding in order to describe and explain Astana Process which have realized in the environment in which the non-linear changing dynamics emerged with diversified actors (not only states but also armed groups included) interacting in the Syrian complexity with many feedback loops. Also, the actors in the case of Syrian complexity are not exogenously closed to the environment as it can be observed from the spilling over the insecurities (such as radical terrorism) and massive flow of the refugees, which have an enormous impact on some actors' changing foreign policies in the disorder.

2.1. Neorealism

Realism is founded on the assumptions that the pessimistic nature of global politics that depicted on endless competition between states in which war is inevitable and also an extension of states' foreign policies; and based on a metaphor that units as the varying size of billiard balls regardless of their morality and internal rule but their sharing goal of maximization of their security and relative power against each other and performance of the similar objectives.²⁰

The philosophical roots of realism derived from the writings of Thomas Hobbes and Thucydides (*The History of the Peloponnesian War*) on the part of *Melian Dialogue* that describes the role of power in the asymmetric relations between mighty Athens and weak Melos, as well as; *'The Prince'* by Niccolò Machiavelli which put forward the importance of pursuing self-interest without any moral obligations while

¹⁹ Dylan Kissane, "Cleopatra's Nose and Complex International Politics" in *Chaos, Complexity and Leadership 2013* edited by: Şefika Şule Erçetin Erçetin, & Santo Banerjee, 57-72. Springer International Publishing, 2015.

²⁰ John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions." *International Security* 19, no. 3 (Winter94/95 1994): 5. doi:10.2307/2539078.

achieving any of objectives, was influential for the realist approach.²¹ The Leviathan by Thomas Hobbes indicates that anarchical state of the war with the pessimistic human nature leads to seeking competition, diffidence, and glory in this war; indeed this situation exemplified as Latin proverb “*homo homini lupus*”²² in which remarks on endless competition between agents while cooperation is not precluded in the conflict, however, this cooperation may become the continuation of the competition against specific groups.²³

Realists agree on the common assumptions that the conflictual nature of the international relations in which morality is excluded, inter-unit conflict determined by the distribution of power assets such as economic, military, demographic, et cetera; and the primacy of power maximization as well as maintaining the security in the politics among states.²⁴ While classical realism prioritizes human nature that is determined by the lust of power on the struggle of power among states, neorealism assumes that the origins of the war mostly derived from the anarchic structure of the system, which resulted in infinite power competition and maintenance of the security.²⁵

²¹ Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*. 23-26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

²² The actual proverb is "Homo homini Deus, et Homo homini Lupus" (That Man to Man is a kind of God, and that Man to Man is an arrant Wolfe). By this proverb, Hobbes defines the harmony in the order inside of the land (*city*), on the other hand, "that Man to Man is an arrant Wolfe" is prevalent in the conflicts and wars against other lands (*cities*): Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*. Vols. III, in *The Clarendon Edition Of The Philosophical Works Of Thomas Hobbes*, edited by Howard Warrender, 24. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

²³ Ibid. p.13-15; John H. Herz, *Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma*. Vols. I, in *International Relations: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, edited by Andrew Linklater, 260-278. New York: Routledge, 2000.

²⁴ Robert G. Gilpin, "The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism" in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, edited by Robert O. Keohane, 301-321. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

²⁵ Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater, "Introduction." In *Theories of International Relations*, by Scott Burchill, Andrew Linklater, & Richard Devetak et al., 1-28. 3rd Edition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan,

In his earlier work "*Man, the State and War*," Kenneth Waltz attaches priority to international structure (anarchy) as a catalyzer and complementary to human nature and internal structure of the states (units) regarding causes of war. The international system is founded on anarchy and its properties determined by "the absence of an ultimate political authority" and inefficient laws to enforce units to dictate terms against the use of force; in this structure, states are required to be prepared for countering threats in order to maintain their security and survival²⁶, and they are inclined to cooperate or compete to attain their goals including their security.²⁷

Later on, by giving a deeper dimension to realism in his works, he made conceptualizations on "system" and became the founder of neorealism approach. The objective of the book of "Theory of International Relations" by Waltz was to improve realism in order to discern the unit and structure levels while connecting them in the international system in which "the ordering principle of the system-anarchy-and the distribution of capabilities across its units the states"; this system entails in self-help principle that the states are distinguished by their power capabilities, and self-regards (being egoistic) themselves in the meantime power competition has been dominant

2005.; Robert O. Keohane, "Realism, Neorealism and the Study of World Politics" in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, edited by Robert O. Keohane, 1-26. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

²⁶As Ken Booth describes the distinction between security and survival: "*Survival was equated with existence – enduring as a physical being – while security was described as survival-plus. The plus here is the choice that comes from (relative) freedom from existential threats, and it is this freedom that gives security its instrumental value. Survival does not guarantee security, because it does not eliminate threats*": Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security*. 106. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

²⁷Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*. 96-206. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

element between those units in the anarchy²⁸; however only if the survival of the units acquired they maintain their goals of struggling for power and their profits.²⁹

Interactions and actions take place at the unit level; however, “the structure of a system acts as a constraining and disposing force” that also possesses an impact on the outcome of actions and interactions, as well as alterations of the behavior of rational units.³⁰ The structure emerges when the units began to co-act and interact together, however, anarchy still constitutes the main characteristics of the international structure even if the inter-structure of the units transforms or changes unless the world government based on hierarchy establishes in the system (as a whole) in which possess common feature that composed of “a set of interacting units and a system-wide component (structure).”³¹

According to neorealism, organizing element of the structure is anarchy because there is no specialization of the enclosed units under hierarchy; character and functions of these units are alike to pursue their interests and maintain their security as well as their survival in varying capabilities, on the other hand, the distribution of their capabilities as well as numbers and magnitudes of great powers shape the structure as well.³² Due to the varying capabilities of the states, the structure plays a restrictive role in the interactions and activism in the foreign policies; nevertheless, cooperative dynamics between states also limited because of the self-help characteristics of the

²⁸Anarchy does not refer to disorder or chaos, but the “absence of a world government”: Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*. 88. Philippines: Addison-Wesley, 1979.

²⁹Kenneth N. Waltz, “Reflections on Theory of International Politics: A Response to My Critics” in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, edited by Robert O. Keohane, 322-346. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

³⁰Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*. 66-93. Ibid.

³¹Barry Buzan & Charles Jones and Richard Little. *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism*. E-book. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

³²Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*. 97-103. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

system that directs each unit to pursue their conflicting interests and maintain their survival and security against other units.³³

Given the neorealist assumptions, the power competition is originated from the wealth and security concerns in the self-help system in which activities of the states restrained or allowed by the anarchical structure which cannot be determined by the international institutions because the power and aims of states possess direct effects on international institutions and also may alter their functionality.³⁴ For instance, Yemen civil war has been subjected to the Saudi-Iranian proxy war; however, it did not result in the competition between great powers (mainly Russia and the US) that are also permanent members in the UNSC and hold veto power which may limit the functionality of the organization if the interests of the parties would not reach consensus; thus, the Yemen crisis ended up in harmony in the Security Council while disagreements and vetoes on Syria in the UNSC have been caused by great power competition and conflicting interests in Syria.³⁵ Moreover, the ad hoc alliances by the external actors (regime side versus opposition side) in Syria have been formed due to the pursuing interests and maintaining or increasing the power capabilities and security of the external participants in the civil war as seen from the countering ISIS, regional rivalry and great power competition in the area.³⁶

However the state-centrism approach of the theory oversimplifies the system as an interaction between units and, excludes the other important actors in the international system, such as transnational terrorist organizations, which boosted its role by

³³Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of International Politics*. 100-105. Ibid.

³⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War." *International Security* 25, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 5–41. doi:10.1162/016228800560372.

³⁵ Amanda Guidero and Maia Carter Hallward. "International Relations Theories and Global Attention to Syria and Yemen." In *Global Responses to Conflict and Crisis in Syria and Yemen*, by Amanda Guidero, & Maia Carter Hallward, 31-54. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

³⁶ Nicos Panayiotides, "The Great Syrian Civil War: A Realist Approach to the Syrian Conflict." *The IUP Journal of International Relations* 14, no.1 (2020): 59-70. https://www.academia.edu/42825365/The_Great_Syrian_Civil_War_A_Realist_Approach_to_the_Syrian_Conflict.

globalization due to the enhancing network and capabilities from the instruments of a globalized world.³⁷ Also neorealism signifies a limited aspect of the change in the system and newly emergent subsystems in the changing dynamics; in view of Waltz, changes and transformations in the system occur in the formation of alterations in the distribution of material capabilities of the states as well as number and capabilities of great powers, on the other hand, anarchy would be a still enduring component of the system.³⁸ Indeed this problem derives from the linear causation because of the ontological foundation of the theory that places a limited number of actors, enclosed units, few variables and diversity of factors in the changing dynamics, and underestimating the importance of other agents and substate actors that possess power capabilities despite their limits in the system.

2.2.Ontological Shift: Complexity

Complexity paradigm originally occurred in natural sciences to challenge Newtonian linear causation in the natural phenomena that can root back to Einstein's Relativity Theory; then, exploratory applications have emerged in social sciences, including IR.³⁹ The paradigm represents that many and diversified interconnected elements, variables, and agents interact each other in which total pattern of the dynamics change over time; because there are uncountable interdependent variables, even minor changes may alter the dynamics in unpredicted flows, in contrast to the paradigms predicted and calculated events as linear flows; as Geyer and Rihani example metaphorically:

³⁷ Luis Tomé and Şuay Nilhan Açıkalin, "Complexity Theory as a New Lens in IR: System and Change" in *Chaos, Complexity and Leadership 2017: Explorations of Chaos and Complexity Theory*, edited by Şefika Şule Erçetin & Nihan Potas, 1-16. Switzerland: Springer, 2019.

³⁸ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.162. Ibid.

³⁹ Emilian Kavalski, "Complexifying IR: Disturbing the "Deep Newtonian Slumber" of the Mainstream" in *World Politics at the Edge of Chaos: Reflections on Complexity and Global Life*, edited by Emilian Kavalski, 253-272. New York: State University of New York Press, 2015.

Grains of sand falling under gravity do not act differently from a single grain under gravity. However, allow these grains to interact with each other by piling them up on a flat disc, and they will begin to exhibit complex, unpredictable behavior.⁴⁰

Complexity is a system that is between the linear flow of determination of the order and non-linear chaotic systems; the chaotic systems represent non-linear and unproportionate characteristics that are reiterated, random, indeterminate and very sensitive as well as interdependent while unpredicted on the origin of the emergent events in which famously signified metaphorically as the “butterfly effect” developed first in meteorology and mathematics: butterfly's flapping wings may cause horrific storms on the other side of the world.⁴¹ While the chaotic systems are beyond this research, it is essential to remark that chaos and complexity are different approaches, and non-linear foundations of the complexity aspect should not be understood as totally random, disproportionate, and unpredicted; however, the complex systems still demonstrate those mentioned characteristics but not totally.

The linear causation founded on the assumptions that the agents (units) in the system are self-enclosed to each agent, on the other hand, in the complex systems it is essential to presume that agents are not enclosed *billiard balls* that interact each other in the system, but their internal dynamics along with interactions with other agents in the system also matter and may also have an impact on the other agent; thus the cause may have differentiated effects in the context of diversified factors considering the features of the complexity that are *diversity, connection, interdependence, and adaptation*; this leads to non-linear causation in the problematic of emerging phenomena and uncertainty in the dynamics; indeed, a cause might result in different and disproportionate effects in various timelines.⁴²

⁴⁰ Robert Geyer and Samir Rihani, *Complexity and Public Policy: A New Approach to 21st Century Politics, Policy, and Society*. 38-40. Routledge, 2010. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=cab06966a&AN=metu.b1371803&site=eds-live>.

⁴¹ David Byrne, *Complexity Theory And The Social Sciences: An introduction*. 1-6. New York: Routledge, 1998.; Leonard Smith, *Kaos*. translated into Turkish by Hakan Gür. Ankara: Dost, 2014.

⁴² Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden, “Complexifying International Relations for a Posthumanist World” in *World Politics at the Edge of Chaos: Reflections on Complexity and Global Life*, edited by

The interconnectedness of the diversified actors, their actions and interactions are not enough to describe the system; however indirect effects and unintended consequences is also possible from the interactions of the other actors; relations between states are beyond their bilateral interactions and totality is not the sum of their parts or interactions, variables are diversified in the relations between states that also prevents the interactions between them from following linear progress; in fact, diversified variables may have a significant impact on the nongradual effects; as Jervis points out: “in relations between two states affect each states stance toward third parties, and the distribution of bargaining power between two states is strongly influenced by existing and possible relations with others.”⁴³

The relations between the two states are not only determined by their respective, collective and contrasting agendas in the changing dynamics because of interconnected and interdependent patterns in the areas of interests; for instance, some major external threats might also cause consistency in the conflicting agendas even though this may not lead complete cooperation in the relations which is consistent with each actor's separate interests and power calculations.⁴⁴ In these calculations, security is prominent to dominate the states' agendas and to reorient their interactions with the other actors since the concern of maintaining security causes significant patterns in their connection and behaviors of the states.⁴⁵

Complexity indicates the vivid and dynamic structure and due to the flow of time dynamics are not able to totally reversed back the same in this system; in this structure states are not only actors interacting in the system but sub-state actors and mobile

Emilian Kavalski, 169-188. New York: State University of New York Press, 2015.; Luis Tomé and Şuay Nilhan Açıklan, Ibid.

⁴³ Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity In Political And Social Life*. 29-37. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.211-226.

⁴⁵ Luis Tomé, “Complex Systems Theories and Eclectic Approach in Analysing and Theorising the Contemporary International Security Complex” in *Handbook of Research on Chaos and Complexity Theory in the Social Sciences*, edited by S. S. Erçetin and H. Bağcı, 19-32. IGI Global: Springer, 2016.

networks across local landscapes with global connections (such as transnational terrorist groups which self-organize themselves consistent to changing dynamics in the system as well) may have major implications in the global events that make them actors in the global system⁴⁶; indeed the complex structure contains disorder and order at the same time enhanced by varying degree of fluctuant “global fractals” in the system.⁴⁷ The international system, as emphasized, is not totally structured as order organizing the interactions and actions of states arranged by the system; nevertheless, fractals in the "order" comprising non-state and sub-state actors as well as their interactions in the system may possess a considerable impact in global politics as observed in the events of 9/11. Indeed, the changing dynamics in the Syrian complexity is not bounded only by the two sides of the civil war (the regime and opposition) nor the external states involved in the area; but non-state actors such as YPG, ISIS, and Al-Nusra had a significant effect in the changing dynamics; in addition, the actors like ISIS cannot be regulated via rules by state actors as in international institutions.

In order to describe connected interactions between agents in the complex system, emergent behaviors, and co-evolution of agent-structure and agent-agent relationships, the concept of “Complex Adaptive Systems” (CAS) has been developed from the biological experiment on the co-evolution of slime mold cells and their environment; based on this experiment as a model, the CAS was conceptualized in mathematics to natural sciences, and then it was also adapted in social sciences.⁴⁸ In the mentioned experiment, it was observed that slime-mold cells affected each other by self-organizing themselves, adapting and co-evolving with the

⁴⁶ Ion Cîndea, “Complex Systems -- New Conceptual Tools for International Relations.” *Perspectives: Central European Review of International Affairs* 26 (Summer 2006): 46–68. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=22981836&site=ehost-live>.

⁴⁷ John Urry, *Global Complexity*. 28-132. Cambridge: Polity, 2003.

⁴⁸ Ted Carmichael and Mirsad Hadžikadić, “The Fundamentals of Complex Adaptive Systems” in *Complex Adaptive Systems Views from the Physical, Natural, and Social Sciences*, edited by Ted Carmichael & Andrew J. Collins & Mirsad Hadžikadić, 1-16. Switzerland: Springer, 2019.

changing environment via *feedback* mechanisms; indeed, the threshold change in the adaption of the cells emerged from non-linear dynamics.⁴⁹ CAS contradicts simple causality based on linear equations, whereas, the approach ascribes processes as dynamic and nonlinear characteristics in which relationships and interactions of different agents impact the system or environment (structure) while the agents are also self-organized and shaped by the system itself.⁵⁰ Kavalski remarks on the properties of complex adaptive systems:

(1) it is not a cluster of unrelated activities but an interconnected system; (2) that this is not a simple system, but a complex one; (3) the interconnectedness between the parts of the system is not unchanging, but constantly self-organizing-that is, it is their capacity to cope with new challenges that makes the system adaptive.⁵¹

The “co-evolutionary dance of competition and cooperation” between interacting states enables each actor to adapt in the international processes while the objective of maintaining their interests is still on the agenda to a degree of their capabilities; nevertheless, relatively weak power would avoid any conflict alone with relatively more powerful state and modify its activism in order to adapt changing dynamics in response to feedback loops in the complex system while the great power would also adapt its policies accordingly to a degree of its limited capabilities in the dynamic processes.⁵² Interdependent roles that are pursued accordingly to each actor's interests and maintenance of their survival and their security in the changing environment result in adaptation and then co-evolution in the foreign policies of the actors sharing landscapes; each alteration in the area whether deriving from the actor's activism or

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ The Health Foundation. "Evidence scan: Complex adaptive systems." *The Health Foundation*. August 2010. <https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/ComplexAdaptiveSystems.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2020).

⁵¹ Emilian Kavalski, "The Fifth Debate and the Emergence of Complex International Relations Theory: Notes on the Application of Complexity Theory to the Study of International Life." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 20, no. 3 (September 2007): 435–54. doi:10.1080/09557570701574154.

⁵² Dennis J. D. Sandole, "Complexity and Conflict Resolution" in *Complexity in World Politics: Concepts and Methods of a New Paradigm*, edited by Neil E. Harrison, 43-72. New York: State University of New York Press, 2006.; Neil E. Harrison, "Complex Systems and the Practice of World Politics" in *Complexity in World Politics: Concepts and Methods of a New Paradigm*, Ibid. p.183-196.

from internal dynamics bring about adaptation in the other actors' polities by self-organizing their attitudes which also causes chaining impact on the different actors' polities involving in the area; indeed this synergic adaptation indicates co-evolution in the polities of the varying actors accordingly non-linear dynamics.⁵³ Co-evolution may provide cooperation, coordination, or further competition between interrelated agents pertaining to the changing dynamics, which also serve the foundation of emergent properties and interaction with that emergent phenomena through feedback loops in the structure⁵⁴ that can be observed in the Syrian Civil War.

2.3.Varied and Diversified Actors in the Syrian Complexity

It is evident that there are varied and diversified actors who come into play in the Syrian complexity. In order to clarify the interrelated feedback loops and interactions between those actors, demonstration of a neorealist model in the civil war, as well as basing and improvising this model into the CAS model into Syrian complexity would help to describe the interrelated, connected and adaptive interactions and polities of the actors. Thus on this part of this research, firstly neorealist elliptical billiard ball model defined and described, secondly improvisation of this model in context with the CAS model was made to clarify the interactions and changes. Then the role of the actors in Syria was given to bring a more in-depth description of the events and international dynamics. As seen from the elaborated roles of the actors below, changes in the actors' behaviors, two watersheds directed the change and adaptation of the polities and priorities on the agendas: the rise of the ISIS and the Russian military intervention in Syria by Assad's request on 30 September 2015.

⁵³ Hilton L. Root, *Dynamics Among Nations: The Evolution of Legitimacy and Development in Modern States*. 58-97. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2014. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=nlebk&AN=656635&site=eds-live>.

⁵⁴ Walter C. Clemens, *Complexity Science and World Affairs*. State University of New York Press. Accessed March 12, 2020. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=cat06966a&AN=metu.b2689946&site=eds-live>. p.28-30.

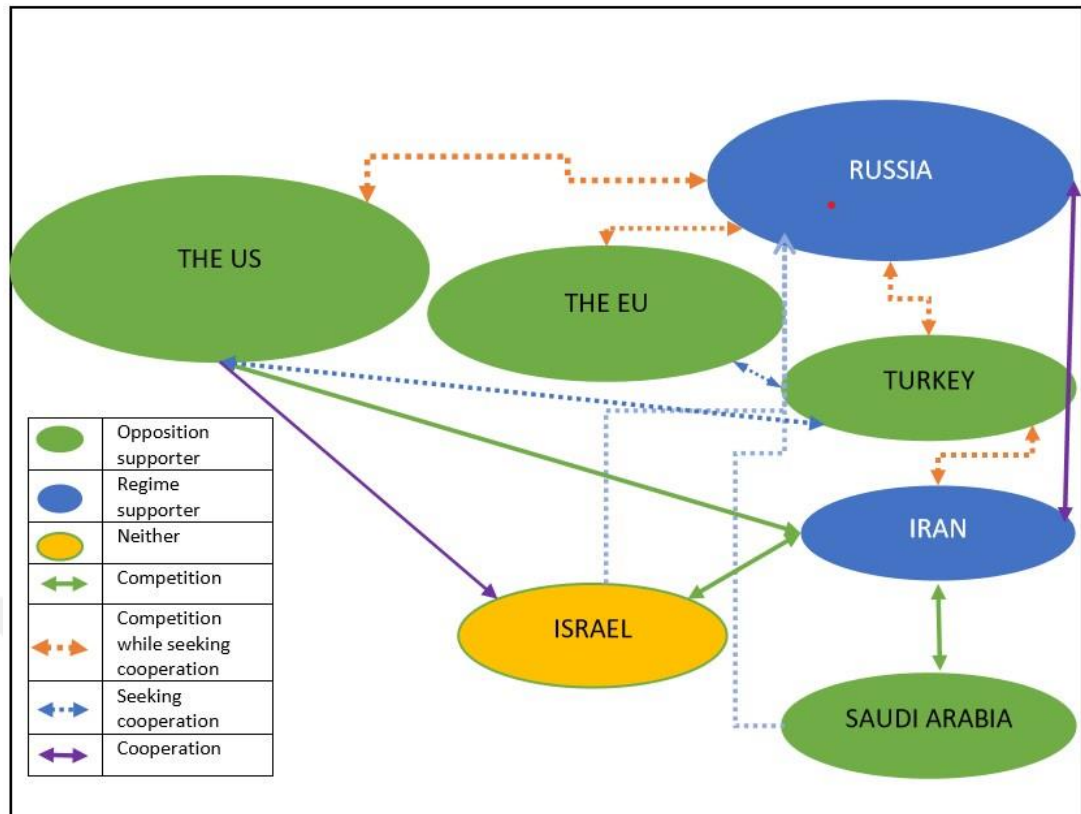


Fig.2.3.1.Elliptical Billiard Balls Model in Syrian Civil War

Billiard balls are not shaped like a circle but elliptical; because the balls are vertically pressured by the systemic restrictions on the activism and on the behaviors of the units (only states), in the meantime horizontally extended due to the varying abilities in the anarchy. The enclosed units are demonstrated as the varying size of balls due to the distribution of the capabilities in the system. Even in the neorealist model, many actors involved in the Syrian Civil War and varying interactions occurred in response to the orientation of the taking specific sides in the disorder and power competition in the current dynamics. However, this model gives insights into the linear dynamics because it externalizes the changes in the dynamics and those effects on the behaviors and interactions between states; in addition, this model also excludes the other important actors.

When the one ball hits any other to a degree of amount, the other ball responds due to its capability to hit in a “predictable” way that leads us to bring the interactions

among the actors together in the system in order to comprehend the sum of its parts which forms the deficient totality of the events. This model offers a proportionate cause-effect in the static relations among the actors and lacks the explanation of the emergent events in the course of time caused by many diverse but interconnected, multiple, dynamic, and various factors. On the other hand, improvising this model and changing the ontological character would give better insights into the Syrian complexity.

Compared with the previous model, the Complex Adaptive Elliptical Billiard model considers non-linear changing dynamics on the interactions between actors. In this model, the diversity of actors included, while the boundaries of the elliptical shape of the billiard balls were distorted in order to adapt to the transforming events and modifying interactions. The core interests, concerns, and policies have been maintained; however, the actors re-organizes their polities to adapt to the new environment while contributing to change dynamics. The balls are not enclosed but penetrable and adaptive to the changing dynamics; nevertheless, diversity and variety of the actors, interconnected events, and interdependence to the changing dynamics on the foreign policies of the actors constitutes the complex structure in Syria. Because of the complexity in area, dynamics do not orient in a linear process, but in a non-linear formation, indeed, due to the non-linear change dynamics in the area, actors are inclined to more flexible to adapt for maintaining their core interests in the Syrian complexity.

Due to the connected, multiple, unproportionate and varied causes; emergent properties carry the characteristics stemmed from the interactions of the many actors which self-organize themselves in the emergence of the new events or phenomena, and because of this adaptation, the system is not complicated but complex which offers a better explanation that the totality is not the sum of the interactions or parts but transcending from the sum of interactions in the system . The balls do not hit only each other but also co-adapt to each other's interactions, the emergent events caused by unproportionate causality, and their environment over time.

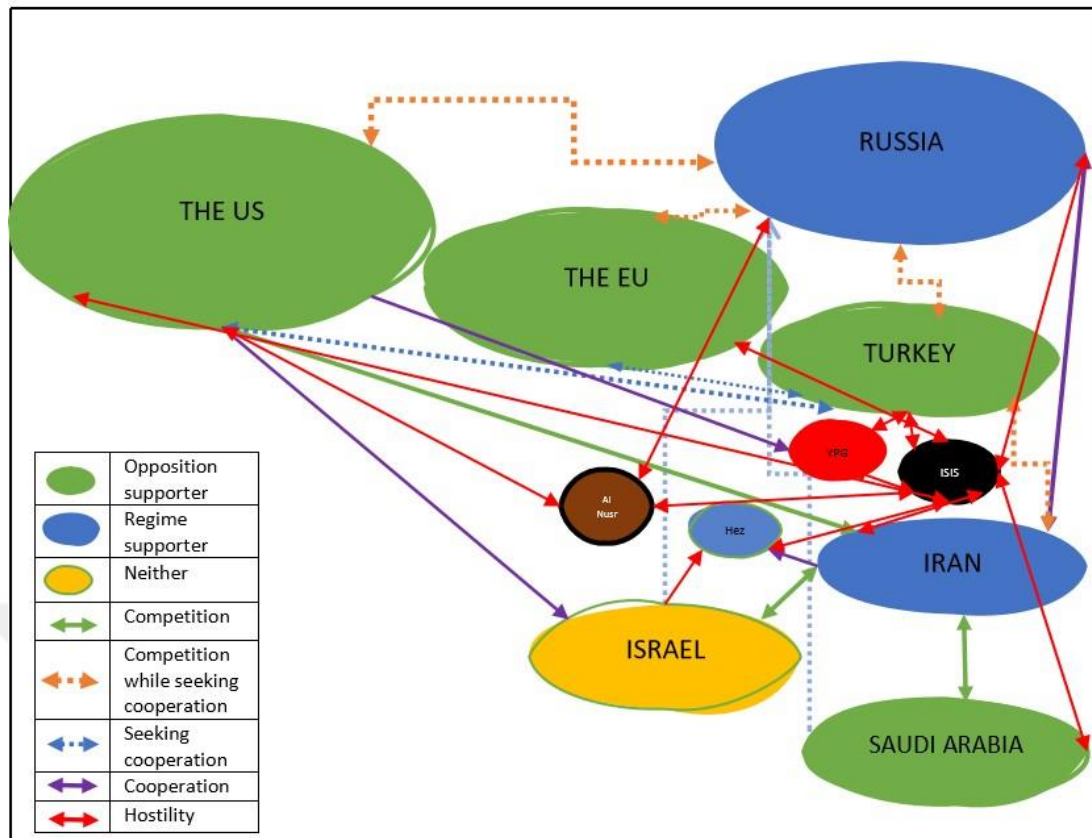


Fig.2.3.2. Complex Adaptive Elliptical Billiard Balls Model in Syrian Complexity (2017-2019)⁵⁵

As famous physicist Albert Einstein pointed out in natural sciences; the events are shaped in the four dimensions of the matter in space which are demonstrated as; the vertical and horizontal co-ordinates constitute the first and second dimensions, the third dimension that gives the matter a volume, and the time as another co-ordinate in the shaping of the matter that generates the fourth dimension in the relations between matter and space.⁵⁶ Similarly, in international relations, it could be argued that there are also four dimensions in the events between interrelated interactions in the complex international system.

⁵⁵ Hostility has been added in the interactions with non-state actors because rivalry or competition is a matter of inter-state interactions, while the competition is not valid on the interactions between states and armed groups.

⁵⁶ Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory*. translated from German into English by Robert W. Lawson. 56-58. New York: Routledge, 1993.

The first and second dimensions constitute the main actors and the interactions between them in the international system. The third dimension, which gives a volume to international events, is formed by the power competition in the system. The fourth dimension as "time" or processes in the international dynamics directs the power competition in the non-linear form of the changing dynamics. In the complex international system, in addition to power struggle guiding by the conflicting or overlapping interests and the interactions between the states constituting per se three dimensions of the system guided by linear processes; the fourth dimension of the international complexity in the vivid structure shaped by the course of the processes and events dynamizes in a non-linear form.

This non-linear characteristics of the power struggle emerge from the structural changes and the continuity in global politics realized in the specific "time" period. In the course of time, power dynamics, the changing dynamics in the area, actors' position, and their interactions co-evolve and co-shape with the events and environments in which the events emerged. However, this co-evolution and co-adaptation, by the course of time, also symbolizes the continuity of the foreign policies of the actors on changing dynamics; the process shaped by the actors also determines the actors' adaptation in their environment. The complexity paradigm considers that both the structure and the actors have been subjected to a change arising from interactions over time when analyzing over processes instead of parts in which totality does not derive from the sum of these parts.⁵⁷ Indeed, by the course of time, the changing dynamics in the area and interconnected relational factors with the varied and diversified actors remodify the power struggle among the actors held conflicting or overlapping interests. The "Complex Adaptive Elliptical Billiard Balls Model" also considers this "time" parameter, which establishes the power struggle in a dynamic, vivid structure that occurs in a non-linear form and contributes to the self-organization of the new circumstances by the interrelated and interdependent actors.

Following this model Syrian complexity will have a better understanding of the description of the actors' roles in the area and then the Astana process in context with

⁵⁷ Hasan Yükselen, "Kompleksite Kuramı ve Diyalektik" in *Tarihsel Materyalizm ve Uluslararası İlişkiler*, edited by Faruk Yalvaç, 309-332. Ankara: İmge Kitabevi Yayınları, 2017.

Complex Adaptive Elliptical Billiard Balls Model. The actors' positions in the complexity will be given in the following parts in order to demonstrate variety and diversity of actors in Syria.

2.3.1.The US

Although one of the main tenets in the foreign policy of Barack Obama Administration (January 2009-January 2017) was based on “universal values” to end the “human suffering” as in Libya by the intervention, central pillar of Obama Doctrine was constructed on multilateralism for the legitimization of any military action, in reaction to his predecessor George W. Bush’s policies founded on unilateralism which boosted anti-Americanism and reduced its credibility in the global politics.⁵⁸ Because Barack Obama’s foreign policy concept established on multilateralism Washington sought to legitimize humanitarian actions by the UNSC approval in order to gain credibility and sharing responsibility on the global challenges; for instance, the US attempted to legitimize Libyan intervention with the UNSC Resolution 1973, however in Syria, it was the opposite because of Russian and Chinese vetoes.⁵⁹

When the uprisings started, Obama urged Syrian President Assad to reform the Syrian political system and end the violence against civilians, however, this narrative soon evolved into regime change policy, then use of chemical weapons became “red line” which crossed by the regime and afterward resolved by the agreement with Russia on disarming the chemical weapons in Syria.⁶⁰ The US abstained from intervening in the country by its hard power while leading from behind the developments with other

⁵⁸Donette Murray, “Military Action but Not as We Know It: Libya, Syria and the Making of an Obama Doctrine.” *Contemporary Politics* 19, no. 2 (June 2013): 146–66. doi:10.1080/13569775.2013.785827.

⁵⁹Nina Hachigian and David Shorr. “The Responsibility Doctrine.” *Washington Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (Winter2012/2013 2013): 73–91. doi:10.1080/0163660X.2013.751652.

⁶⁰Veyssel Kurt, “Trump ve Suriye Krizi.” *SETA*. April 2019. <https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2019/04/A275-TrumpSuriye.pdf> (accessed April 24, 2020).

actors in order to support rebels against Assad with the train-equip program, in accordance with the false prediction that the regime would fall in a short period.⁶¹ Even though the death toll in Syria surpassed the numbers in Libyan Civil War, the Obama administration was reluctant to engage militarily in the area before ISIS' rise in the area, but CIA was authorized to train rebels; moreover, other actors (for instance Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar) were encouraged to take part in the Syrian crisis while the Administration ignored these actors' demand to militarily intervene in the country.⁶²

The US converted its central policy from overthrowing Assad to fight against ISIS in conjunction with Operation Inherent Resolve leading by the US in the Global Coalition against Terrorism⁶³, and also by supporting YPG in the east of Euphrates (north of Syria) and 'moderate rebels' around Al-Tanf base (situated in the M2 Baghdad–Damascus Highway in Homs, Syria), and with its territorial gains, has aimed to compel Assad to make concessions in the Geneva talks; in 2017 the American ambassador to UN signaled that American position would not be focused on overthrowing Assad; besides, Donald Trump administration⁶⁴ ceased the covert

⁶¹Steven Metz, "It's Time to Abandon the Myths Behind America's Syria Strategy." *World Politics Review* (Selective Content), September 25, 2015, 1. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=109979973&site=ehost-live>.

⁶²Shadi Hamid, "What Is Policy Research For? Reflections on the United States' Failures in Syria." *Middle East Law & Governance* 7, no. 3 (September 2015): 373–86. doi:10.1163/18763375-00703006.

⁶³This operation was contributed by European, Middle Eastern, African and Asian states as well as international organizations such as NATO and Arab League. More information can be attained on: <https://www.inherentresolve.mil/>

⁶⁴It should also be mentioned that when Trump came to office after Obama in January 2017, it was analyzed that Trump was more inclined to cooperate with Turkey and Russia in Syria while isolating Iran more in the area: Oktay F. Tanrısever, "Donald Trump Başkanlığında Abd'nin Rusya İle Kurabileceği İlişkiler Ve Ortadoğu Bölgesine Etkileri." *Middle Eastern Analysis / Ortadoğu Analiz* 9, no. 78 (January 2017): 12–15. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=121304305&site=ehost-live>.

arming of Syrian opposition committed to the overthrow of the regime.⁶⁵ American deployment in Syria with nearly 2,000 special forces in a partnership with SDF on the ground (since Obama's term of office in response to the emergence of ISIS) enabled the US to limit Turkey's attacks against YPG, to contribute to the isolation of Iran, and to prevent the resurgence of ISIS.⁶⁶ The US presence in the area also caused further contacts and rivalry with Russia in the area (Washington enhanced bilateral talks with Moscow after Russian military intervention) in order to be an active stakeholder in the negotiation table as well as to persuade Russia to restrain Iranian influence and to preserve Israel's security against Iran in the area.⁶⁷ In addition, the US Al-Tanf base in the southeast of Syria has controlled the M2 highway to Iraq, which restrains the Iranian-Hezbollah corridor and contributes to isolation of Iran; also, the base enables the US to boost its power in the negotiation table on the future of Syria.⁶⁸

In October 2019 the US president Donald Trump abruptly announced the decision of withdrawal from northern Syria, however, the American presence remains in the east of Syria asserting to prevent ISIS' resurgence and to safeguard the oil revenues in Deir al-Zour from ISIS.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Aaron Stein, *What Turkey's Afrin Operation Says about Options for the United States*. February 14, 2018. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/what-turkey-s-afrin-operation-says-about-options-for-the-united-states-2/> (accessed April 17, 2020).

⁶⁶Brett McGurk, "Hard Truths in Syria: America Can't Do More With Less, and It Shouldn't Try." *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 3 (May 2019): 69–84. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=135900370&site=ehost-live>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸Geoffrey Aronson, *Washington fights to stay in Syria game from isolated base*. April 26, 2020. <https://thearabweekly.com/washington-fights-stay-syria-game-isolated-base> (accessed May 09, 2020).; İlhan Uzgel, *ABD Suriye'de kalıcı mı?* February 05, 2018. <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2018/02/05/abd-suriyede-kalici-mi/> (accessed May 09, 2020).

⁶⁹Kathy Gilsinan, *What Was the Point of the Syria 'Withdrawal'?* October 25, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/10/what-was-the-point-syria->

2.3.2.The EU

At the beginning of the Arab uprisings, the EU announced that Europe supported democratic movements in the Middle East, which is essential for the stability and security of the EU due to the geographical proximity; on the other hand, Europe was affected rather than playing an active role in the Syrian crisis because of the intensive refugee crisis and lack of coherent action in Common Foreign and Security Policy.⁷⁰ The EU members reached consensus on denouncing the regime, urging Assad to resign, and launching sanctions because of increasing humanitarian crisis; however, member states were divided by how to respond to the crisis on the issues of military intervention (For instance France and the UK lobbied for intervention contrary to Germany and Italy that disagreed on the issue), and of the refugees' entry in Schengen area.⁷¹ Besides, Europe considered the regime as an illegitimate actor on the ground, even on the fight against extremism, and actively supported rebel forces financially and diplomatically; the EU lifted oil embargo (which was launched in 2011) in Syria when rebels captured oil fields, declared Syrian National Council as a legitimate representative of Syrian people, encouraged regional, international and state actors against the regime, and eased the arms embargo in order to pave the way for transferring military types of equipment in 2013.⁷²

withdrawal/600829/ (accessed May 08, 2020).; Karen DeYoung, et al, *Trump decided to leave troops in Syria after conversations about oil, officials say*. October 26, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-defense-secretary-mark-esper-says-us-will-leave-forces-in-syria-to-defend-oil-fields-from-islamic-state/2019/10/25/fd131f1a-f723-11e9-829d-87b12c2f85dd_story.html (accessed May 08, 2020).

⁷⁰ Sinem Kocamaz, "Avrupa Birliği ve Ortadoğu: Bir Uluslararası Aktörün İnandırıcılık Sorunu" In *Küresel ve Bölgesel Güçlerin Ortadoğu Politikaları; Arap Baharı ve Sonrası*, edited by Tarık Oğuzlu & Ceyhan Çiçekçi, 101-129. Ankara: Nobel, 2019.

⁷¹ Francesco Cavatorta and Pierre-Michel Turcotte, "The European Union and Syria" In *The War for Syria: Regional and International Dimensions of the Syrian Uprising*, edited by Raymond Hinnebusch & Adham Saouli, 261-276. New York: Routledge, 2020.

⁷² Rim Turkmani and Mustafa Haid, "The role of the EU in the Syrian conflict." *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*. February 2016. <https://www.fes->

When insecurities enhanced to spill over to the EU, European states focused on reducing humanitarian crises while endeavoring to keep the refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt in order to minimize the refugee crisis in the continent.⁷³ Also, the gaining momentum of radicalism by ISIS and Al-Nusra led to terrorist attacks in Europe, along with the refugee crisis the radicalism threat and returning European foreign fighters became essential issues in the EU which resulted in increasing counter-terrorism efforts.⁷⁴ Changing dynamics led European leaders to incline more to endeavor resolution of the conflict, seek partnerships against jihadist groups, and decrease the tone of narratives about Assad while re-engaging with Russia despite Ukraine crisis to persuade Assad for concessions on the political transition in Syria.⁷⁵

2.3.3.Saudi Arabia

Saudi foreign policy in Syria determined as isolation of the Assad government which was enhanced by the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri in February 2005, later Riyadh softened its tone towards Damascus in 2009 in an effort to break up “axis of resistance” from Iran; however when uprisings began Saudis played an active role in suspending Syria's membership in the Arab League and supporting the opposition militarily and financially in order to diminish the power

europe.eu/fileadmin/public/editorfiles/events/Maerz_2016/FES_LSE_Syria_Turkmani_Haid_2016_02_23.pdf (accessed May 09, 2020).

⁷³ Sinem Kocamaz, Ibid.

⁷⁴ Çiğdem Nas, “The EU’s Approach to the Syrian Crisis: Turkey as a Partner?” *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 16, no.62 (June 2019): 45-64. doi: 10.33458/uidergisi.588912.

⁷⁵ Anchal Vohra, *Europe Doesn’t Even Agree on Assad Anymore*. March 08, 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/08/europe-doesnt-even-agree-on-assad-anymore/> (accessed May 09, 2020).; Tom O'connor, *West Needs Russia's Help To Fight ISIS And Assad Can Stay, France's Macron Says*. June 21, 2017. <https://www.newsweek.com/west-need-russia-help-fight-isis-assad-stay-macron-628119> (accessed May 09, 2020).

of Assad and Iranian influence in the country.⁷⁶ Riyadh urged Western intervention in Syria against the Assad regime to limit Iranian influence in the area⁷⁷, on the other hand; rapprochement between the US and Iran in the term of Obama Administration and US reluctance to intervene militarily in the area resulted in more proactive politics in financing opposition groups more, especially Salafist fractions in that groups except for ISIS and sought for engaging with other actors in the area; however, when the US intervened in Syria, Saudi Arabia requested Washington to stay as long as possible to curb Iranian influence, while engaging with Russia in an effort to cooperate and request Russia to limit Iran's influence in the area.⁷⁸

2.3.4. Israel

Transformations seen in the immediate vicinity of Israel has led Tel-Aviv's reaction in the events of Syria as "strategic unresponsiveness"; while Israel has been still *de jure* in a war against Syria and holds Golan Heights, threats have emanated from radical substate actors more than weakened Assad regime and there was no guarantee

⁷⁶Benedetta Berti and Yoel Guzansky. "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy on Iran and the Proxy War in Syria: Toward a New Chapter?" *Israel Journal of foreign Affairs* 8, no.3 (2014): 25-34. <https://www.inss.org.il/he/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/systemfiles/SystemFiles/Saudi%20Arabia's%20foreign%20policy%20on%20Iran%20and%20the%20proxy%20war%20in%20Syria.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Saudi Arabia does not possess sufficient military capability (despite its military modernization) to achieve certain victory in the war, for this reason, Riyadh urges great powers to curb rising Iranian influence in the region; on the other hand, "Riyalpolitik" is one of the prominent means in its foreign policy by exploiting massive financial capacities to direct the wars and diplomatic processes: May Darwich, "Saudi Policies in the Syrian Crisis." in *The War for Syria: Regional and International Dimensions of the Syrian Uprising*, edited by Raymond Hinnebusch & Adham Saouli, 120-137. New York: Routledge, 2020.; Mehran Kamrava, "Accessing the Multipolarity and Instability in the Middle East." *Orbis* 62, no. 4 (October 2018): 598–616. doi:10.1016/j.orbis.2018.08.003.

⁷⁸ Yehuda U. Blanga, "Saudi Arabia's Motives in the Syrian Civil War." *Middle East Policy* 24, no. 4 (December 2017): 45–62. doi:10.1111/mepo.12307.; Frank Gardner, *Saudi Arabia warms to Russia's embrace*. October 16, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50054546> (accessed May 21, 2020).; Arab News. *Al-Jubeir: Saudi Arabia to engage with Russia to support Syria political solution*. August 29, 2018. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1363741/middle-east> (accessed May 21, 2020).

that new possible regime would carry on friendly relations with Israel.⁷⁹ Tel Aviv's mentioned strategy has been composed of non-involvement directly in the civil war, however targeting Hezbollah, attempting to curb rising Iranian influence in the area and sometimes operating in its northern borders against radical elements.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the primary concern of Israel in the area has been securing its northern borders and the significant Iranian presence in the civil war; to decrease this influence, Tel-Aviv sought cooperation with Russia in the area and augmenting support from the US.⁸¹

2.3.5.Hezbollah

Under the Assad regime, Syria has been vital for Hezbollah's interests due to the weapon and material supply route from Iran and "resistance" against Israel; thus, from the beginning of the Civil War, Hezbollah supported the regime firstly in the training and advisory role for preparing the Syrian Army in guerilla warfare in the cities, then deploying its combat forces since 2013.⁸² Damascus has benefited from the organization in order to train its military for guerilla tactics for the operations in the cities and strengthened its position in some areas; nonetheless, the paramilitary organization also fought against opposition and extremist forces in al-Qusayr (the district of Homs province and close to Lebanon) located in the Iranian-Hezbollah supply route and protected Shia shrines in Damascus alongside other Shia proxies of

⁷⁹ Ceyhun Çiçekçi, "Paryanın Hegemonyası: Arap Baharı Prizmasından İsrail'in Ortadoğu Politikaları" in *Küresel ve Bölgesel Güçlerin Ortadoğu Politikaları; Arap Baharı ve Sonrası*, edited by Tarık Oğuzlu & Ceyhun Çiçekçi, 201-243. Ankara: Nobel, 2019.; Ceyhun Çiçekçi, "Arap Baharı Sonrasında İsrail'in Ulusal Güvenlik Politikasını Kavramsallaştırmak." *Akademik Ortadoğu* 12, no.2 (2018): 99-123.

⁸⁰ Çiçekçi, Ceyhun. "Arap Baharı Sonrasında İsrail'in Ulusal Güvenlik Politikasını Kavramsallaştırmak." *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Gawdat Bahgat, "The Brewing War between Iran and Israel: Strategic Implications." *Middle East Policy* 25, no. 3 (September 2018): 67–79. doi:10.1111/mepo.12362.; Zvi Magen, "The Trilateral Israel-US-Russia Meeting: Motives and Ramifications." *INSS*. June 23, 2019. <https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/No.-1178.pdf> (accessed May 21, 2020).

⁸² Armenak Tokmajyan, "Hezbollah's Military Intervention in Syria." *Approaching Religion* 4, no. 2 (December 2014): 105–12. doi:10.30664/ar.67554.

Iran against extremist groups.⁸³ Disturbed by Hezbollah's growing influence in the country, Assad had the opportunity to break the influence (even slightly) of the organization with the Russian intervention in the civil war; on the other hand, in line with the changing dynamics, Iran's proxy Hezbollah tried to achieve a strategic position against Israel by deploying its paramilitary forces on the Syrian-Israeli border, especially in the Golan Heights.⁸⁴

2.3.6. Al-Nusra

At the beginning of the Civil War, leader of Al-Qaeda Ayman al-Zawahiri embarked organization's Syrian faction as Jabhat al-Nusra, then Jabhat Fateh al-Sham and lastly Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) for the objectives of overthrowing Assad and establishment of "Islamic Emirate" in Syria. Indeed Al-Nusra attempted to merge with other opposition groups and tried to hide its relations with Al-Qaeda over time while holding its network in order to attract the opposition groups and foreign funding, in an effort to adapt the changing dynamics which has been in favor of the regime after Russian intervention.⁸⁵ Because of that, this radical actor's name changed in response to altered dimensions of the Syrian complexity. The strategy of this group aimed "nationalization" of the "jihad" and engagement with opposition as well as Syrian society in the Syrian context; in contrast to ISIS which drew apart from the Al-Qaeda (AQ), became rival of Al-Nusra and intended to merge its territories in

⁸³Marisa Sullivan, "Hezbollah in Syria." *Institute for the Study of War*. April 2014. http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah_Sullivan_FINAL.pdf (accessed May 23, 2020).

⁸⁴ Mohanad Hage Ali, "Power Points Defining the Syria-Hezbollah Relationship." *Carnegie Middle East Center*. March 2019. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Hage_Ali_Hezbollah_final1.pdf (accessed May 22, 2020).

⁸⁵ Seth G. Jones, "Al-Qaeda's Quagmire in Syria." *Survival* (00396338) 60, no. 5 (October 2018): 181–98. doi:10.1080/00396338.2018.1518381.

Iraq and Syria under “*Islamic Caliphate*”.⁸⁶ Benefiting from divided leadership of opposition forces, HTS has been attempting to establish an enclave based on the leadership of the organization in Idlib that also hinders the application of de-escalation zone⁸⁷ in the northwest of Syria in context with Astana Process.⁸⁸

2.3.7. ISIS

The roots of ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) derived from Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi which was the faction of Al-Qaeda benefiting from the power vacuum in Iraq by the US occupation in 2003; nevertheless, the terrorist organization was based on Zarqawi’s network, continuity of priorities distinct from AQ and methods of the AQI.⁸⁹ Zarqawi had disagreements with AQ (for instance, his group had priorities in the power vacuum by adding dimensions of sectarian brutality against Shias) that would result in separation from AQ by his network over time with the rise of ISIS; soon after the assassination of Zarqawi, the group subordinated to him declared that Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) was established; following the changing dynamics in the area with the civil war in Syria, the organization entered into Syria via helping the establishment of Al-Nusra and attempted to merge with that organization into its leadership and declared the foundation of ISIS without modern states’ boundaries; however, Al-Nusra showed its allegiance to AQ in which opposed such a merger, disavowed the relations with ISIS

⁸⁶ Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, “The Case of Jabhat Al-Nusra in the Syrian Conflict 2011-2016: Towards a Strategy of Nationalization?” *Mediterranean Politics* 24, no. 2 (April 2019): 260–67. doi:10.1080/13629395.2017.1392709.

⁸⁷ The establishment of this zone necessitates the temporary ceasefire between the opposition and regime forces (which will be elaborated in Chapter 4). Still, the strong presence of HTS in Idlib problematizes making a distinction between the opposition and this terrorist organization in order to apply cessation of hostilities between the regime and opposition forces.

⁸⁸ Aron Lund, *A Jihadist Breakup in Syria*. September 15, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2017-09-15/jihadist-breakup-syria> (accessed May 13, 2020).

⁸⁹ Joby Warrick, *Siyah Bayraklar: IŞİD’in Doğuşu ve Yükselişi*. translated from English into Turkish by Işık Tansal. 25-184. Istanbul: A7 Kitap, 2016.

and focused on overthrowing Assad for the establishment of *sharia* in Syria instead of prioritizing the breaking up boundaries; that resulted in a rivalry between those actors.⁹⁰

ISIS urged for *hijrah* to its sympathizers around the world to Syria and Iraq in order to strengthen its human-power in the area; nevertheless, the organization also called for *lone-wolf*⁹¹ terrorist activities in their country for those who could not arrive in the area which increased internal insecurities of the other regions and states, especially Europe and Turkey.⁹² The rise of ISIS in northern Iraq (de facto capital Mosul) and northern Syria (de facto capital Raqqa, and motivational strategic base Dabiq⁹³) by the year 2014 destabilized the area and surrounding countries more by changing the dynamics of the civil war. While the global and regional actors have maintained their objectives; their priorities have altered in Syria; because, while the terrorist organization did not pose an existential threat to West, however, it propagated terrorism and spreaded its violent ideology in the Western and MENA countries, in addition to increasing massive refugee influx into those countries while extending its territories in a barbaric way; nonetheless ISIS prepared the ground for Western, Russian, and regional actors' direct intervention in Syria with the help of their proxies, as well as the foundation of strategic ties between YPG and the other

⁹⁰ Ahmed S. Hashim, "The Islamic State: From Al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate." *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 69–83. doi:10.1111/mepo.12096.

⁹¹ "Lone-wolf" conceptualized as individuals or small cells that were affected by terrorist organizations' propaganda facilities and participated in terrorist activities without leaders. This method has also promoted by Al-Qaeda, as seen from its magazine "Inspire": Jennifer Varriale Carson and Matthew Suppenbach, "Lone Wolf Terrorism: The New Form of the Global Jihadist Movement? Evidence from Afghanistan (1997–2013)." *Journal of the Middle East & Africa* 7, no. 4 (October 2016): 441–53. doi:10.1080/21520844.2016.1238291.

⁹² Julian Droogan and Shane Peattie. "Mapping the Thematic Landscape of Dabiq Magazine." *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 6 (December 2017): 591–620. doi:10.1080/10357718.2017.1303443.

⁹³ Dabiq refers to a Syrian town, which is believed that the apocalypse (an apocalyptic battle between Islamic armies and the forces of "Rome") would begin in there according to *hadiths*; thus the location had been aligning ISIS' military strategy with an eschatological interpretation of end-time prophecy: Vicken Cheterian, "ISIS and the Killing Fields of the Middle East." *Survival* (00396338) 57, no. 2 (April 2015): 105–18. doi:10.1080/00396338.2015.1026089.

actors especially the US, which concerned Turkey because of the fear of Kurdish separatism.⁹⁴

2.3.8.YPG

YPG is the armed faction of SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces), dominated by PYD (Democratic Union Party) that based on Kurdish activism as well as the objectives of “*democratic autonomy*” and “*granting Kurdish rights*”; PYD has been an affiliate organization of PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) in Syria and rejected KNC’s (Kurdish National Council) leadership -which has cooperative connections with Turkey and KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq)⁹⁵- on Kurdish movement in Syria in order to operate under united opposition front with other opposition factions against the regime without concerning Kurdish separation.⁹⁶ The power vacuum and lack of authority in the north of Syria emanated from the civil war offered YPG/PYD to strengthen its connections with the terrorist organization PKK and to control in some cantons as seen in The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria that also became a model of captured PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan’s “*democratic confederalism*” idea applying Kurdish self-rule in practice

⁹⁴ Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*. 233-256. London: William Collins, 2015.; Milena Sterio, "The Applicability of the Humanitarian Intervention 'Exception' to the Middle Eastern Refugee Crisis: Why the International Community Should Intervene Against ISIS." *Suffolk Transnational Law Review* 38, no.2 (Summer 2015): 325-357. https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=http://scholar.google.com.tr/&httpsredir=1&article=1813&context=fac_articles.; Evaghoras L. Evaghorou, “Turbulent Times in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Struggle for Power.” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (March 2018): 1–18. doi:10.1215/10474552-4397233.

⁹⁵ There is a KRG-PKK rivalry (under KDP leadership in KRG) in Kurdish politics that demonstrated itself in the dimensions of the obtaining Kurdish political leadership, ideological reasons, and pragmatic relations with other actors: Hannes Černý, *Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations: Theory and Ethnic Conflict*. 197-238. New York: Routledge, 2018.

⁹⁶Syria Resources. *The Kurdish Democratic Union Party*. March 01, 2012. <https://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=48526&reloadFlag=1> (accessed June 02, 2020).

experimentally while pragmatically “*respecting the existing borders*”⁹⁷ at the moment.⁹⁸

With the emergence and rise of the ISIS in 2014, the US, Russia, the regime and other actors have established tactical ad hoc alliances with YPG in order to fight against ISIS and al-Nusra; nevertheless, the victories against ISIS in the area served YPG to consolidate its power and autonomy in the area and its cantons in Jazira, Kobane, and Afrin to unite under one authority and apply co-administration models with local Arabs under the Kurdish authority.⁹⁹ YPG’s adaptation and activism on the changing dynamics alarmed Turkey and affected its interactions with Russia and the US; indeed Washington has cooperated with the organization while also concerned the relations with Ankara and attempted to mediate between opposite sides, nevertheless also applied carrot and stick tactics in the relations with Ankara with regard to the Kurdish issue and on the Turkish-American relations; similarly, Moscow has maintained diplomatic relations with the organization and pursued mediation between YPG and the regime while allowing Ankara to conduct military operations against YPG; on the other hand, the organization has been used as Kurdish card

⁹⁷ It should be noted that PKK's (which is also one of the main determinants of Turkey's foreign policy) central aim is based on Pan-Kurdism; indeed, the objective of united *Kurdistan* under Marxist ideology contradicting traditional feudal Kurdish politics has never faded away: Graham E. Fuller and Henri J. Barkey, *Türkiye'nin Kürt Meselesi*. translated from English into Turkish by Hasan Kaya. 45-74. 4th Edition. Istanbul: Profil, 2015.

⁹⁸ Zeynep Kaya and Matthew Whiting, “Sowing Division: Kurds in the Syrian War.” *Middle East Policy* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 79–91. doi:10.1111/mepo.12253.

⁹⁹ H. Akın Ünver, “Militancy Governance under State Failure: Models of Legitimacy Contestation in Ungoverned Spaces.” *Security Strategies Journal* 13, no. 26 (October 2017): 45–83. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=126366869&site=ehost-live>; Halil Atilla Sivrikaya, “Arap Bahari’nin Suriye Sahasında Arap Diline Olan Yansımaları: Pyd/YPG Örneği.” *Journal of Security Science* 8, no. 2 (November 2019): 329–57. doi:10.28956/gbd.646356; OFRA BENGIO, “The Improbable Rise and Uncertain Future of Syria’s Kurds.” *American Interest* 14, no. 6 (July 2019): 32–34. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=137224208&site=ehost-live>.

against Ankara by the mentioned great powers on the changing dynamics and relational factors in the area.¹⁰⁰



¹⁰⁰Fehim Taştekin, *Rusya Kürt kartını açıyor mu?* February 20, 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2020/02/turkey-syria-russia-idlib-unfolding-kobani-card-kurds-sdg.html> (accessed June 03, 2020).; Sait Yılmaz, *Suriye’de dönüm noktası; YPG/PKK’ya ne olacak?* October 20, 2019. <https://tele1.com.tr/suriyede-donum-noktasi-ypg-pkkya-ne-olacak-93526/> (accessed June 03, 2020).

CHAPTER 3

FOREIGN POLICIES OF RUSSIA, TURKEY AND IRAN ON SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

The guarantors of the Astana Process; Russia, Turkey, and Iran have followed different policies and demonstrated divergent outlooks regarding the crisis. Indeed the priorities and set agendas differed from one another as well as objectives to pursue in the disorder occurred by fragmented and diversified dynamics in Syria. Whereas overthrowing Assad may pose an “existential threat” to Iran, it would signify losing a strategic partner in contrast with her global calculations for Russia. On the other hand, Turkey in coordination with the US, has aimed to establish a new government. However “unpredictable” events of changing dynamics resulted in diversification of states’ agendas. The prolongation of the civil war led to the introduction of new actors along with it, and especially the states sharing the border with Syria were also exposed to new threats.

3.1. Russian Foreign Policy on Syria

Moscow has been skeptical about Arab uprisings from the beginning and, has not perceived it as a benign character because of its possible outcome of destabilizing the region and resulting in insecurities due to the aims of opponents and rebel forces links

to Al-Qaeda.¹⁰¹ But in the early times of the Arab uprisings, Moscow approached with caution to the demonstrations but urge governments to reform and establish dialogue channels with the society¹⁰² to prevent any upheaval and maintain stability in the region. The Kremlin was cautious due to the events and carefully analyzed the facts and followed the “wait and see” policy. Accepted political change in Egypt by following pragmatic foreign policy trying to take care of keeping good relations with all parties because of the fact that there were not direct foreign military involvement, even when Libyan Crisis occurred Russia abstained to veto the Resolution 1973¹⁰³ in the UNSC to allow the establishment no-fly zone in Libya but also expressed her concerns on the threat of rise of Islamism and its possible affect on the security of North Caucasus due to the external intervention while avoiding harsh discourses in the events of Bahrain and Yemen.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Andrew Monaghan, *The New Politics of Russia, Interpreting Change*. Great Britain: Manchester University Press, 2016.

¹⁰²As the former President Dmitry Medvedev answers the question on Tunisia at Davos Economic Forum: “*I think that what happened in Tunisia was a big lesson for governments all around the world. Governments should not sit on their laurels and settle back in comfy chairs, but need to grow and develop together with society, regardless of where they are: in Europe, Africa, or Latin America...Even if governments in power find many of the demands made unacceptable they still must remain in dialogue with all the different groups because otherwise they lose their real foundation. This does not mean that governments should automatically follow all recommendations made, but they must listen to what people are saying. I therefore think this is a big lesson for Africa, for the Arab world, and for governments in general.*”: Dmitry Medvedev, *Dmitry Medvedev addressed the World Economic Forum in Davos*. January 26, 2011. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/10163#sel=68:3:L33,68:141:kjr> (accessed March 01, 2020).

¹⁰³ The Resolution did not foresee any direct regime change and military occupation by NATO and stating “*Authorizes Member States that have notified the Secretary-General, acting nationally or through regional organizations or arrangements, and acting in cooperation with the Secretary-General, to take all necessary measures...while **excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory***” and also reaffirms: “*its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya*”

¹⁰⁴Mark N. Katz, *Russia and the Arab Spring*. April 03, 2012. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/russia-and-arab-spring> (accessed January 11, 2020).

When protest demonstrations began in Syria, Moscow firstly encouraged Assad government to reform the political system¹⁰⁵ in order to alleviate Western criticism and prevent growing upheavals in Syria. In the Syrian case what was calculated was turned out to be wrong estimations for Western powers, Russia has not followed just passive policies, and did not only settle for encouraging reforms but also used her active policy instruments such as her veto power in the UNSC¹⁰⁶ and military engagement with the civil war in favor of Assad.

Meetings with Russian delegates and opposition representatives were held in 2011 but as there was no satisfactory result, Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Sergey Lavrov suggested that after the meetings, the opposition did not provide an adequate political alternative.¹⁰⁷ Russia stayed away from direct intervention at the start of the civil war, maintained negotiation efforts, but supported the regime with weapons and sent military advisors to Damascus and provided air defense systems against any foreign intervention in late 2012.¹⁰⁸ Also in late November 2012 Lavrov stated that: “Russia’s involvement in the armed conflict is absolutely out of the question”¹⁰⁹ as

¹⁰⁵Kremlin.ru. *Telephone conversation with President of Syria Bashar al-Assad*. May 24, 2011. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/11327> (accessed March 01, 2020).

¹⁰⁶ Indeed by December 2019, Russia vetoed 14 draft Resolutions. See also: Security Council Report. *UN Documents for Syria: Other*. December 20, 2019. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/other-documents/page/1?ctype=Syria&cbtype=syria#038;cbtype=syria (accessed February 16, 2020).

¹⁰⁷ Daria Vorobyeva, "Russian Policy in the early Syrian conflict." In *The War for Syria: Regional and International Dimensions of the Syrian Uprising*, edited by Raymond Hinnebusch & Adham Saouli, 228-244. New York: Routledge, 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Valery Dzutsati, "Russia’s Syria War: A Strategic Trap?" *Middle East Policy* 25, no. 2 (June 2018): 42–50. doi:10.1111/mepo.12341.

¹⁰⁹ TASS Russian News Agency. *Russia involvement in Syria armed conflict out of question – Lavrov*. November 28, 2012. <https://tass.com/middle-east-and-north-africa/686069> (accessed March 03, 2020).

well as in the same year remarking that “Russia does not defend Assad” while trying to contact opposition and put the regime and opponents on the negotiating table.¹¹⁰

It could be argued that Western involvement in the uprisings by supporting opponents and rebel forces actively and continuously inviting Assad to resign visibly, provoked Russians to maintain a more active policy. Likewise, given the interests of Russia in Syria (such as preserving her rights in Tartus Port and her influence in the area), the suspicions that if Assad had fallen, she could not maintain her relations as well as before, and that the Western influence would be more effectively applied to isolate Russia, had been found more in the political ground. The Kremlin and the rebel forces could not come to a common ground, and the rebel groups could not offer any alternatives that could please Russia. It has been argued that Moscow’s policy is not to defend Assad as personally but state institutions that symbolized under Assad’s regime.¹¹¹ Lavrov has stated that as soon as a new Syrian constitution created, there should be elections that free, fair, monitored by the UN, and by the votes, it should be determined if Assad must go or not.¹¹² Considering failed example of political transition in Libya that resulted in second civil war (2014-present) in the country and uncertain leadership in the possible future of Syria, as well as endangering the constructive role in the country, the events pushed the Kremlin into more aggressive policies in the course of time. Since 2013 Russia’s state-owned arms manufacturer Rosoboronexport has delivered more weapons to the Syrian regime and by November 2015, Russia supplied S-300 air defence system¹¹³ in Latakia after shot down of

¹¹⁰ Mark N. Katz, “Russia and the Conflict in Syria: Four Myths.” *Middle East Policy* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 38–46. doi:10.1111/mepo.12018.

¹¹¹ Ruslan Mamedov, *What Russia Wants in Syria*. October 07, 2019. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/what-russia-wants-in-syria/> (accessed February 28, 2020).

¹¹² Sergey Lavrov, *It is Not Russia That is Shaping This World Order, It Is History*. July 03, 2018. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/it-is-not-russia-that-is-shaping-this-world-order-it-is-history/> (accessed February 27, 2020).

¹¹³ Moritz Pieper, “‘Rising Power’ Status and the Evolution of International Order: Conceptualising Russia’s Syria Policies” *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 3 (March 2019): 365–387. doi:10.1080/09668136.2019.1575950.

Russian Su-24 by Turkish F-16 to deter any foreign involvement and help the regime to fight against the rebel forces.

In this environment, Russian air strikes began when rebel forces arrived about 8 km from the Damascus presidential palace.¹¹⁴ By intervening in Syria, Russia has not only to strengthen Assad's hand in the negotiations against the opposition, but she also prevented Assad from falling and helped to demonstrate regime as a legitimate party (at that time his resignation was calculated, and that was considered a necessary precondition for resuming peace talks for the West and other regional actors) in the negotiations.¹¹⁵ Intervention by NATO in Libya and the allegations of used chemical weapons by Syrian regime determined Moscow's outlook in Syria, and by engaging in Syria via Assad's request on 30 September 2015¹¹⁶; Russia has become one of the key players in the civil war by militarily and diplomatically. Moscow targeted every anti-Assad armed group deemed *terrorists* by Assad, including ISIS, from the air and paved the way for the regime forces to capture key zones mainly in western and northwestern Syria and cities such as Deir Ezzor, Aleppo and Palmyra with the land support of Iran, Hezbollah¹¹⁷ and a Russian mercenary Wagner Army in coordination with Russian forces.¹¹⁸

On this part of the research, it will be analyzed that; Russian foreign policy on the issue of Syrian Civil War has a variety of dimensions including Russian outlook of

¹¹⁴ Emil Aslan Souleimanov, "Mission Accomplished? Russia's Withdrawal from Syria." *Middle East Policy* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 108–18. doi:10.1111/mepo.12198.

¹¹⁵ Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Valery Dzutsati, *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ "Russia's military — including elite ground forces, the latest Su-34 strike fighters, Buk-M2 missile systems, KA-52 attack helicopters, and other technologically advanced assets — had been deployed in the Middle Eastern country, apparently at Bashar al-Assad's request, since August 2015 and in combat since late September.": Emil Aslan Souleimanov, "Mission Accomplished? *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Moritz Pieper, *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Neil Hauer, *The Rise and Fall of a Russian Mercenary Army*. October 06, 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/06/rise-fall-russian-private-army-wagner-syrian-civil-war/> (accessed March 12, 2020).

the world affairs and her place in the global politics basing her view on the international system as multipolar and placing herself as an equal partner with the Western states in this system, norm contestation between non-interference in domestic politics and concerns of regime change policies, the threat of jihadist terrorism to her mainland and Near Abroad and also geopolitical concerns.

3.1.1.Global Calculations

Russia's economically and politically fragile position has recovered from her weak position by the collapse of the USSR, and to this point, Russian foreign policy has been more active due to her capabilities from utilizing her power for her security concerns. Russian MENA policies are part of her global objectives as being a power center and pursuing her interests in her Near Abroad¹¹⁹ and status enhancing in the international system. In 2007 at Munich Security Conference, President of Russia Vladimir Putin addressed the concerns of Russia, remarking unipolarity is unacceptable and unipolar model is not applicable also pointed out that rising economies and growing political influence of other countries would strengthen multipolarity.¹²⁰ While the Russian multipolar order worldview was dominant in the understanding that grouping of regional powers rising to balance the US at first, this multipolarity view soon evolved into the debates that regional powers could compete amongst each other while the US influence and strength has been declining in the

¹¹⁹ Near Abroad can be simply defined as post-Soviet space, which shares the neighborhood with Russia. Russia, under Vladimir Putin's rule (1999-to today), alternately President, Prime Minister and again President of Russia, has engaged more militarily, economically, and politically in this area more to secure her sphere of influence in the area: ELIAS GÖTZ, "Putin, the State, and War: The Causes of Russia's Near Abroad Assertion Revisited." *International Studies Review* 19, no. 2 (June 2017): 228–53. doi:10.1093/isr/viw009.

¹²⁰ Kremlin.ru. *Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy*. February 10, 2007. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034#sel=15:1:LI3,15:71:lvo;18:1:Xjo,18:61:v2v;27:1:Wrw,27:29:v26;31:32:L66,31:95:u3o;32:113:D6m,32:165:l3j;35:1:Wym,35:18:rm3;38:1:W63,38:68:Dm1;50:1:Qlx,50:51:Z2j;51:1:E6r,51:54:jjj;52:26:HR3,52:146:p3j> (accessed February 19, 2020).

global politics, that may also cause instability as well as an opportunity to gaining more influence and strength in the globe for Russia.¹²¹

Indeed, Russia under Vladimir Putin's rule has augmented its presence in the Middle East politics benefiting from the reluctance of the US under the Obama Administration to involve actively in the MENA region; Putin has established pragmatic relations with the regional powers while abstaining from taking sides of the regional rivalries to enhance Moscow's leverage on the MENA and global issues and to break US monopoly on the global politics in order to demonstrate itself as an equal partner in the global agenda.¹²²

The importance of the Middle East in 3 different places (articles 15, 16 and 18) was mentioned in the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, where it was noted that Russia would continue to claim to be the "world-leading power" in 2015.¹²³ Whereas in the Russian Federation's National Security Strategy dated on 12 May 2009, the expression of the Middle East was mentioned only in the 11th article; so it can be claimed that the importance of the Middle East has started to increase in the eyes of Moscow with the events of Arab Spring and the rise of ISIS.¹²⁴

Russia applied for military interventions, aiming to increase its status and maintain its influence in global politics.¹²⁵ Russia, which aims to be an equal dialogue partner with the US, has been trying to stand out as an indispensable actor in the order to be

¹²¹ Andrew Monaghan, "'An Enemy at the Gates' or 'From Victory to Victory'? Russian Foreign Policy." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 84, no. 4 (2008): 717-33.

¹²² Angela E. Stent, *Putin's World: Russia Against the West and with the Rest*. E-book. New York: Hachette Book Group, 2019.

¹²³ Araz Aslanlı, *Rusya'nın Suriye Politikası*. Ankara: ORSAM, August 2018. https://orsam.org.tr/d_hbanaliz/75tr.pdf (accessed February 14, 2020).

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ M. R. Freire and R. Heller, "Russia's Power Politics in Ukraine and Syria: Status-seeking between Identity, Opportunity and Costs." *Europe-Asia Studies*, (2018): 1–28. doi:10.1080/09668136.2018.1521914.

established in the region with her intervention in Syria on 30 September 2015. Vladimir Putin manifests Russia as an indispensable global power and attempts to play a decisive role in the region by active military engagement in Syria.¹²⁶ Entering in the region, Russia has also affected the policies of the regional powers to coordinate and be in good relations with herself. Although good relations have been developed and airstrikes have been coordinated with Iran; Kremlin also attaches great importance to her relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia considering balances in the regional competition, and intends to prevent Iran from gaining a great influence in Syria.¹²⁷

3.1.2.Syria-Ukraine Nexus

Although many sanctions were imposed on Russia because of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, this crisis also motivated Russia to demonstrate herself as an indispensable actor in the Middle East (ME) by pushing a more active policy in the region, and increased the power of Russia at the negotiations of the problems arising from the Ukraine problem. Western efforts of integrating Ukraine into the EU and NATO in the broader strategy via promoting democracy meant moving the country (which is a buffer zone for Moscow) away from Russian orbit.¹²⁸ The fear of Ukraine getting closer to the West and out of her sphere of influence, and even the fact that Ukraine's possible accession to NATO was on the agenda, led to Russia to play an even more active role in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea (in 2014) by guaranteeing ownership of Sevastopol port in Crimea, Black Sea fleet's role in the Black Sea and

¹²⁶ N. Unnikrishnan and U. Purushothaman, "Russia in Middle East: Playing the Long Game?" *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 73, no.2 (2017): 251–258. doi:10.1177/0974928417700788.

¹²⁷ Eugene Rumer, "Russia in the Middle East: Jack of All Trades, Master of None." *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace*. 31 October 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/31/russia-in-middle-east-jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none-pub-80233> (accessed: March 12, 2020).

¹²⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault." *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (September 2014): 77–89. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=97381275&site=ehost-live>.

also naval access to the Mediterranean and MENA region was secured¹²⁹ considering its connection with Tartus Port in Syria.

By intervening in Syria in 2015, Russia not only assured Assad's salvation, but also managed to draw attention to Syria from the Ukrainian crisis and was able to put Syria as a trump card against Ukraine in the negotiations with the West¹³⁰ and also to attempt to alleviate her isolation from the Ukraine crisis and reengage with the West but having more powerful position on the negotiations.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the possible compromise deal would be determined by a variety of interests and may be hard to achieve, because the Syrian case is not only connected to the Ukraine crisis but the outcome of power competition and many factors that are not agreed upon regional and world policy. As soon as Russian demands were agreed on preserving her interests and rights of her strategic bases (with or without Assad) in Syria and eliminating her anxiety due to the effects of the disorder in the country, Russia would be ready to compromise on Syria for Ukraine.

3.1.3. Tartus Port and Beyond

In addition to being the only base of Russia in the Mediterranean, Tartus Port, which also provides access to the Eastern Mediterranean, the developments in Syria have enabled this base to be more functional, and Russia's largest electronic eavesdropping facility outside her borders has been established in Latakia in 2012 which is very close to Tartus, furthermore, Russia has also used the Hmeymim Air Base in Latakia for its military operations in Syria (by the agreement signed on 17 January 2017, it was decided that Russia would be in the control of the Hmeymim Air Base and the

¹²⁹ Blessing Simura, "USA and Russia in Syria and Ukraine: The Irony of Geo-Political Interventions." *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 67–75. doi:10.21599/atjir.66684.

¹³⁰ Hanna Notte, "Russia in Chechnya and Syria: Pursuit of Strategic Goals." *Middle East Policy* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 59–74. doi:10.1111/mepo.12174.; Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Valery Dzutsati, *Ibid.*

¹³¹ J. Wilhelmsen, "Putin's Power Revisited: How Identity Positions and Great Power Interaction Condition Strategic Cooperation on Syria." *Europe-Asia Studies*, (2019): 1–31. doi:10.1080/09668136.2019.1602594.

agreement could be extended for another 25 years).¹³² At the same time, another agreement was signed to expand Tartus base and allow Russia to control over the Port for another 49 years. It was agreed upon that the deal would automatically extend for further 25-year periods if neither side objected.¹³³

Also the importance of Syria could be seen from Russian intelligence establishment in the state as well; intelligence cooperation continued on the Moscow-Damascus line after the USSR collapsed even it was the years when the FSB was following the invasion of Iraq through Syria and that Syria was Russia's eye in the Middle East.¹³⁴ When it is evaluated with the development of military opportunities, it can be seen that securing this intelligence network facility also has a geopolitical anxiety in Russia's strategic and security establishment, as its interests in the Middle East cannot be evaluated solely through bilateral relations. In this sense, the protection of existing institutions in Syria means the protection of geopolitical interests, and at the same, these developments enable Moscow to secure its security architecture in the ME, and to expand its strategic achievements and pursue a more active policy in the future of the region.

3.1.4. The Problematique of Regime Change

Before the Arap uprisings, Kremlin has suspected color revolutions by the initiatives of the West (primarily the US)¹³⁵ to engage regime change in the post-Soviet states,

¹³² Araz Aslanlı. Ibid.

¹³³ Deutsche Welle. *New Russia-Syria accord allows up to 11 warships in Tartus port simultaneously*. January 20, 2017. <https://www.dw.com/en/new-russia-syria-accord-allows-up-to-11-warships-in-tartus-port-simultaneously/a-37212976> (accessed March 7, 2020).

¹³⁴ Mühdan Sağlam, *Kronik: İnadin Ötesinde: Rusya'nın Suriye Politikası*. Ankara Üniversitesi, 2013. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=ir00559a&AN=tuda.article.42457&site=eds-live>.

¹³⁵ Anna Borshchevskaya, "Moscow's Middle East Resurgence: Russia's Goals Go beyond Damascus." *Middle East Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 1–13. <http://0-47>

seen it as an intervention in her primary domain of influence, isolated and even feared of the possibility to the extension to Russia itself.¹³⁶ Color revolutions and democracy promotion policies have been understood as intervening in the internal affairs and destabilizing the states by manipulating public opinion causing protests; also protests in Russia (2011-2012) caused more concerns about Western intentions.¹³⁷ In this framework, the “Arab Spring” was seen as the continuation of regime change policies by discerning as Western activity to promote democracy.

Russia fears long-term and unilateral implementation of regime change policies by the West, and does not support the overthrow of authoritarian regimes through foreign intervention, arguing that these policies will give rise to hopes of the overthrowing regimes through external intervention and will lead to civil wars.¹³⁸ Russia perceived that she was alienated from the formation of a new multilateral Contact Group to provide political guidance on operations in Libya, and criticized regime change by the intervention that NATO is no right authority to implement Resolution 1973.¹³⁹

[search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=126681681&site=ehost-live](http://search.ebscohost.com/library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=126681681&site=ehost-live).

¹³⁶ Jeanne L. Wilson, “The Legacy of the Color Revolutions for Russian Politics and Foreign Policy.” *Problems of Post-Communism* 57, no. 2 (March 2010): 21–36. doi:10.2753/PPC1075-8216570202.

¹³⁷ Andrew Monaghan, *The New Politics of Russia, Interpreting Change*. Ibid.

¹³⁸ Roy Allison, “Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis.” *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (July 2013): 795–823. doi:10.1111/1468-2346.12046.; In 2013 (Before alleged chemical attacks by Syrian Regime) Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation article 15 states that: “...Some concepts that are being implemented are aimed at overthrowing legitimate authorities in sovereign states under the pretext of protecting civilian population. The use of coercive measures and military force bypassing the UN Charter and the UN Security Council is unable to eliminate profound socioeconomic, ethnic and other antagonisms that cause conflicts. Such measures only lead to the expansion of the conflict area, provoke tensions and arms race, aggravates interstate controversies and incite ethnic and religious strife.” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. “Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation.” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*. February 18, 2013. https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/122186 (accessed March 01, 2020).

¹³⁹ Ibid.

NATO's implementation of Resolution 1973 under the banner of the R2P norm, and subsequently the fact that this norm used to led to a regime change in Libya, caused Russian already doubts have grown in the implementation of the R2P and policies and have begun more cautious towards the Western policies.¹⁴⁰ Moscow's doubts about the implementation of this norm and humanitarian interventions are about misusing for regime change, and Kremlin is a proponent of the idea that the norm should have interpreted as strengthening legitimate government and preventing conflicts by peacebuilding measures not by democracy promotion; rather than applying them by harming the right of sovereignty of the states.¹⁴¹

The arising problematique of implementation of the R2P discussions since 2005 challenged with the principles of sovereignty of the states and non-interference in domestic affairs in which Moscow strongly asserts her disagreement on interference in domestic politics in her sphere of influence by the West. The policy differentiations of promoting democracy are the main challenges of Moscow that concerns regime changes in her land and Near Abroad by the "color revolutions" would harm her influence in the area. Pieper illustrates Russian policies on Syria as *rising normative power*:

Russian policies in the Syrian conflict against the backdrop of Russian norm contestation in global politics. Russian Syria policies, beyond Russia's immediate interests in Syria, have instrumental value for the perception of Russia as an actor in the international system, and it is this link that illustrates Russia's "rise" on a normative level... In so doing, Russia resists norms of 'responsible state conduct' defined and propagated by the West, seen by Moscow as illegitimate breaches of sovereignty. On a policy level, Russian references to "sovereignty" and "non-interference" are indicative of its perspectives on international law and what constitutes desirable interaction between 'Great Powers'.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Samuel Charap, "Russia, Syria and the Doctrine of Intervention." *Survival* (00396338) 55, no. 1 (March 2013): 35–41. doi:10.1080/00396338.2013.767403.

¹⁴¹ Derek Averre and Lance Davies, "Russia, Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: The Case of Syria." *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (July 2015): 813–34. doi:10.1111/1468-2346.12343.

¹⁴² Moritz Pieper, *Ibid.*

In order to prevent the regime from toppling through R2P or humanitarian intervention in Syria, Moscow shelved the claims that the regime used chemical weapons in 2013 by diplomatic means in the UN and prevented the establishment of a no-fly zone by Western powers. Likewise, by sending arms support and a missile defense system, it tried to give the regime a deterrence against any intervention. It then prevented any external military intervention from causing regime change as intervening by Assad's request in 2015. It might be argued that one of the aims of these activities, the reaction against regime change policies and demonstration that the Kremlin would not be passive if these policies followed a long-term development any longer.

3.1.5.Jihadist Terrorism Threat

Considering that there are about 20 million Muslims living in Russia, the majority of which are Sunni, and that there are jihadist Chechen organizations (such as "North Caucasus Emirate" in 2007 and later "Caucasus Province") where Moscow is struggling for over decades to fight Chechen jihadist organizations¹⁴³; it is another concern for Moscow that radical Islamic ideas and armed groups in the Middle East can penetrate the post-Soviet territory and the Russian North Caucasus, the central Russian republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan due to the region's proximity.¹⁴⁴ Russian foreign and internal politics affected by radicalism and separation issues in the North Caucasus, as well as the region's proximity with ME and post-Soviet states, attach area to the geopolitical sense.¹⁴⁵ The leader of "North Caucasus Emirate", Doku Umarov was killed in 2013 by Russian security forces but the organizations' network and cells remained, and rising of ISIS would activate these cells and

¹⁴³ Samuel Charap, Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Dmitri Trenin, *Russia's Policy in the Middle East: Prospects for Consensus and Conflict*. Carnegie Endowment, New York: The Century Foundation, 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Джулиано Бифолки, "Геополитика и терроризм на Северном Кавказе: последствия конфронтации / сотрудничества ЕС и России и пропаганда джихадистов." *Государственное управление. Электронный вестник*, no. 68 (June 2018): 7-37.

encourage Chechen radicals to engage in terrorist activities inside of Russia. And because Assad is Alawite, jihadist Chechen groups would be more motivated to fight alongside other jihadist groups to topple the regime considering sectarian clashes.¹⁴⁶ This would cause the Jihadist Chechens to gain more networks in Syria and become increasing threat if they return to the country.

According to the Soufan Center's estimations (based on official reports and statements) in 2017, there are approximately 3.500 Russian foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq and 400 returned to Russia as well as there were 8,717 foreign fighters from former Soviet Republics.¹⁴⁷ Kremlin's motivations also concerned that possible returning fighters would act terrorist deeds in Russia, thus Putin aims to neutralize foreign fighters at their location in Syria to preempt this spilling over insecurities.¹⁴⁸ Central Asian states are also threatened more by radical Islamism especially after the rising of ISIS that proclaims overthrowing authorities of the post-Soviet states; thus returning foreign fighters, possible preparation of the ground for "ISIS 2.0" in Central Asia mainly in Afghanistan, and radicalism pose a big threat for these countries and Russian southern border (and also Russian sphere of influence).¹⁴⁹

In September 2015, Russia narrated *civilizational* discourse as "ISIS vs. Assad" to support Assad, even though by implying "*there is no difference between terrorists*" the attacks were also targeted mainly non-ISIS armed groups as well.¹⁵⁰ The use of

¹⁴⁶ Roy Allison, Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Richard Barrett, "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees." *The Soufan Center*. October 2017. <https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf> (accessed March 2020, 06).

¹⁴⁸ Hanna Notte, Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Л. Л. Хопёрская, "«Исламское Государство. 2.0»: Новые Вызовы в Центральноазиатском Регионе." *Большая Евразия: Развитие, безопасность, сотрудничество*, no. 1-2 (2018): 212-217.

¹⁵⁰ Hanna Notte, Ibid.

the discourse of *civilization*, as well as efforts to ensure legitimacy by the West in airstrikes, also represented a call for cooperation in the war on terrorist groups and in the fight against terrorism. After Russian charter jet bombed and crashed in Sinai and Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris by ISIS in 2015, Russia started to pay more attention to the fight against ISIS and followed a policy to conduct cooperation with other states more, for instance it was agreed on coordinating attacks with France in the fight against ISIS terrorism.¹⁵¹

Russian counterterrorism policies has not been limited to ISIS in Syria but also Al-Nusra Front (later broader Syrian Islamist group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham) which was linked to Al-Qaeda.¹⁵² Russia's policy in this direction is to try to eliminate the disorder that has emerged from jihadist organizations by ensuring that the regime forces are standing and that the regime would establish its authority in other regions such as Idlib, north Hama, and west Aleppo. And as of 2020, a result of problems arising out of Idlib in the relations with Turkey also stems from Russian efforts to imprisoning jihadist organizations in Syria to defuse them in there while trying to maintain the regime's dominance in the region.

3.2.Turkish Foreign Policy on Syria

Turkey's 1990's security-oriented policies were replaced by the early 2000s liberal-oriented policies (with the effects of the EU negotiations, capturing Öcalan in 1999, and the JDP government's efforts to reduce the influence of military elites in political

¹⁵¹ Neil MacFarquhar, *Russia Allies With France Against ISIS, Saying Jet That Crashed in Sinai Was Bombed*. November 17, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/18/world/europe/russia-plane-crash-bomb.html> (accessed March 13, 2020).

¹⁵² It should be also mentioned that Russian airstrikes aimed not only ISIS and HTS, but also other jihadist factions and rebel groups. Chase Winter, *Russian airstrikes in Syria reportedly killed 18,000 people*. September 30, 2018. <https://www.dw.com/en/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-reportedly-killed-18000-people/a-45702091> (accessed March 17, 2020).

decision making).¹⁵³ The liberal-oriented view in TFP demonstrated itself by application of the complex interdependence with the neighboring countries via “zero problems with the neighbors” principle; however, in the 2010s, with the effect of power vacuum in Syria, the PKK threat has risen again, and the ISIS threat has also brought Turkish foreign policy to a security-oriented position.¹⁵⁴

At the start of the Arab Spring, Turkey has supported and welcomed the developments of political transformations against authoritarian regimes in the MENA region. However, when revolts spilled over to Syria in which reconciliation and enhancement policies applied by Turkey during the JDP term in office, Turkey has become alarmed due to the concerning events in its neighbor.¹⁵⁵ The position of Turkey in Syria initially evolved in three stages while hoping best-case scenario in the country’s transformation under Bashar al-Assad’s government; requesting political reforms and end of the violence was the first stage: engagement, second phase: isolation by making attempts at the countries of the region to isolate Syria; as well as, the third stage envisaged the sanctions as mobilizing the international community towards enforcement via international organizations mainly the UN.¹⁵⁶

Despite there had been recovering and enhancing bilateral relations and moreover working towards free trade zone between the parties¹⁵⁷, Turkish-Syrian relations spoiled due to the events which resulted in brutal crackdowns by Assad and instead

¹⁵³ Müge Aknur and Tuğcan Durmuşlar, “Turkey’s Changing Security Environment and Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy.” *Dokuz Eylul University Journal of Graduate School of Social Sciences* 21, no. 4 (October 2019): 1355–76. doi:10.16953/deusosbil.567894.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Hüseyin Bağcı, “Strategic Depth in Syria: From the Beginning to the Russian Intervention.” *Valdai Discussion Club*. 7 December 2015. <https://valdaiclub.com/a/valdai-papers/valdai-paper-37-strategic-depth-in-syria-from-the-beginning-to-russian-intervention/> (accessed: September 5, 2019).

¹⁵⁶ Bülent Aras, interview by Yeni Şafak. “Yaptırım politikası.” *Yeni Şafak*. (August 15, 2011).

¹⁵⁷ Michael B. Bishku, “Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Checkered History.” *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 36–53. doi:10.1111/j.1475-4967.2012.00546.x.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's (Turkish former PM (2003-2014), then President since 2014) support to protestors and even hosting FSA and Syrian National Council in Istanbul in 2011. These incidents would indicate that evolution into the 2nd phase of Turkey's Syria policy; as a matter of fact, legitimacy was ensured by organizing elements opposing to Assad and it was envisaged to give up the policies that Assad applied in the field which also help Ankara to internationalize crisis and mobilize other actors.

By planning joint sanctions in coordination with the US, Turkey closed its airspace to planes carrying military supplies to Syria as a first sanction to the Syrian regime in September 2011; Erdoğan urged the Arab League to establish humanitarian corridor mainly to Homs in March 2012; in response to the massacre in Hula, all Syrian charge d'affaires and embassy officials were requested to leave the country within 72 hours in May 2012.¹⁵⁸ While such policy practices showed a step-by-step transition from phase 2 to phase 3, events in June 2012 caused 3rd stage to have become much more pronounced. Especially wrong estimations on Assad's departure; led Ankara to follow a much stricter policy as well as paving the way to conceive of more security problems.

The downing of the Turkish reconnaissance aircraft (on 22 June 2012), without warning symbolizes the watershed in bilateral relations; the trajectory of foreign policy on Syria has been more prone to be shaped around security, and Ankara's attitude has taken a much more severe form in parallel with the events. Incidents in 2012 led to assumptions that the threat could come from the Regime as well.

Furthermore; Erdoğan also initiated more efforts to mobilize the international community via international organizations against the Assad regime in as much as started to display more hostile attitudes towards the Assad regime. Repeated

¹⁵⁸Ümit Çetin, *Türkiye, hava sahasını askeri sevkiyata kapattı*. September 22, 2011. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/turkiye-hava-sahasini-askeri-sevkiyata-kapatti-18796280> (accessed March 22, 2020).; Hürriyet. *Erdoğan'dan insani yardım koridoru çağrısı*. March 07, 2012. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-dan-insani-yardim-koridoru-cagrisi-20071181> (accessed March 22, 2020).; Hürriyet. *Erdoğan: Farklı yaptırımlar gündemde*. May 31, 2012. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-farkli-yaptirimlar-gundemde-20661104> (accessed March 22, 2020).

violations to Turkish border led to requests from Turkey for NATO support; following the incidents of the shooting down of a Turkish jet by Syrian forces in June 2012, Ankara applied for invoking article 4 of the NATO Treaty¹⁵⁹ to discuss the security situation in the region and also depending on the cases of Syrian rockets killing Turkish civilians in Akçakale (which is situated in close to the Syrian border) on October in the same year, Ankara also demanded an increase in its air defense capabilities from NATO; which resulted in the request of deployment of Patriot missiles in Kahramanmaraş, Adana, and Gaziantep.¹⁶⁰ However, it was clearly stated that: “This deployment will be defensive only and will not support a no-fly zone or any offensive operation.”¹⁶¹

Establishment of a no-fly zone could allow external intervention concerning humanitarian reasons through the authorization of the UNSC, or a military assistance request by a possible governmental entity recognized as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people from external powers¹⁶², as well as may prepare the ground for the rebel forces to recover in these zones. Turkey lobbied dynamically for the US to set up no-fly zones or buffer zones along the Turkish-Syrian border; however, the White House's reluctance to involve militarily in the civil war prevented this planned establishment from realizing it on the border.¹⁶³ Moreover, following events by

¹⁵⁹ Article 4 states that: “*The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened.*” NATO. *The North Atlantic Treaty*. Treaty, Washington D.C.: nato.int, 1949.

¹⁶⁰NATO. *Secretary General's Annual Report 2012*. 31 January 2013. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_94220.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed March 23, 2020).

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Jordan J. Paust, “Use of Military Force in Syria by Turkey, Nato, and the United States.” *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law* 34, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 431–46. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=87852357&site=ehost-live>.

¹⁶³ Henri J. Barkey, “Turkey’s Syria Predicament.” *Survival* (00396338) 56, no. 6 (December 2014): 113–34. doi:10.1080/00396338.2014.985440.

Russian intervention in 2015, there has been precluded any possible no-fly zones from being applied.¹⁶⁴

Apart from Ankara's own concerns and policy agenda (which will be elaborated in this part of the research), Turkey, via America's "leading from behind" policy, has been the prominent actor in the crisis in Syria; however, miscalculations on Assad's fall and not receiving *de facto* adequate support from the US; dragged Ankara to a deadlock where Assad's departure would be the only way out.¹⁶⁵ Usage of chemical weapons, which crossed Obama's red line in 2013, urged Ankara to raise the expectations regarding Assad's fall and toughen her policy on transition without Assad in all diplomatic events. However, "unpredictability" in political events displayed that Ankara had limited capabilities in overthrowing the regime by external intervention with the support of the US.

Geneva meetings and developments showed that Turkey didn't find any support for international intervention. Even US and Russia agreed on destruction of chemical weapons in Syria, directly showing that unfortunately Turkey became much more lonely in her Syrian policy.¹⁶⁶

Because of the continuing violence on civilians and especially chemical weapon use by the Assad government in 2013, Turkey has defined the Syrian regime as an illegitimate actor, on the other hand; since 2011 Ankara believes that an effective and inclusive opposition must emerge in order to initiate a healthy political transition process in line with public expectations in Syria and indicates Syrian National Coalition (SNC) as legitimate representatives of the Syrian opposition which of strived and mobilized to establish by Turkey.¹⁶⁷ Also, Turkish official discourse

¹⁶⁴ Hüseyin Bağcı, Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Hüseyin Bağcı, *Suriye'de doğrular yanlışlar...* June 01, 2013. <https://www.star.com.tr/acik-gorus/suriyede-dogrular-yanlislar--haber-759105/> (accessed March 27, 2020).

¹⁶⁶ Hüseyin Bağcı and Şuay Nilhan Açıkalın, Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *2014 Yılına Girerken Dış Politikamız*. Dışışleri Bakanlığı'nın 2014 Mali Yılı Bütçe Tasarısının TBMM Genel Kurulu'na Sunulması Vesilesiyle Hazırlanan Kitapçık, Ankara : Dışışleri Bakanlığı, 2013, 69-72.

preferred to use the “Assad regime” instead of the “Syrian government” so as to a symbol for considering the mentioned actor as illegitimate.

3.2.1. Activism in TFP

Since 9/11, Turkey discovered her trump card in the Middle East as a global stakeholder and boosted her soft power capabilities as an interlocutor for the Muslim world, reorienting her foreign policy towards as an influencing regional actor in the ME in addition to following objectives to being part of the Western club.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the development of dynamics in the region began to take on a non-linear position outside the usual flow with the effects of the 2003 invasion of Iraq to the area. Given the power vacuum created by fall of Saddam Hussein, Kurdish groups have strengthened which leads to increasing concerns of Kurdish separatism, and Iran (Turkey’s rival in the ME) has also gained more influence in the region due to its Shia stance; but also this vacuum gave an opportunity to Turkey to fill the power vacuum and economic engagement with its neighbors.¹⁶⁹

New TFP has been founded on Davutoğlu’s (former academic, Minister of Foreign Affairs, former Deputy Prime Minister and former PM of Turkey) views on the international system and status of Turkey in this system. The geopolitical worldview of Davutoğlu based on the assumption that the decline of the West and thus Turkey could lead the shaping of regional and global events by the instruments of mediation efforts, economic engagement and exploiting her soft power capabilities to demonstrate itself as a power center.¹⁷⁰

According to his classification and suggestions, Turkey should be a center state that has capability to transform chaos to cosmos. In order to be a center state, Turkey

¹⁶⁸ Zeyno Baran and Ian O. Lesser, "Turkey's Identity and Strategy: A Game of Three-Dimensional Chess." in *Powers and Principles: International Leadership in a Shrinking World*, Reaction by Hüseyin Bağcı, edited by Michael Schiffer, & David Shorr , 197-224. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009.

¹⁶⁹ Özlem Tür, "Turkey's Role in Middle East and Gulf Security." *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 13, no.4 (2019): 592-603, DOI: 10.1080/25765949.2019.1682305.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

should redefine its power parameters and annotate paralleling with dynamics and parameters of the international system.¹⁷¹

Bağcı and Doğanlar argue that; Turkey has always been pro-active status quo power; however, in 2000's the TFP seemed to have been evolving into being a more active player from its pro-active status quo power in its geopolitical position and its changing environment that together offer both insecurities and opportunities.¹⁷² According to Davutoğlu; Turkey's strategic depth formed by its historical, geographical (in which its nearby land, sea, and continental basins interacting but they are different from each other), cultural assets and its power capacity should be mobilized to realize its real power and in terms of enhancing the regional and global position of Turkey; its geopolitical geo-economic and geo-cultural integration tool should be utilized, and Ankara should pursue strategic consistency and flexibility in the uncertainties of the dynamic transition derived from the new parameters of the order that not entirely determined after the Cold War.¹⁷³ In this framework, Davutoğlu further states that Turkey's most influential soft power tool is its democracy and specifies four primary principals in the Middle East that should constitute Turkey's position in the region: "common security for the entire region," diplomatic and political dialogue channels for solving the crises that also includes non-state actors and communities, economic interdependence, and lastly "cultural coexistence and plurality."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Hüseyin Bağcı and Şuay Nilhan Açıkalin, Ibid.

¹⁷² Hüseyin Bağcı and Aslıhan Anlar Doğanlar, "Changing geopolitics and Turkish foreign policy." *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska* 16, no.2 (2009): 97-115. http://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media/files/Annales_Universitatis_Mariae_Curie_Skłodowska_Sectio_K_Politologia/Annales_Universitatis_Mariae_Curie_Skłodowska_Sectio_K_Politologia-r2009-t16-n2/Annales_Universitatis_Mariae_Curie_Skłodowska_Sectio_K_Politologia-r2009-t16-n2-s97-115/Annales_Universitatis_Mariae_Curie_Skłodowska_Sectio_K_Politologia-r2009-t16-n2-s97-115.pdf.

¹⁷³ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik, Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*. 108th Edition. İstanbul: Küre, 2016.

¹⁷⁴ Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007." *Insight Turkey* 10, no.1 (2008): 77-96. <https://www.insightturkey.com/file/1005/turkeys-foreign-policy-vision-an-assessment-of-2007>.

During the Arab uprisings, Turkey assessed those events as an opportunity to realize and promote her liberal policies such as economic interdependence, political transformation, democratization in the region under her influence.¹⁷⁵ Based on the predictions that the old order in the MENA would change and authoritarian leaders would leave their seats, and new regimes would be established in the region; Turkey was enthusiastic about playing a constructive role during the change that occurred from the Arab uprisings and to involve in shaping the transformation in this region.¹⁷⁶ İbrahim Kalın (then Foreign Policy Chief Advisor in the Premiership) defines 2000's TFP's main goals as "security, freedom, prosperity, and identity" and he further indicates that; policies have been implemented within the framework of "engaging all political actors, supporting democratic processes, economic integration, and fostering cultural and people-to-people relations" to reach these goals while also remarking that: "A policy of "mutual empowerment" strikes a balance between security and freedom, while sharing wealth and addressing issues of identity... Turkey cannot claim to be safe if one or more of its neighbors are beset by civil war."¹⁷⁷

However this *balance* started to tend around security and opportunity, as the dynamics of the civil war in Syria are gaining momentum, and the principle of "zero problems with neighbors" was replaced by hostility with the Assad regime and security concerns in Syria. Öniş and Kutlay argue TFP in the post-2011 as 'punch above its weight' and analyze the pro-activism in the TFP as such:

In the pre-Arab Spring era, Turkey had been able to position itself as a benign regional actor whose soft power was based on economic interdependence, cultural ties and a common identity. The promotion of democracy was not explicit on the foreign policy

¹⁷⁵ Bülent Aras, "Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy Revisited." *Journal of Balkan & Near Eastern Studies* 16, no. 4 (December 2014): 404–18. doi:10.1080/19448953.2014.938451.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ İbrahim Kalın, "Turkish foreign policy in 2011: an assessment." In *What Does Turkey Think*, edited by Dimitar Bechav, 51-56. London: the European Council on Foreign Relations, 2011.

agenda. From the onset of the Arab revolutions onwards, however, Turkey projected its image as a key actor in the promotion of democracy.¹⁷⁸

Nonetheless, this policy orientation based on soft power evolved into hard power due to the failure of the “Arab Spring” to bring democracy in the MENA region, as seen from the 2013 Egyptian military coup d'etat and prolongation of the Syrian Civil War.¹⁷⁹ Also, the strengthened terrorist groups in the area benefiting from the prolongation of the disorder, as well as the Western support to YPG concurrently neglected Turkish security concerns by the West resulted in the revision in the agenda by seeking new ad hoc collaborations with other actors (that might have considered its security concerns) and enhancement of hard power measures in order to deal with disorder in its security environment.¹⁸⁰

Indeed, the post-2011 events and the failure of the soft-power measures in the MENA transformed the TFP into a more security-oriented view as in the '90s; especially the events in 2016 which were the announcement of “federal democratic system” by PYD in March 2016, Western support to PYD/YPG despite Turkish sensitiveness on this subject, departure of Davutoğlu from the Premiership and his disagreements with the ruling elites in May 2016, failed coup attempt in July 2016 and the reluctance of Western support to Erdoğan after the coup attempt (conversely Western leaders augmented their tones to criticize the JDP rule slipping towards authoritarianism after the coup attempt) resulted in the doctrinal shift in TFP by increasing its hard-power measures and its unilateral acts in the area as well as distrust to traditional allies while engaging more with Russia (Moscow also seized the opportunity to the enhancement

¹⁷⁸ Ziya Öniş and Mustafa Kutlay, “The Dynamics of Emerging Middle-Power Influence in Regional and Global Governance: The Paradoxical Case of Turkey.” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 2 (April 2017): 164–83. doi:10.1080/10357718.2016.1183586.,

¹⁷⁹ Hasan Yükselen, *Russia and Turkey in Syria: Testing the Extremes*. Unpublished book. SETA, 2020.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

of disagreements in the NATO alliance) despite reciprocal mistrust and conflicting interests in the region.¹⁸¹

3.2.2.Syrian Refugees

In the Turkish legal system, Syrian refugees are not defined as “refugees”; nevertheless, their status is subject to “temporary protection”. Both the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol arrangements also are side by geographical limitations of Turkey, which means that recognition of refugee status to asylum seekers only from Europe. Although Syrians were accepted as “guests” before, their legal status was controversial, consequently Temporary Protection Regulation came into force by being published on 22.10.2014. While deriving concepts such as conditional refugee or secondary protection from those seeking asylum seekers from outside Europe; new regulation has been issued in the case of Syrians, and status of temporary protection has been defined, accordingly, they have been conditioned to come in massive influx and cannot be returned except for voluntarily.¹⁸²

Internally displaced persons may pose the risks and threats to the receiving countries concerning social order, economic development, and political stability.¹⁸³ As well as interactive levels of threatening the security of the receiving country, tensions between the countries between neighboring countries regarding the influx of refugees and human dignity of displaced persons may challenge to regional security.¹⁸⁴ The massive influx of refugees has been forcing Turkey's economic capacity, thereby disrupting the social composition and have been taken into account in the future of

¹⁸¹ Meliha Benli Altunışık, “The New Turn in Turkey’s Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Regional and Domestic Insecurities.” *Istituto Affari Internazionali*. July 2020. <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaip2017.pdf> (accessed August 01, 2020).

¹⁸² Ahmet H. Topal, “Geçici Koruma Yönetmeliği ve Türkiye’deki Suriyelilerin Hukuki Statüsü.” *İstanbul Medipol Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi* 2, no.1 (Spring 2015): 05-22.

¹⁸³ R. Lohrmann, “Migrants, Refugees and Insecurity. Current Threats to Peace?” *International Migration* 38, no.4 (2000): 3–22. doi:10.1111/1468-2435.00118.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

the refugees' situation in the country remains in the process of integration will constitute a major problem is clear. However, the influx of refugees and gives an ethical responsibility to Turkey regarding ensuring humane conditions for "the guests". Ankara, which initially implemented an "open door policy", was considering that the Assad regime would fall in a short time; nonetheless, its capacity against such a large influx was not suitable. The "unpredictability" of dynamics caused by a disorder in the neighboring country has posed risks and threats to the internal order of the receiving country.

According to UNHCR data by March 2020, approximately 65% of Syrian Refugees to bordering countries (composed of 3,586,069 out of 5,562,204 registered refugees) have immigrated to Turkey.¹⁸⁵ The related curve on the number of refugees has recorded a much higher trend since 2013¹⁸⁶, and as of 2018, a stable trend has been observed.¹⁸⁷ Given data demonstrates that the proportion of refugees in urban and rural areas far more exceeds the proportion of those who accommodate in camps.¹⁸⁸

M. Erdogan analyzes the situation of Syrian refugees in Turkey divided into three time periods:

The period of 2011-2013 passed with anticipation and intense emotional discourses that the process was met with emergency management and that the crisis would be short. The most important feature of the second period between 2014 and 2016 was the significant increase in refugees and their settlement outside the border region. The period of 2017-2018 was a period when the numerical increase peaked. During this period, the EU attempted to "externalize" this process, while, Turkey has been to transfer the issue to the world public opinion, and "instrumentalize" this issue as an

¹⁸⁵UNHCR. *Syria Regional Refugee Response*. 26 March 2020. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria> (accessed April 01, 2020).

¹⁸⁶ The use of chemical weapons in 2013 and as of 2014 rise of ISIS have an impact upon a massive influx to the destination countries.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

essential part of the negotiations with the EU; besides, Ankara has followed an ongoing process of integration policy at the generally local level.¹⁸⁹

Turkey has been willing to sharing the responsibility of the refugees with the other actors and provide proper conditions for the voluntary return of refugees. However, sufficient support from Europe has not been provided, and the number of those settling in the safe zones established by military operations has remained minimal.

3.2.3.Border Security

After the plane crisis in 2012, an announcement was made to specify that; rules of engagement regarding south and southeast borders were changed. Thus, within the scope of new rules of engagement, it was stated that Turkey would counteract against any slightest harassment to its borders; and any armed element (which would be implemented on the elimination of organizations such as ISIS before such armed groups cross the border in the following years) at the border would be perceived as a threat.¹⁹⁰ Then, a 1-year permit was obtained from the parliament, which will be repeatedly extended again to send Turkish troops, assuring that deterrence and right of self-defense will be used if deemed necessary.¹⁹¹

Although Turkey has perceived a threat from ISIS to its border and internal security, the other dynamics in the area alarmed Ankara and led to dilemmas due to the events that in Ayn el-Arab; Kurds would strengthen their position to establish an autonomous structure in Syria, because PKK linked organization YPG's fight against

¹⁸⁹ M. Murat Erdoğan, "Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Mülteciler." *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*. September 2019. <https://www.kas.de/documents/283907/7339115/T%C3%BCrkiye%27deki+Suriyeliler.pdf/aca9d37-7035-f37c-4982-c4b18f9b9c8e?version=1.0&t=1571303334464> (accessed April 04, 2020).

¹⁹⁰T24. *2012 yılında değiştirilen angajman kuralları neleri kapsıyor?* July 23, 2015. <https://t24.com.tr/haber/2012-yilinda-degistirilen-angajman-kurallari-neleri-kapsiyor,303829> (accessed March 30, 2020).

¹⁹¹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *2013 Yılına Girerken Dış Politikamız*. Dışışleri Bakanlığı'nın 2013 Mali Yılı Bütçe Tasarısının TBMM Genel Kurulu'na Sunulması Vesilesiyle Hazırlanan Kitapçık, Ankara: Dışışleri Bakanlığı, 2012, 66-8.

ISIS would boost Kurdish identity¹⁹², as well as the US support to this organization, would legitimate Kurds as a political actor.¹⁹³

In parallel with the threats emanating from YPG and ISIS to the Turkish territory, Ankara has prioritized to eliminate these groups' presence and build a wall along the border to secure its territory; besides these prevention measures would also help Ankara to maintain its domestic security from the PKK which emboldened to pursue and increase terror activities due to the wins of YPG in northern Syria.¹⁹⁴ As of July 24, 2015, TAF targeted certain ISIS elements in Syria based on the right of self-defense, Ankara provided support to the efforts of opposition forces (mainly the FSA) against ISIS in Syria within the scope of the Euphrates Shield Operation on August 24, 2016.¹⁹⁵ As part of the operation, the FSA supported by the TAF recaptured Jarabulus and Dabiq back from ISIS; in this manner, ISIS threat to the border was eliminated.¹⁹⁶ This operation also aimed to prevent YPG, which also received the support of the US against ISIS, from gaining power by benefiting from power vacuum that would occur after ISIS in the north of Syria; hence, TAF with the support of FSA clashed against ISIS which controlled Jarabulus-Azaz line, as well as against SDF (on

¹⁹² It should also be noted that the dynamics of Kurdish cantons in Syria, has encouraged other Kurdish actors in the region to implement their separatist agenda. For instance; despite the bilateral good economic and energy relations between Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region and Turkey (which is on the side of the protection of Iraq's territorial integrity), the independence referendum held in September 2017 in the Kurdish region increased the fears emanating from the already existing concerns of Kurdish separatism. See also: Reuters. *Iraqi Kurdish referendum 'historic mistake': Turkey*. September 14, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-turkey/iraqi-kurdish-referendum-historic-mistake-turkey-idUSKCN1BP0OV> (accessed March 20, 2020).

¹⁹³ Henri J. Barkey, *Ibid*.

¹⁹⁴ Lacin Idil Oztig, "Syria and Turkey: Border-Security Priorities." *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 1 (March 2019): 117–26. doi:10.1111/mepo.12404.

¹⁹⁵ Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, *2017 Yılına Girerken Dış Politikamız*. Dışişleri Bakanlığı'nın 2017 Mali Yılı Bütçe Tasarısının TBMM Genel Kurulu'na Sunulması Vesilesiyle Hazırlanan Kitapçık, Ankara : Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2016, 83-6.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*.

which YPG is the basis) which was dominated in Manbij.¹⁹⁷ Announcement of US-led coalition to build 30,000-strong border force in the north of Syria along with YPG alarmed Ankara that this decision would help legitimization of PKK linked formation.¹⁹⁸ This declaration prompted Turkey to initiate “Operation Olive Branch” (on January 20, 2018) aiming to establish a safe zone within 30 km depth, besides, to convey a message that American support would not guarantee the existence of the autonomous cantons.¹⁹⁹ Established following the capture of the city by the YPG, the Manbij Military Council in which dominated by YPG elements, remained a bitter disagreement between Ankara and Washington. Bilateral diplomacy traffic took place in order to reach a settlement, and it was agreed on the Manbij road map, which envisages joint patrol and withdrawal of the YPG elements from Manbij.²⁰⁰

In tandem with the events of the US pulling military elements across the border from the east of Euphrates, Turkey began to target YPG in the operation of Peace Spring (on October 9, 2019) and aimed to establish a safe zone across its boundary.²⁰¹ Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu claimed that YPG/PKK had committed a “crime against humanity” to attempt to change the demography of the region by using brutal force against Arabs and Assyrians in places such as Raqqa,

¹⁹⁷BBC Türkçe. *Suriye sınırında hazırlık: Türkiye’nin önceki askeri operasyonlarında neler yapıldı?* October 08, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-49959630> (accessed March 30, 2020).

¹⁹⁸ Patrick Wintour, *Erdoğan accuses US of planning to form 'terror army' in Syria*. January 15, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/15/turkey-condemns-us-plan-for-syrian-border-security-force> (accessed March 30, 2020).

¹⁹⁹ Ul Hassan Khan, “Turkey Military Operation Olive Branch.” *Defence Journal* 21, no. 9 (April 2018): 77–N.PAG. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=129149007&site=ehost-live>.

²⁰⁰ Kilic Bugra Kanat and Hannon Jackson, “The Manbij Roadmap and the Future of U.S.-Turkish Relations.” *Middle East Policy* 25, no. 3 (Fall 2018). Web. <https://mepc.org/journal/manbij-roadmap-and-future-us-turkish-relations>.

²⁰¹ Veysel Kurt, *5 Soru: Barış Pınarı Harekatı*. October 10, 2019. <https://www.setav.org/5-soru-baris-pinari-harekat/> (accessed April 04, 2020).

Deir Ez-Zor, Tell Abyad, and Al-Hasakah; in contrast, Turkey's military operations also conducted to prevent this type of situation.²⁰²

Based on self-defense to establish safe zones, these military operations met on common ground; all activities conducted with the help of FSA (later named as Syrian National Army) which was trained and equipped by Turkey; nonetheless, declarations were also made to ensuring Syrian refugees to return in those safe zones. While the operation in progress, the US administration interposed regarding circumstances in the area and further events led to an agreement over establishing mutual observation points and safe zones in the east of Euphrates.²⁰³ The US administration has attempted to prevent conflicts between Turkey and YPG at every turn which demonstrates that in order to implement the policies, Turkey should have engaged with the great powers in the region. Because of the involvement of other actors, including great powers, Ankara has limits of capabilities in the area; accordingly, to maintain her priorities, Ankara has coordinated with notably the US and Russia. This compulsory situation demonstrated itself on the Astana process with Russia (which will be later analyzed and elaborated on this research) and Kurds with the US.

3.3.Iranian Foreign Policy on Syria

At the beginning of the Arap uprisings, Iran's perspective on events demonstrated itself by the narrative of "Islamic Awakening," which is inspired by the Iranian uprising against the Shah in "solidarity with the resistance" against authoritarian secular rulers.²⁰⁴ In fact; Tehran assessed the incidents as diminishing the role of the

²⁰² Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, *Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu'nun TBMM Genel Kurulunda Barış Pınarı Harekatı hakkında yaptığı konuşma*. October 16, 2019. <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sayin-bakanimizin-tbmm-de-yaptigi-konusma-2019.tr.mfa> (accessed March 30, 2020).

²⁰³ BBC Türkçe. *Erdoğan: Suriye'de güvenli bölgede 12 gözlem noktası kurmayı planlıyoruz*. October 18, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/live/haberler-turkiye-50092782> (accessed April 04, 2020).

²⁰⁴ Edward Wastnidge, "Iran and Syria: An Enduring Axis." *Middle East Policy* 24, no. 2 (June 2017): 148–59. doi:10.1111/mepo.12275.

US in the region and the opportunity to set an example to the uprisings from its Islamic Revolution experience.²⁰⁵ Moreover, Supreme Leader of Iran Ali Hosseini Khamenei urged Tunisian and Egyptian protesters in Arabic to resist the oppression and security forces whereas, abstaining from using such narratives in Persian by declaring the US' major setback from the region, mentioning the impact of the 1979 revolution.²⁰⁶ On the other hand; Tehran took measures in order to prevent the potential of spilling over to Iran (considering the 2009 Green Movement) from the Arab uprisings; protests in Syria in 2011 reviewed as a foreign conspiracy as an attempt to overwhelm "*the resistance*" against "*Zionist regime*" and "*great Satan*," while Iran was supporting the events in Tunisia, Egypt, and Bahrain.²⁰⁷

At the start of the civil war, Iranian military advisers contacted Damascus and stated their support on Assad's side; in the course of time, Tehran sent its Shia militia proxies (as such the Fatemiyoun Division²⁰⁸) under auspices of IRGC and

²⁰⁵ In the 32nd Anniversary of Islamic Revolution, former President Ahmadinejad quoted: "Today we are facing a major global revolution managed by the imam of the time. Time; world is experiencing the turbulent situation, and this is global awaking unfolding, and in fact, you can see the hand of the time directing this moment the thoughts of the *imam of the time* ... such a vigilance movement not limited to Iran, or the Middle East, or North Africa, or Egypt and Tunisia. In every corner of this world, every part of Latin America, Africa. in Europe, in Asia. In every corner of this world, the movement has already started... I am particularly addressing Arab nations the youths and also nation of Egypt and all world nations, you should be vigilant, and it is your right to be free it is your right practice your sovereignty and it is your right to express your views regarding global issues freely. Selecting the type of governmentality, administration, the rulers, these all your right, and it is your right to have monotheism justice and dignity and make efforts in order to attain these objectives."; Full speech is available at: Press TV. *32nd Anniversary of Iranian Islamic Revolution*. February 11, 2011. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?297962-1/32nd-anniversary-iranian-islamic-revolution&showFullAbstract=1> (accessed April 07, 2020).

²⁰⁶ Farideh Farhi, "Tehran's Delayed Spring?" *Globalizations* 8, no. 5 (October 2011): 617–21. doi:10.1080/14747731.2011.621279.

²⁰⁷ Firas Abu Hilal, "Iran and the Arab Revolutions: Positions and Repercussions." *Doha Institute*. September 2011. https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/Iran_and_the_Arab_Revolutions_Positions_and_Repercussions.pdf (accessed April 07, 2020).

²⁰⁸ The division is composed of approximately 10,000-20,000 Afghans (mostly belongs to Hazara ethnic group). And the name of the group (Fatemiyoun) possess sectarian connotation: "They chose the unit's name wisely: Fatemiyoun. They say that Omar killed Fatemeh, the daughter of the Prophet. Now they gathered us to take revenge for Fatemeh's death on the Sunnis.": Lars Hauch,

coordinated strategy with the Lebanese Hezbollah. When the dynamics gained momentum to the detriment of the Assad regime on the verge of collapse in 2013, IRI (Islamic Republic of Iran) has augmented Shia militia forces and its military personnel to combat rebel forces, Al Nusra and ISIL; that provide Iran an opportunity to extend its forces to advance across the Levant, on account of a probable front against Israel.²⁰⁹ In addition to Iran's influence and coordination with its Shia proxies, the “axis of resistance” has inclined more to be comprised of the network of armed movements, from the mainly state-centered basis, and attempted to extend its area in as much as broadened its vision at enmity with new actors such as ISIS.²¹⁰

Although newly elected President Hassan Rouhani came to office in 2013 and has offered moderate solutions for the Syrian crisis considering the platform where both Assad and opposition can take part in a transitional period, it did not cause a diversion in the priorities and policies of Iran; because of the internal dynamics of the conservative regime and developing external dynamics such as ISIS in the area led to maintaining core policies.²¹¹ Fundamental decisions in Iranian foreign policy have always been dependent on the Supreme Leader's view and indication on the subject. Although Rouhani views that direct engagement in Syria would harm efforts to reboot Iran's international and regional relations regarding boosting already burdened Iran's economy; IRGC's position, which is the primary determinant of Iran's stance on

Understanding the Fatemiyoun Division: Life Through the Eyes of a Militia Member. May 22, 2019. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/understanding-fatemiyoun-division-life-through-eyes-militia-member> (accessed April 06, 2020).

²⁰⁹ Ben Hubbard & Isabel Kershner and Anne Barnard. *Iran, Deeply Embedded in Syria, Expands 'Axis of Resistance'*. February 19, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/19/world/middleeast/iran-syria-israel.html> (accessed April 07, 2020).

²¹⁰ Payam Mohseni and Hussein Kalout, *Iran's Axis of Resistance Rises: How It's Forging a New Middle East*. January 24, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2017-01-24/irans-axis-resistance-rises> (accessed April 07, 2020).

²¹¹ Ali Hashem, *Rouhani Considers New Approach To Syria*. July 02, 2013. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/07/iran-rouhani-support-syria-diplomatic-initiative-opposition.html> (accessed April 11, 2020).

Syria outweighed elected government's implications.²¹² Even Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif's attempt to resign in 2019 signifies that discomfort with the ineffectiveness in Syria and actions that unfairly coordinated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, taken by the major general of the Quds Force Qasem Soleimani, who could only be engaged in the direct coordination with the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.²¹³

According to Sinkaya, Iran's firm position on Syria stems from several reasons. Firstly exclusion from international and regional initiatives meant to the establishment of the new regional order without considering Iran's expectations and apprehensions on the subject, secondly; security elites come to the fore in the decision-making process that results in the perception of the events as a zero-sum game, and thirdly Russian intervention in 2015 greatly relieved Iran militarily and economically, eliminated the need to change of its position; nonetheless, Tehran had to follow the leadership of Russia on Syria because of the Russian engagement.²¹⁴

Removal of Assad regime defined as "red-line" for IRI, nevertheless; the other objectives in Syria demonstrate themselves as restoring the status quo ante, as far as possible to keep Assad in power concerning that probable government change would not result in carrying out vis a vis strategic relations like before; and also preventing "Lebanonization" of Syria in case of autonomous Kurdish zone would also pose a

²¹² Ali Ansari and Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi, "The View From Tehran" in *Understanding Iran's Role in the Syrian Conflict*, edited by: Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi and Raffaello Pantucci, 3-10. London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2016.

²¹³ Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era, Resisting the New International Order*. p.24. California: Praeger, 2010. See also: Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Iran and Daesh: The Case of a Reluctant Shia Power." *Middle East Policy* 22, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 44-54. doi:10.1111/mepo.12142.; Maysam Behraves, *Why did Iran's Foreign Minister Zarif resign?* February 27, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/iran-foreign-minister-zarif-resign-190227094958786.html> (accessed April 11, 2020).

²¹⁴ Bayram Sinkaya, "İran'ın Suriye Stratejisi." *Akademik Ortadoğu* 11, no. 2 (2017): 49-64.

threat to Iranian territorial integrity, while maintained tactical relations with PYD to counter ISIS in coordination with Assad.²¹⁵

3.3.1.Axis Of Resistance

Since its establishment, the main priority of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) is to counter the US influence and the US-sponsored regional order employing “Islamic resistance” for “oppressed Muslims” while instrumentalizing its Shia proxies and other actors who oppose the impact of the US, Israel, and Gulf Monarchies in the region; this activism may also serve Iran to position itself as a regional power as well as having ratified Iran’s significant role in the area by the other actors.²¹⁶ The term “axis of resistance” has been more nuanced with the subsequent events of Syrian uprisings by converting the narrative of “axis of evil”, indeed; “resistance” envisages withstanding against Western implications and Israel as well as guarding their regimes via acting in concert.²¹⁷ Over the past decades, Iran has diversified and augmented its support on a non-sectarian basis to broaden its zones and expand the “resistance” against common “enemies”; such as Hamas was one of the primary beneficiaries of this policy; nevertheless, on Syria, Hamas decided on supporting Syrian opposition instead of aligning with Iran which also demonstrated one of the fragilities of the Tehran’s non-sectarian vision.²¹⁸

²¹⁵Ali Ansari and Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi, Ibid.; Bayram SİNKAYA, “İran-Pyd ilişkileri: Taktik Ortaklık.” *Middle Eastern Analysis / Ortadoğu Analiz* 7, no. 70 (September 2015): 50–52. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com/library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=113283415&site=ehost-live>.

²¹⁶Shahram Chubin, "Iran and the Arab Spring: Ascendancy Frustrated." *Gulf Research Center*. September 2012. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Iran_and_Arab_Spring_2873.pdf (accessed April 06, 2020).

²¹⁷Tom O'connor, *Saudi Arabia Calls Iran, Turkey And Islamic Militants The 'New Axis Of Evil,' Egypt Reports*. July 03, 2018. <https://www.newsweek.com/saudi-arabia-calls-iran-turkey-muslim-militants-new-axis-evil-egypt-reports-835697> (accessed April 15, 2020).

²¹⁸ Shahram Chubin, Ibid.

Defined as the part of the “axis of evil” together with North Korea and Iraq (later Syria too was added on this list) by the Bush Administration and especially after the 2003 occupation of Iraq, Iran has perceived that it would be next after Iraq and thus received more threat from the US to its Islamic regime which maintains vis a vis negative relations with the West and has been isolated since 1979.²¹⁹ However, due to the occurring power vacuum by the 2003 Iraqi operation and then the withdrawal of the US forces from Iraq, Iranian influence enabled to augment in Iraq²²⁰; therefore, the Iraqi corridor to Levant through Syria solidified as well as Tehran’s capability to impact on the events in Syria. Possible regime change in Syria would boost the encirclement of Iran, in which case the Islamic regime would become a more brittle structure.

As a “semi-alliance”, the axis of resistance (*mehvar-e moqâvemat*) has been shaped around coalition-building among the group of states and armed groups aiming to “resisting dominance” and mutual solidarity against the Western and regional measures to isolate Iran and Syria; accordingly, the axis establishes the backbone of Iranian regional strategy as well as relations with the great powers.²²¹ The common understanding of Syria and Iran against Israel, countering Iraqi ambitions (before 2003), and isolation by the US caused to pursue a pragmatic way in bilateral relations; however, the axis has been defined as “marriage of convenience” in the bilateral

²¹⁹ Ahmed Abdel Halim, “The New ‘New World Order’: Regional Security after Iraq.” *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics & Culture* 11, no. 1 (March 2004):11–15.<http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=13118177&site=ehost-live>. See also: BBC News. *US expands ‘axis of evil’*. May 06, 2002. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/1971852.stm> (accessed April 15, 2020).

²²⁰ Ed Blanche, “Iran Tightens Its Grip on the ‘New’ Iraq.” *Middle East*, no. 411 (May 2010): 12–17. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=53403121&site=ehost-live>.

²²¹ M. Soltaninejad, “Coalition-Building in Iran’s Foreign Policy: Understanding the “Axis of Resistance.” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 21, no.6 (2019): 716-731. doi:10.1080/19448953.2018.1506295.

relations.²²² Moreover, the assassination of Lebanese former PM Rafic Hariri, alleged to be by Syria in 2005 and the nuclear ambitions of Iran, resulted in the boosting alienation of these actors in the regional order, which resulted in further rapprochement in the bilateral relations.²²³

Iranian military elites assume that approximately %70 of Syria was under the control of “terrorists” and, they assess that due to the past events that demonstrate the success of axis, especially the Hezbollah's victory over Israel in 2006, led the US policy towards breaking down the “axis of resistance” from its “heart”.²²⁴ Although the Syrian crisis interpreted as an “existential threat” to Iran, Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei considers accord priority treatment that preserving the weapon and goods corridor to Lebanese Hezbollah and securing the holy shrines in Syria.²²⁵ Accelerating Iranian network with state and non-state actors across the Levant brings about the strategic depth which reckons for deterrent capabilities against Israel and also serves Tehran as a departure point against Western isolation for the IRI.²²⁶ In this context; Iranian security architecture consists of preventing elements that pose a threat to its borders and maintaining the spheres of its regional influence that extends to Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon to be capable of averting its security structure from regional and global threats.²²⁷ This architecture attaches great importance to

²²²Bayram Sinkaya, “İran-Suriye İlişkileri ve Suriye’de Halk İsyanı.” *Middle Eastern Analysis / Ortadogu Analiz* 3, no. 33 (September 2011): 38–48. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=66294066&site=ehost-live>.

²²³ M. Soltaninejad, Ibid.

²²⁴Ali Hashem, *In Syria, Iran sees necessary war*. March 16, 2017. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/03/iran-syria-intervention-hamedani-quds-force-memoir.html> (accessed April 12, 2020).

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Sanam Vakil, “Understanding Tehran’s Long Game in the Levant.” *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 15, no. 60 (2018): 105-120. DOI: 10.33458/uidergisi.525101.

²²⁷ Ali Hashem, “Iran's Post-ISIS Regional Strategy.” *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Summer 2017: 105-112.

establishing a connection between proxies and maintaining strategic “alliances” in order to serve its influence in the region and departure from isolation. Since Iran provides financial, military, and logistical support to Hezbollah over Syria, as the primary connection point between Iran and Hezbollah, it has been seen as critical for breaking Syria from this “axis”, ensuring that Hezbollah is besieged and breaking the influence of Iran in Lebanon.²²⁸

Apart from playing a crucial role to form a Syrian paramilitary organization National Defence Forces to support Assad and providing logistical support to the Syrian army; Tehran mobilized its local Syrian, Pakistani, Iraqi and Afghan Shia proxies and mainly has carried out operations in the provinces of Aleppo, Latakia, Homs, Hama, Idlib and Tartus under the control of senior commanders assigned directly by IRGC Commander General Mohammad Ali Jafari.²²⁹ IRGC Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani was responsible for coordinating operations with Assad regime and Shia forces in Syria and Iraq; under his leadership, Shia forces gained more ground and strengthen their positions in Syria in order to counter against rebel forces and extremist Sunnis.²³⁰ The activities stretched out to secure the arms and goods route for the proxies across Iraq and Lebanon, and to acquire a strategic position in southwestern Syria in order to counter probable escalation with Israel.²³¹ Indeed, Shia proxies’ stance also aims to gather relatively strength against Israel; for instance, Iran-

²²⁸ Bayram Sinkaya, “İran-Suriye ilişkileri ve Suriye’de Halk İsyanı.” Ibid.

²²⁹ Ali Ansari and Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi, Ibid.

²³⁰The Israel Defense Forces. *Iranian Forces Deployed in Syria*. n.d. <https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/iran/iran-in-syria/iranian-forces-deployed-in-syria/> (accessed April 2020, 13).

²³¹ Maysam Behravesht, *Iran’s Syria policy post-IS: Staying for the long haul*. November 15, 2017. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/irans-syria-policy-post-staying-long-haul> (accessed April 14, 2020).

backed Iraqi militia Harakat al-Nujaba declared the foundation of the Golan Liberation Brigade employing “resistance” narrative.²³²

3.3.2. ISIS And Beyond

Despite averting from sectarian narratives and adopting pan-Islamic views, in conjunction with the emerging threat of ISIS, the events set Tehran forward to utilizing discourses based on Shia sect for recruiting Shia forces against Sunni radicalism.²³³ Developing events in Syria and Iraq forced IRI (reluctantly) to perpetuate sectarian lines, at the expense of decreasing the impact of the proclamation of the unity of Muslim *umma* and avoidance of sectarian discourses, to defend Shia shrines and attract Shia fighters against ISIS which was also brutally aiming Shia holy sites and communities.²³⁴ Besides IRGC's fight against ISIS together with its Syrian origin and other proxies, Tehran also mobilized multifaceted paramilitary groups, including “shrine defenders” in order to guard Shia holy sites, for instance, the Sayyida Zaynab Shrine in Damascus²³⁵, that also served Iran to get a foothold in Syrian regime’s vital zones.²³⁶

Stretched out to 80 km remoteness to the Iranian border in 2014, ISIS was assaulting Shia communities in its captured zones as well as posing a threat to Iranian domestic security as attracting Sunni minority to recruit them or challenge to Iranian internal

²³² Ahmad Majidiyar, *Iran-Supported Iraqi Militant Group Calls for Joint Efforts to Fight Israel in Meeting with Syrian Minister*. 10 May 2017. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/iran-supported-iraqi-militant-group-calls-joint-efforts-fight-israel-meeting-syrian> (accessed April 13, 2020).

²³³ Sanam Vakil, *Ibid*.

²³⁴ Shahram Akbarzadeh, *Ibid*.

²³⁵ Maysam Behraves, *Ibid*.

²³⁶ The other holy sites for the Shia sect in Syria could be exemplified as; Al-Nuqtah Mosque (Aleppo), and Sayyidah Ruqayya Mosque (Damascus), et cetera.

order.²³⁷ Although ISIS propaganda in Persian had limited appeal of its ideology within the country's Sunni minority (composing of 5-10 percent of the total population of Iran), still ISIS managed to recruit Iranians.²³⁸ Following terrorist attacks by five Iranian citizens on behalf of ISIS against the symbols of the post-revolutionary values; the mausoleum of Ruhollah Khomeini and parliament building (the Islamic Consultative Majlis), indicated as an attack on the Islamic regime rather than an assault on civilians.²³⁹ The terrorist attacks inside Iran displayed that the dimension of the threat may extend to domestic security from external dynamics.

Although both the US and Iran sought a solution in order to fight against the advances of the terrorist organization, Tehran has been alienated in the course of the coalition against ISIS led by the US.²⁴⁰ Iranian official discourse describes ISIS as a US creation and concurrently claims that this creation aimed to serve to break the axis while strengthening Israel and US' "dependent" states such as Saudi Arabia; accordingly, operations led by the US against ISIS was demonstrated as the fight against "unrestrained ISIS," not to eliminate this organization.²⁴¹ Therefore Tehran's counter-terrorism efforts were not in coordination with the West, namely, tensions with the US prevented cooperation even in vital operations.

²³⁷ Sanam Vakil, *Ibid*.

²³⁸ Golnaz Esfandiari, *IS Propaganda Increasingly Targeting Iran And Its Sunnis*. June 06, 2017. <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-islamic-state-propaganda-targets-sunnis/28531534.html> (accessed April 14, 2020).

²³⁹ Suzanne Maloney, *ISIS attacks Iran and accusations fly*. June 09, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/06/09/isis-attacks-iran-and-accusations-fly/> (accessed April 13, 2020).

²⁴⁰ Dina Esfandiary and Ariane Tabatabai, "Iran's ISIS Policy." *International Affairs* 91, no. 1 (January 2015): 1–15. doi:10.1111/1468-2346.12183.

²⁴¹ Khamenei.ir. *Who created ISIS? Was it anyone but the U.S.? Ayatollah Khamenei asks*. June 13, 2017. <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/4913/Who-created-ISIS-Was-it-anyone-but-the-U-S-Ayatollah-Khamenei> (accessed April 13, 2020).; Khamenei.ir. *By eradicating US-backed ISIS you helped not only Muslims but also the mankind*. 21 November 2017. <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/5284/By-eradicating-US-backed-ISIS-you-helped-not-only-Muslims-but> (accessed April 13, 2020).

CHAPTER 4

ASTANA PROCESS

Mediation, as a process of conflict management, has faced many hardships in the complexity of the Syrian crisis.²⁴² Although experienced diplomats Kofi Annan, Lakhdar Brahimi and, Staffan de Mistura made serious attempts to cease the fire in this complex area, their efforts failed because; firstly, President Assad was there to stay in any case, secondly already divided opposition unwilling to compromise on political terms and thirdly external powers fueling the separate sides made mediation hard to attain.²⁴³ In addition, the measures remained temporary, and while the external powers' conflicting interests determined the future of the process, other actors (such as ISIS) emerged in the place benefiting from the disorder, which added another dimension in the complex environment of the civil war. In this complex disorder, Astana talks took place in order to minimize uncertainties, clarify complexity and reach a compromise between guarantors as well as between opposition and Assad to be influential in the peace process and Geneva talks in the process of time.

²⁴²Ertuğrul Apakan, "Mediation: The Best Way Forward in Conflict Prevention and Resolution." *All Azimuth* 2, no.1 (January 2013): 39-42.

²⁴³Raymond Hinnebusch, I. William Zartman, Elizabeth Parker-Magyar, and Omar Imady, *UN Mediation in the Syrian Crisis: From Kofi Annan to Lakhdar Brahimi*. Technical Report, New York: International Peace Institute, March 2016.

4.1. Initiatives of the UN (2012-2016)

In the early stages of the Syrian disorder, the Arab League (AL) involved in the crisis to cease the fire, stopping the military operation against rebels and offering “national dialogue” by Nabil Elaraby’s mediation; but given mistrust to AL associated with Qatar and Saudi Arabia (which have supported rebels) led Assad to ignore the mediation efforts and gain time to suppress rebels, that caused Syria to be suspended from the AL.²⁴⁴ After the AL’s failed initiative, the UN has taken the lead on the mediation efforts, and experienced diplomat and former Secretary-General of the UN Kofi Annan²⁴⁵ appointed as joint UN–Arab League envoy to Syria in 2012.

On March 2012 Kofi Annan proposed a “six-point peace plan” for the de-escalation of the conflict and established Action Group for Syria for monitoring and pursuing this plan.²⁴⁶ Annan’s plan constituted the critical elements of an inclusive Syrian transitional process, cessation of fire supervised by the UN, provision of humanitarian assistance, free movement of the journalists, and releasing the arbitrarily detained persons²⁴⁷; which also would be the basis on the Syrian peace process aimed to minimize uncertainties by clarifying external powers’ position and ceasing fire in

²⁴⁴Magnus Lundgren, “Mediation in Syria: Initiatives, Strategies, and Obstacles, 2011-2016” *Contemporary Security Policy* 37, no.2 (April 30, 2016): 273-288. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2787157>.

²⁴⁵ It is argued that former UN secretary-general Ban Ki-Moon attempted to find a high-level Arab mediator who could persuade both sides in the negotiation table; however, he could not find a high-level Arab mediator in the first attempt. Apart from Annan's high-level career in the UN (including former secretary-general), he successfully resolved the conflict in Kenya, 2008, and holds the Nobel Peace Prize. These facts enabled him as a convenient mediator in Syria even though his attempts failed: CBC News, Kofi Annan named UN-Arab League envoy to Syria. February 24, 2012. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/kofi-annan-named-un-arab-league-envoy-to-syria-1.1186485> (accessed August 23, 2020).

²⁴⁶Douglas Hamilton, *Text of Annan's six-point peace plan for Syria*. April 04, 2012. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-ceasefire/text-of-annans-six-point-peace-plan-for-syria-idUSBRE8330HJ20120404> (accessed April 17, 2020).

²⁴⁷Annan's plan also necessitates the right to peaceful protest; however, due to the priorities in the initiatives, this right has de facto lost its ground in Geneva. The main priorities of the initiatives have remained as the cessation of hostilities, Syrian-led transition, and humanitarian assistance.

Syria while employing confidence-building measures.²⁴⁸

Annan's strategy envisaged that the regime should have made most of the concessions to end the violence and human rights abuses, however, this strategy also harmed the inclusiveness of the mediation efforts; nonetheless, Assad did not implement any of the requirements planned, and even when Geneva I commenced the regime was importantly missing.²⁴⁹ Annan stated that in Geneva:

The Action Group for Syria should also agree on guidelines and principles for a *Syrian-led political transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people*; and agree on actions that will make these objectives a reality on the ground (italics added).²⁵⁰

However, this transition subjected to many disagreements between the US and Russia pertaining to the question of transition with or without Assad.

After his resignation, Annan accused the Syrian government's rejection of operating his plan in practice, as well as opposition's military campaign hoping for external intervention as in Libya, and the deadlock in the UNSC; and his farewell advice for reaching a solution in Syria gathered around the essentials of joint international action to persuade both sides, a transitional government which leads the departure of Assad, and action by political means, in contrast, to militarily efforts.²⁵¹ Annan's successor Brahimi made attempts to obtain inclusiveness of his mediation efforts, for instance, he made an effort for bringing Iran in Geneva II; however, this move resulted in a

²⁴⁸ R. Gowan, "Kofi Annan, Syria and the Uses of Uncertainty in Mediation." *Stability* 2, no.1 (March 2013): 1-6, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.ax>.

²⁴⁹ Francesco Mancini and Jose Vericat, *Lost in Transition: UN Mediation in Libya, Syria, and Yemen*. New York: International Peace Institute, November 2016.

²⁵⁰ Kofi Annan, *Joint Special Envoy for Syria announces meeting of the Action Group for Syria*. June 27, 2012. <https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/news-releases/joint-special-envoy-for-syria-announces-meeting-of-the-action-group-for-syria-english-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d8%b1%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%a9/> (accessed April 18, 2020).

²⁵¹ Kofi Annan, *My departing advice on how to save Syria*. August 02, 2012. <https://www.ft.com/content/b00b6ed4-dbc9-11e1-8d78-00144feab49a> (accessed April 20, 2020).; Raymond Hinnebusch, I. William Zartman, Elizabeth Parker-Magyar, and Omar Imady, Ibid.

boycott from opposition; moreover, neither side had confidence in Brahimi's mediation strategy.²⁵²

Due to the temporary achievements of the conflicting sides on the ground, in 2012, rebel forces' morale was high to reach complete victory, nevertheless, in 2013 this morale converted into in favor of Assad; these temporary events also affected the parties' attitude on the negotiation table in which each side offered concessions that the other party would not accept.²⁵³

Following the deal on the chemical weapons of Syria between the US and Russia, given the Russian negotiation role on the alleged chemical attacks in Ghouta, 2013; the deal pushed to continue further talks in Geneva.²⁵⁴ However as mentioned above, American and Russian officials disagreed on the meaning of the Geneva I communiqué²⁵⁵ pertaining to Assad's role too, besides when Geneva II held there was no prospect to achieve any significant results.²⁵⁶ In fact, the disagreements between the great powers demonstrated itself in the UNSC as well; from the beginning, Russia, along with China vetoed draft resolutions²⁵⁷ pertaining to denouncing Assad's

²⁵² Lakhdar Brahimi, interview by Al-Hayat. *Brahimi: Geneva I Communiqué was 'superficial'* (June 26, 2014). URL: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2014/06/syria-brahimi-interview-envoy-reasons-failure.html#ixzz6KCN1cWje>; MANCINI, FRANCESCO, and JOSE VERICAT. Ibid.

²⁵³ Lakhdar Brahimi, interview by Al-Hayat. Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Pinar Akpınar, "The Limits of Mediation in the Arab Spring: The Case of Syria." *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 12 (December 2016): 2288–2303. doi:10.1080/01436597.2016.1218273.

²⁵⁵ Also named as Final Communiqué of the Action Group for Syria

²⁵⁶ Julien Barnes-Dasey and Daniel Levy, *Three Goals for Making The Most of Geneva II on Syria*. European Council on Foreign Relations, January 17, 2014. https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/Making_the_most_of_Geneva_II.pdf (accessed April 16, 2020).

²⁵⁷ In response to Russian and Chinese second veto, Friends of Syria Group (Inspired by the Friends of New Libya coalition) established by its core members of Turkey, the US, Britain, France, Jordan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia in order to widen the support and invoke legitimization of opposition by the collective action, while framing to regime's actions and Assad as illegitimate: Eric W. Schoon and Scott W. Duxbury, "Robust Discourse and the Politics of Legitimacy:

violence, imposing sanctions on Syria and urging Assad to step down, as well as ending all military attacks in Aleppo, 2016.²⁵⁸

In view of Brahimi, opposition and regime participated in the meetings because of pressures exerted from the US for the former and Russia for the latter, while the regime was insistent on staying and blaming “foreign plot” for the crisis and, opposition’s stance was determined by the consideration of the Assad’s departure while all of the parties supported by particular states; all of which made hard to achieve negotiations; and indicated that: “The issue of ending (the crisis) is not in the hands of the regime. It is in the hands of its neighboring countries and the international community. Syria is witnessing a civil war, and a regional war is raging through the Syrian crisis.”²⁵⁹

According to Hinnebusch and Zartman et al., Annan’s and Brahmi’s failed mediation efforts also brought some experiences, and both mediators had to challenge several facts: opposition’s precondition (not as a result for negotiation) for Assad departure, perception of their non-impartiality from both sides, lack of consent of entry into negotiation table and will to pursue conflict, ceasefires implemented for a strategy to maintain conflict by the actors, and without coercive means of hard power mediators depended on the great powers to persuade their sides for ending the conflict while the Washington and Moscow disagreed on many issues.²⁶⁰

Appointed after Brahimi, de Mistura’s first initiation was to select “pilot case” to employ confidence-building measures; indeed this initiative firstly implemented in

Framing International Intervention in the Syrian Civil War, 2011–2016.” *Sociological Science* 6, (November 2019): 635-660. DOI: 10.15195/v6.a24.

²⁵⁸The draft resolutions are available at: *UN Documents for Syria*. n.d. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/other-documents/page/1?ctype=Syria&cbtype=syria#038;cbtype=syria (accessed April 16, 2020).

²⁵⁹ Lakhdar Brahimi, interview by Al-Hayat. "Brahimi: Ending Syria crisis 'in hands of international community'." *Al Monitor*. (June 27, 2014). URL: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2014/06/syria-brahimi-un-arab-envoy-interview-efforts-solution.html>.

²⁶⁰Hinnebusch, Raymond, I. William Zartman et al., Ibid.

Aleppo where the conflict occurred between various actors as opposition, regime, and Kurdish forces; and when the tentative cease-fire was violated, and the civil war gained another dimension by the advance of ISIS, de Mistura provided to hold Vienna peace talks for Syria in 2015 (after the events of Russian intervention and temporary rapprochement between the US and Iran) to enable negotiations between the global and regional powers in order to re-energize Geneva talks.²⁶¹

Despite many hardships de Mistura faced, especially opposition's biased position towards him, Vienna peace talks were held more inclusively; indeed, it was the first international peace conference on Syria that West and Iran attended together; in Vienna, the events resulted in the establishment of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) consisting of 18 countries including Iran and Russia (which de facto disabled the Friends of Syria Group) and meeting on 14 November 2015 prompted to the adoption of the UNSC Resolution 2254 in December 2015.²⁶² Based on the Geneva Communiqué and “Vienna Statements”, Resolution 2254 obliges that supporting a nationwide ceasefire except for ISIL and Al-Nusra, allowing humanitarian assistance, and building conditions for the voluntary return of refugees.²⁶³ In this framework, Geneva III was held in February 2016; however, in the meantime, Aleppo offensive, which violated the cease of hostilities, resulted in suspension of the talks.²⁶⁴

Despite there were no significant results applied in Geneva, the conference series have continued due to any uncertain alterations on the ground that could enable the

²⁶¹ Magnus Lundgren, *Ibid.*

²⁶² Pinar Akpınar, “The Limits of Mediation in the Arab Spring: The Case of Syria.” *Ibid.*

²⁶³ United Nations Security Council. *Resolution 2254 (2015)*. New York: UNSC, 18 December 2015. Available at: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2254>.

²⁶⁴ Nick Paton Walsh, Tim Hume, and Hamdi Alkhshali, *As fighting rages, Syrian peace talks put on 'pause'*. February 03, 2016. <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/02/03/middleeast/syria-aleppo-offensive-geneva/index.html> (accessed April 21, 2020).

parties' on the significant negotiation.²⁶⁵ On the one hand, the specific barriers as; military prospects, and hope for foreign intervention, fragmentation of the opposition, which decreases its ability to negotiate and implement the decisions, fueled sectarianism, and lack of external parties' concerted position, have presented impediment in the peace processes.²⁶⁶ On the other hand, the dynamics as the rise of ISIS, joint suffering from combat fatigue, and the emergence of ethnic enclaves may cause external and local parties to employ practical measures and to reconciliation.²⁶⁷

4.2.The Role of Kazakhstan

After the Geneva and Moscow talks²⁶⁸ (2015) resulted in failure, a leading secular opposition figure, Randa Kassis, announced that some of the opposition assessed the possibility of Astana's participation in the mediation of the Syrian Civil War, and intended to establish a platform in Kazakhstan to discuss humanitarian aid and an action plan to settle the conflict in 2015.²⁶⁹ On the one hand, Kazakhstan did not attempt to found alternative platforms to Geneva and demonstrated significance in mediation parallel with Geneva talks, as former Minister of Foreign Affairs Erlan

²⁶⁵Sam Heller, *Geneva Peace Talks Won't Solve Syria—So Why Have Them?* June 30, 2017. <https://tcf.org/content/report/geneva-peace-talks-wont-solve-syria/> (accessed April 22, 2020).

²⁶⁶ Magnus Lundgren, *Peacemaking in Syria: Barriers and Opportunities*. UI Brief, Stockholm: Swedish Institute of International Affairs, November 2015.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ The Moscow talks, which were held in January 2015, resulted in "The Moscow I Communiqué that urges Parties to the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty as well as non-interference to the country by external powers. This meeting series aimed to complement the Geneva talks and reach a compromise on fight against terrorism; however, Moscow also aimed to establish "moderate" opposition that Assad tolerates. The maintenance of these talks failed in April 2015, because the Syrian opposition boycotted these talks: New Europe, *Russia hosts Syria peace talks, urges participants to compromise and unite against extremism*. April 09, 2015. <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/russia-hosts-syria-peace-talks-urges-participants-compromise-and-unite-against-extremism> (accessed August 23, 2020).; Yury Barmin, *Moscow's 11 principles for peace in Syria*. January 29, 2015. <https://russia-direct.org/analysis/moscows-11-principles-peace-syria> (accessed August 23, 2020).

²⁶⁹ Catherine Putz, *Kazakhstan to Host Syria Talks; Is the Central Asian nation an ideal mediator for international disputes?* May 08, 2015. <https://thediplomat.com/2015/05/kazakhstan-to-host-syria-talks/> (accessed April 18, 2020).

Idrissov stressed that these talks were not substituted for Geneva talks and indicated that “the Geneva process remains the best hope of a lasting and peaceful solution”.²⁷⁰ On the other hand, regardless of the output of the talks in Kazakhstan, the Syrian secular oppositions’ meeting (mainly led by Randa Kassis-Movement for a Pluralistic Society) in Astana, May 2015 was overlapping with former President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s objective of boosting the country’s image with the intent of attracting attention to Kazakhstan with world’s leading crises.²⁷¹ That initiative was actually an early sign of enthusiasm for practicing Astana as a platform for future Syria talks.

In order to provide Astana to boost its role in the international stage, Kazakhstan’s foreign policy concept in 2014 attaches great importance to maintaining well-balanced relations with international actors, as well as involving in multilateral activities, especially in the UN, and the role of mediation assessed to sustain stability.²⁷² “As an independent state Kazakhstan desired to keep all options open in the realm of international relations and the multi vector approach enabled the Kazakhs to maintain newly gained independence and engage in autonomous action.”²⁷³ This multivector approach also necessitates pragmatism and maintaining good relations with the opposing camps as well, in context with this policy approach Kazakhstan pursued advanced cooperation while abstaining from restraining relations with Iran, Turkey, and Russia. It should also be mentioned that both Russia, Turkey, and Iran have been enthusiastic about pursuing good relations with Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is part of the Russian Near Abroad, constitutes a

²⁷⁰Catherine Putz, *Why Was Syria’s Opposition in Kazakhstan?* May 29, 2015. <https://thediplomat.com/2015/05/why-was-syrias-opposition-in-kazakhstan/> (accessed April 17, 2020).

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷²Georgiy Voloshin, “Kazakhstan Adopts New Foreign Policy Concept.” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst* 16, no. 3 (February 5, 2014): 23–24. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=94681337&site=ehost-live>.

²⁷³Kaan Diyarbakırloğlu and Süreyya Yiğit, “Kazakh Multi Vector Foreign Policy in Action.” *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 70–82. doi:10.21599/atjir.97918.

geo-economic position and economic benefits for Iran (especially Iran's gas export to Kazakhstan alleviates Tehran's economic burden derived from Western sanctions), and possesses cultural and strategic ties with Turkey.²⁷⁴

In context with Kazakh objectives, Nazarbayev also took a constructive role in mediation with Turkey and Russia, and implement intense efforts to restore the Ankara-Moscow line which greatly harmed after the incident of Russian Sukhoi Su-24 shootdown by Turkey in 2015; as a matter of fact, Putin had defined this shootdown incident as "stab in the back" and imposed harsh sanctions to Turkey, and for that reason, bilateral relations had not seemed to recover in a short term period.²⁷⁵ It should be also mentioned that Kazakhstan also endeavored to form a platform to end the Iran nuclear crisis in the Kazakh city Almaty, 2013.²⁷⁶ With the effect of these events, Astana was already a suitable, constructive and impartial platform to pursue negotiations on Syria by all three states.

Considering Nazarbayev's stance on "sovereignty" (which could benefit on Assad's future according to Russia), Kazakh's strict position against extremist Islamists and Astana's avoidance from siding with any conflicting party since 2011, Putin nominated Astana on December 2016 to pursue further talks and negotiation for

²⁷⁴For "Russian influence" over Kazakhstan, despite Astana's independent role see also: Marlene Laruelle & Royce, Dylan and Beysembayev Serik, "Untangling the puzzle of "Russia's influence" in Kazakhstan", *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 60, no.2, (2019): 211-243, DOI: 10.1080/15387216.2019.1645033. For Iranian geostrategic interests: Elaheh Kooalee & Ebrahimi, Amir and Mougouee, Simin Shirazi, "Iran and Kazakhstan Relations: A Geopolitical Analysis", *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs* 4, no.1, (Winter 2014): 89-112. And for the summary of Turkish-Kazakh relations: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Relations between Turkey and Kazakhstan*. n.d. <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-kazakhstan.en.mfa> (accessed April 18, 2020).

²⁷⁵ Nurlan Baymoldauly Onjanov, *Ara Bulucu; Suriye Düğümü*. edited by Rahime Özdemir. Translated from Kazakh into Turkish by Aşur Özdemir. Ankara: Panama, 2018.

²⁷⁶Togzhan Kassenova, *Iran Nuclear Talks in Kazakhstan: Remember When Diplomacy Worked*. February 25, 2013. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/02/25/iran-nuclear-talks-in-kazakhstan-remember-when-diplomacy-worked-pub-50901> (accessed April 17, 2020).

peace with the regime and opposition elements in Syria.²⁷⁷ With the acceptance of this nomination by all sides, Astana has become another dimension of the Syrian peace process.

4.3. Ground Dynamics for Tripartite Talks

Astana process is an output of the developing but structurally limited rapprochement among Russia, Iran, and Turkey as well as deriving from parties' objective of maintaining their foreign policies as far as possible in Syria by utilizing the platform and ensuring the acceptance of their interests by the other actors. In doing so, the Astana platform also helped parties in providing ground for coordination to prevent any possible clashes between them.²⁷⁸

4.3.1. Impartiality Status

In mediation efforts, mediators should have influence over the disputants in order to maintain leverage and effectiveness over the conflicting parties.²⁷⁹ Neither Turkey, Russia, nor Iran possess influence over both of the disputants because of the active involvement in the civil war and their support to particular conflicting sides. In the meantime, as a part of the civil war that also extended by hard power means in area, Ankara, Moscow, and Tehran exerted their intention to determine the direction of conflict. However, mediation efforts, which is one of the appropriate tools in this context, could not be carried out solitarily due to the lack of the specific disputants' consent and entry in mentioned states' mediation efforts. Before militarily

²⁷⁷Samuel Ramani, *What Does Kazakhstan Have at Stake in Syria?* December 24, 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/what-does-kazakhstan-have-at-stake-in-syria/> (accessed April 17, 2020).

²⁷⁸Hamidreza Azizi, *Why the Ankara Summit Is Important*. September 18, 2019. <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/why-the-ankara-summit-is-important/> (accessed May 02, 2019).

²⁷⁹ Jeffrey Z. Rubin, " Conclusion: International Mediation in Context." In *Mediation in International Relations; Multiple Approaches to Conflict Management*, by Jacob Bercovitch, & Jeffrey Z. Rubin, edited by Jacob Bercovitch, & Jeffrey Z. Rubin, 254. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992.

intervening in the civil war, Russia demonstrated its intentions to maintain mediation in parallel with the Geneva talks with the Moscow talks, however; the Moscow talks (hosted by Russia delegates of Syria's permanent representative to the UN, Bashar Jaafari and mainly "moderate" opposition attended and moderated by Russian academic Vitaly Naumkin²⁸⁰) did not achieve any success, even SNC, which was recognized as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people by the West, and also the UN special envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura declined to join further meetings in Moscow, early of 2015. As a proponent of the Assad regime, Russia could not establish an impartial platform for enabling negotiation and discussing the events in Syria.²⁸¹

Turkey's previous mediation efforts in global affairs has diverted to be preserving influence in its backyard during the Arab uprisings²⁸²; however, the continuation of the civil war minimized the effectiveness of its mediation efforts. Although Ankara made attempts to persuade Assad in order to appease the incidents before growing momentum in the early stages of the disorder, this stance has turned into hostility with Assad and full support to rebels in response to the continuation of harsh actions by Assad.²⁸³ These factors enabled Ankara to gain influence over rebels but also harmed its impartiality in the further mediation efforts in Syria because of visible hostilities with Assad.

Iran also offered mediation between the conflicting sides in Syria in 2013, however, because of its vigorous stance on Assad's side, opposition strongly rejected its

²⁸⁰ Gabriela Baczynska, *Moscow-hosted Syria talks end, sides agree only to meet again*. January 29, 2015. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-moscow-talks/moscow-hosted-syria-talks-end-sides-agree-only-to-meet-again-idUSKBN0L21VV20150129> (accessed August 23, 2020).

²⁸¹Putz, Catherine. *Kazakhstan to Host Syria Talks; Is the Central Asian nation an ideal mediator for international disputes?* Ibid.

²⁸²Pinar Akpınar, "Mediation as a Foreign Policy Tool in the Arab Spring: Turkey, Qatar and Iran." *Journal of Balkan & Near Eastern Studies* 17, no. 3 (September 2015): 252–68. doi:10.1080/19448953.2015.1063270.

²⁸³Ibid.

offer.²⁸⁴ Tehran was unable to mediate between the parties despite its intentions to boost leverage by mediation along with its military support in Syria.

4.3.2.Tripartite Relational Dynamics

In order to have a “greater stake and higher status” in the MENA region, Russia implements a multi-vector policy in the region, which also necessitates developing ties with regional actors such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran together and restoring stability and security in the area.²⁸⁵ Astana would be another instrument of broader Russian multi-vector policy in which helps to boost Russian status in the region as well as might have compelled other regional actors to accept its presence²⁸⁶ in the area and hence may result in developing closer ties with Moscow.

Stressing political solutions for the peace whereas, gaining ground which also might serve to acquire a position in the negotiations, Tehran endeavored to gain a seat in Syria talks, notwithstanding, Iran was isolated from Geneva I and II talks, and other diplomatic processes.²⁸⁷ Similarly, discord in Syria between Turkey and the US, especially over Kurds’ position, led to expressing the “precious loneliness” paradigm

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵Vitaly Naumkin, *What Awaits Syria?* September 26, 2017. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/what-awaits-syria/> (accessed February 23, 2020).

²⁸⁶For instance, Israel needs Russia to limit Iranian influence in Syria and its nuclear enrichment program. As seen from the Israeli-Russian-American national security advisers' meeting in June 2019, Israel emphasized its concerns over the Iranian footprint in Syria to the Russian side. Nevertheless, Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev remarked that Russia attaches importance to ensuring Israeli security. However, he also stated that Iran was not a threat to regional security and it was playing a significant role in fighting against terrorism in Syria:

Judah Ari Gross, *In trilateral Jerusalem summit, Russia sides with Iran, against Israel and US*. June 25, 2019. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-trilateral-summit-russia-sides-with-iran-against-israel-and-us/> (accessed May 02, 2020).; The Arab Weekly. *No consensus in Israel-US-Russia summit over Iran role in Syria*. June 29, 2019. <https://the arabweekly.com/no-consensus-israel-us-russia-summit-over-iran-role-syria> (accessed May 02, 2020).

²⁸⁷Jubin M. Goodarzi, "Iran and the Syrian civil war." In *The War for Syria: Regional and International Dimensions of The Syrian Uprising*, by Raymond Hinnebusch, & Adham Saouli, 138-155. London: Routledge, 2020.

in the Turkish lexicon.²⁸⁸ Whereas Tehran was isolated from diplomatic events, Ankara was alienated from political events in Syria, on the other hand, Russia assessed to take advantage of these situations.

As “bitter frenemies” (in Sinem Cengiz’s definition²⁸⁹) Turkey and Iran, despite their proxies in Syria clashing each other, avoided worsening the relations and Iran maintain engagement with Turkey, which is also a specific gas market considering its isolation by the West.²⁹⁰ In this context, Turkey and Iran had already demonstrated co-mediation efforts, for instance, by implementing temporary truce between Hezbollah and rebels in Zabadani and Idlib in August 2015.²⁹¹ Another factor that enabled the Turkish-Iranian rapprochement in Syria was in their complex relations in the Kurdish issue. While Turkey supported KDP backed Kurdish National Council which is also the main rival of the PYD, Iran maintained pragmatic and tactical relations with YPG against ISIS; besides, Tehran did not consider YPG/PYD as a terrorist group; however, Ankara has perceived threat to its border security from this organization as well as mentioned repeatedly this organization’s links to PKK.²⁹² But at the same time, it should be also mentioned that Tehran’s relations with the PYD remained solely pragmatic in context with preserving Syrian territorial integrity; because of the fact that PKK-linked Iranian organization PJAK also poses threat to Iranian security and its territorial integrity, especially when PJAK started operating in the 2000s, developing dynamics also led to creating conditions for cooperation on

²⁸⁸Hüseyin Bağcı and Şuay Nilhan Açıklan, Ibid.

²⁸⁹Sinem Cengiz, *Can Turkish-Iranian cooperation work against PKK?* June 15, 2018. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1322246/%7B%7B> (accessed August 23, 2020).

²⁹⁰Özden Zeynep Oktav, “Turkish-Iranian relations in Syria” In *The War for Syria: Regional and International Dimensions of the Syrian Uprising*, edited by Raymond Hinnebusch & Adham Saouli, 176-188. New York: Routledge, 2020.

²⁹¹Pınar Akpınar, “The Limits of Mediation in the Arab Spring: The Case of Syria.” Ibid.

²⁹²Bayram Sinkaya, “İran-Pyd ilişkileri: Taktik Ortaklık.” Ibid. See also: Ali Ansari and Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi, Ibid.

Kurdish issue between Turkey and Iran.²⁹³ American support for the YPG is another factor that also worries Iran for the post-ISIS environment.²⁹⁴ However, due to the proximity, PYD has been posed a fundamental threat to the Turkish border, on the other hand, the Kurdish problem occurring from Syria found a place as a secondary threat on Tehran's agenda.

In the 2000s under the JDP rule, TFP added dimensions to its relations with Russia more than economic rapprochement, Moscow and Ankara attempted to include their global and regional interests in their common agenda despite their conflicting interests in Central Asia and the Caucasus; their mutual interests such as diplomatic, energy and economic relations led these actors to cooperate in such sectors; however, the relations strained due to the explicit conflicting interests in Syria while the mentioned actors still attempted to pursue good relations in other areas; nevertheless, the shootdown incident of Russian Su-24m bomber aircraft by a Turkish F-16 fighter jet on 24 November 2015²⁹⁵ brought about Russian harsh sanctions against Turkey and almost rupture in bilateral relations while Turkey endeavored to maintain relations via diplomatic channels after the Russian sanctions; on the other hand, this rupture in the relations harmed both sides in many areas; for instance notably both states' economy followed negative trend.²⁹⁶

Kurdish separatism and PKK linked groups defined as "Achilles heel" of Turkey had been more played as a trump card by Russia, which has sustained historical ties with

²⁹³ Ibid. and; Nuri Yeşilyurt, *Orta Doğu'yla ilişkiler*. Vols. III (2001-2012), in *Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, edited by Baskın Oran, 401-462. İstanbul: İletişim, 2013.

²⁹⁴ Maysam Behravesht, *Iran's Syria policy post-IS: Staying for the long haul*. Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ankara argued the incident realized because of the violation of its airspace, on the contrary, Russia denied this kind of violations and asserted it had never achieved warning signals due to the violation of Turkish airspace in its fight against terrorism in Syria: Hüseyin Bağcı and Serdar Erdurmaz, *Turkey-Russia Relations in the Era of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party): From Honeymoon to Separation and Reconciliation Again*, in *Security Narratives in Europe*, edited by Wolfgang Zellner, 131-146. Germany: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, 2017.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

Kurdish actors²⁹⁷, after the shootdown incident by Turkey in November 2015; on the other hand, there was no capability of Ankara to hold a Chechen card against Russia as in the 1990s given that Kremlin's control over Chechens has been augmented since the second Chechen war (1999-2009).²⁹⁸ In the short period of strained relations with Turkey, Russia protected political representatives of YPG, and enable PYD to run the first overseas office in Moscow, inasmuch as did not oppose federal solution in Syria and even tried to persuade Assad to cooperate with the Kurds, however, it did not officially recognize self-proclaimed administration in Rojava.²⁹⁹ Nevertheless, this "Kurdish card" would be played by Russia in order to negotiate and persuade Turkey to side with Moscow and make concessions in favor of Assad, by reassuring Ankara to acknowledging its security concerns and enabling its military operations against YPG in some areas where Russian presence located.

The abrupt change in Ankara-Moscow bilateral relations developed following by concurrent tensions over Turkey and the US. Ankara-Washington relations came through tensions over the threat of FETÖ as well; nevertheless, after the Gülenist failed coup attempt in 2016 the US did not want to support Turkey, and despite Ankara's repeated requests to handing over the FETÖ's leader Fethullah Gülen from the US, the demands were declined. However, on the issue of FETÖ Russia declared to support to Turkey fully; that was also one of the reasons motivated Erdoğan to

²⁹⁷Russia has maintained close ties with the diversified Kurdish actors in the Middle East. For instance, while the Astana process was proceeding, despite Turkish and Iranian denouncement of the Iraqi Kurdish independence referendum in September 2017, Russian MFA Sergei Lavrov stated that: "We are interested that the Kurdish people like any other nation on the planet can fulfill its hopes and aspirations." Also, in the same year, Russia became the leading funder of the Iraqi Kurdish region with the deal by Rosneft: Dmitry Zhdannikov, *Russia becomes Iraq Kurds' top funder, quiet about independence vote*. September 20, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-kurds-referendum-russi/russia-becomes-iraq-kurds-top-funder-quiet-about-independence-vote-idUSKCN1BV1IH> (accessed May 01, 2020).

²⁹⁸ Marcus Papadopoulos, *Russia-Turkey Relations and the Kremlin's "Kurdish Card"*. November 27, 2018. <https://www.globalresearch.ca/russia-turkey-relations-and-the-kremlins-kurdish-card/5661007> (accessed April 13, 2020).

²⁹⁹Al Jazeera English. *Why is Russia courting Syrian Kurds?* June 01, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2m86rPNSPQ&list=WL&index=41> (accessed April 15, 2020).

approach to Moscow.³⁰⁰ Mutual perception of rejection by the West was another factor that enabled pragmatically developing relations and ad hoc cooperation, which also seeking modus vivendi in the issue of Syria.³⁰¹

As “strategic singles” (in Suchkov’s term) Russia and Iran have shared the proximate views on Syrian future and sought to cooperate in Syria; however, this cooperation also based on “delicate balance” which would be jeopardized if either party would probably harm the other’s interests and opportunities in the area.³⁰² Although different policies and interests determined the particular implications, because of their overlapping agendas on Assad’s fate, as seen from Soleimani’s visits to Moscow in July 2015, Russia and Iran have already been maintaining tactical and operational coordination³⁰³ in Syria.³⁰⁴ Before the Astana process, Moscow sought for establishing platform (as in Astana) in coordination with Tehran. For instance; Putin had already visited Iran in November 2015, to confer on Russian proposal on Syria in which prescribes establishing a forum consisting of representatives of both opposition and Assad to forming a new constitution, excluding to refer Assad’s

³⁰⁰ Şener Aktürk, "Relations between Russia and Turkey Before, During, and After the Failed Coup of 2016." *Insight Turkey* 21, no.4 (Fall 2019): 97-113. DOI: 10.25253/99.2019214.06.

³⁰¹Maxim A. Suchkov, “Russia's "Post-West World Order": Why Turkey Matters.” *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, (Spring 2017): 69-78.

³⁰²Maksim A. Suchkov, *Moscow’s Leverage in Syria is Strong, But Limited*. 11 December 2017. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/moscows-leverage-in-syria-is-strong-but-limited/> (accessed: February 28, 2020).

³⁰³Rusia's first airstrikes were realized from the Iranian Hamadan airbase. However, in 2016 Iran annulled the permission of Russian presence in the mentioned base:
Anne Barnard and Andrew E. Kramer, *Iran Revokes Russia’s Use of Air Base, Saying Moscow ‘Betrayed Trust’*. August 22, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/23/world/middleeast/iran-russia-syria.html?emc=eta1> (accessed April 30, 2020).

³⁰⁴John W. Parker, *Qassem Soleimani: Moscow's Syria Decision – Myth and Reality*. February 04, 2020. <https://inss.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/2074132/qassem-soleimani-moscows-syria-decision-myth-and-reality/> (accessed April 28, 2020).

fate.³⁰⁵

4.3.3. Dynamics in the Area

An agreement between Turkish intelligence and Russian military in December 2016 (before the declaration of nationwide ceasefire in Syria by Russia and Turkey), foresaw the ceasefire in Aleppo and relocation of opposition forces to Idlib from Aleppo³⁰⁶, that enabled regime forces to recapture the city.³⁰⁷ The ceasefire agreement on Aleppo was the preliminary step for the nationwide ceasefire in Syria and the Astana Process; nevertheless, initiation of this deal enabled Moscow and Ankara to take further steps and build confidence in the interactions between them in the area. After recapture of Aleppo in December 2016 by Assad, and with the initiation of Astana talks, Moscow estimated that enforcing rebels to conform with diplomatic pressures, and assessed the possibility to convince Turkey to sideline with Russia as well as sought Turkish persuasion over rebels, in order to return Geneva as a triumphant of the peace process and strengthening the position of the Syrian regime by enabling Assad to retake the west and south of the country.³⁰⁸ In contrast to a partnership with the US in a diplomatic means on Syria, Turkey was assessed to be relatively easier to negotiate on Moscow's terms, due to the impact of possible coercive economic, militarily and political measures applying in a regional power

³⁰⁵ Associated Press. "Putin Visits Iran for Talks on Syria's Future." *Time.Com*, November 24, 2015, N.PAG. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.metu.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=111173069&site=ehost-live>.

³⁰⁶ Aleppo used to be most populated and wealthy city in Syria, the recapture of this city is defined as "key prize" for the conflicting parties: Alice Fordham, *Why The Battle For Aleppo Is So Important*. October 04, 2016. <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/10/04/496543697/why-the-battle-for-aleppo-is-so-important> (accessed August 24, 2020).

³⁰⁷ Kareem Shaheen, *Aleppo: Russia-Turkey ceasefire deal offers hope of survival for residents*. December 14, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/13/deal-reached-to-evacuate-rebels-and-civilians-from-aleppo> (accessed August 24, 2020).

³⁰⁸ Charles J. Sullivan, "Sidestepping a Quagmire: Russia, Syria, and the Lessons of the Soviet-Afghan War." *Asian Affairs* 49, no. 1 (March 2018): 48–55. doi:10.1080/03068374.2018.1416011.

would be more effective than a superpower in a possible conflict.

The Russian presence in the west of the Euphrates, and the US presence in the east, located in northern Syria compelled Ankara to cooperate with the other external powers in order to conduct operations against YPG.³⁰⁹ At the time Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) commenced, Turkey had already agreed with Washington; nevertheless, Washington support was limited in addition to having been aiming to prevent escalations between Ankara and YPG, Syrian government denounced the military operation; Iran in coordination with Assad also expressed its concern over the incursion.³¹⁰ However, Tehran and Ankara hold disagreements over dealing with the YPG; Turkey has focused on coordination with Moscow (notably during the Astana Process) and Washington, whereas Iran, in tandem with Assad, has indicated negative stance on the Turkish operations and urge Turkey to stop military operations and to respect for the territorial integrity of Syria.³¹¹ Just before the first round of the Astana talks took place and during the OES, Ankara and Moscow jointly airstrike against ISIS' compound in Al-Bab due to the signed a memorandum to coordinate airstrikes which also provides communication when it comes to the aviation airspace.³¹²

As a result of Russian-Turkish rapprochement, a country-wide ceasefire declared (except for terrorist groups) under the guarantors of Moscow and Ankara on 29

³⁰⁹Aaron Stein, *Ibid.*

³¹⁰GlobalSecurity.org, *Operation Euphrates Shield*. March 10, 2020. <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/syria-euphrates-shield.htm> (accessed April 16, 2020).

³¹¹*Ibid.* and; BBC News Türkçe. *İran Cumhurbaşkanı Ruhani: Türkiye'nin Afrin'deki operasyonu nafile*. February 06, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-42959710> (accessed April 16, 2020).

³¹² Hurriyet Daily News. *Turkey, Russia sign memorandum to coordinate strikes in Syria*. January 12, 2017. <https://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/turkey-russia-sign-memorandum-to-coordinate-strikes-in-syria-108469> (accessed April 16, 2020).; Al Jazeera. *Russian and Turkish jets 'bomb ISIL' in Syria's Al Bab*. January 19, 2017. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/russian-turkish-jets-bomb-isil-syria-al-bab-170118130233894.html> (accessed April 14, 2020).

December 2016; the declaration also envisaged meetings would commence in Astana in order to revitalize the process under the UN auspices.³¹³ As seen from these intertwined causalities, the “emergence” of the Astana Process is derived from the interconnected and interrelated interactions between varied and diversified actors that co-adapt in their interrelated interactions and the environment. Iran, Russia, and Turkey in context with their interrelated and interconnected interactions with the other actors and the changing dynamics in the area led these Parties to co-adapt with each other and the dynamics in the area in order to maintain their core interests in Syria, that resulted in the initiation of the Astana Process.

4.4.Astana Talks (2017-2019)

Mediation efforts engaged in a complex environment of interdependent and interactive relations operate in this complexity in order to “influence, change or modify” the direction of the dispute.³¹⁴ Both Astana and Geneva talks have been operated in this context but utilized different methodologies to manage the conflict. A basic comparison between the two peace processes would help to clarify the differences: (1) Geneva talks hold under auspices of the UN special envoy, while Astana Talks have operated by three guarantor states with the impartial platform Kazakhstan in parallel with Geneva process, (2) Effectiveness of Geneva is based on American-Russian relations and negotiations; however, Astana’s impact is dependent on tripartite relations and negotiations between them, (3) Geneva’s inclusiveness comprises more participant states and excludes the military factions, while Astana also includes military factions³¹⁵ but not many states as in Geneva were invited, (4) Geneva process *per se* legitimate platform by the UN, nevertheless rivalry with this

³¹³Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı. No: 333, 29 Aralık 2016, Suriye’de Çatışan Taraflar Arasında Ülke Genelinde Ateşkes İlanı Hk. n.d. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-333_-29-aralik-2016_-suriye_de-catiskan-taraflar-arasinda-ulke-genelinde-ateskes-ilani-hk_.tr.mfa (accessed April 30, 2020).

³¹⁴Jacob Bercovitch, "The Structure and Diversity of Mediation in International Relations." In *Mediation in International Relations; Multiple Approaches to Conflict Management*, edited by Jacob Bercovitch, & Jeffrey Z. Rubin, 25. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992.

³¹⁵Sam Heller, Ibid.

platform would harm Astana's legitimacy in the broader international arena; thus Astana process requires the UN special envoy's acceptance and participation, (5) Geneva has been organized by impartial³¹⁶ UN special envoy; on the other hand, Astana talks are executed by countries that explicitly support a particular side, impartiality merely ensured by the hosting country. Bercovitch indicates that:

... mediation is a dynamic process taking place within a political context, which affects, and is in turn affected by, the practice of mediation. International mediation is truly the continuation of global politics by other means. As such, it can only be comprehended as a contingent and reciprocal form of political behavior.³¹⁷

According to Touval, domestic and foreign policy considerations of the mediator states also form the format and tactics of the mediation, and principles of the mediation would be secondary with regards to primary goals: "The mediating state is no longer perceived as focusing its efforts on ending the conflict, but rather as pursuing a broadly conceived foreign policy in which the effective reduction of the conflict among the disputants plays a part, but only a part."³¹⁸

Astana talks have been primarily an extension of the foreign policies of the three guarantor states, which have been militarily involved in the area and willing to pursue their military gains through diplomatic means via Syria's peace process. Although it was argued that Astana platform has been to by-pass Geneva³¹⁹, non-participation of the UN in the Astana platform would harm the legitimacy of the rounds because of the fact that it is necessary to ensure the rounds' validity and legitimacy against the probable objections of other "participants" of the civil war, for instance, Saudi Arabia

³¹⁶The UN special envoy should provide impartiality in accordance with UN principles: United Nations. *United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation*. Guidance, New York: Mediation Support Unit (MSU), September 2012.

³¹⁷Jacob Bercovitch, *Ibid*.

³¹⁸S. Touval, "Mediation and Foreign Policy." *International Studies Review* 5, no.4 (2003): 91-95. doi:10.1111/j.1079-1760.2003.00504009.x.

³¹⁹Patrick Wintour, *Syrian opposition rejects Russia talks as west frets over influence*. November 01, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/01/syrian-opposition-refuses-to-attend-russian-peace-talks> (accessed April 26, 2020).

and the US, on the results in the area. On the other hand, the platform (if it succeeds) would enable the guarantor states, especially Russia, to affect on Geneva process and dynamics in the area in context with their priorities. For Turkey, joining the tripartite process assessed that it might provide Ankara to legitimize Turkish forces in Syria, limit Assad forces' attacks on the opposition forces³²⁰, as well as restraining the role of YPG/PYD in diplomatic forums and reality in the area.³²¹ As for Iran, it is essential to preserve its achievements and the Iran-Hezbollah corridor via Syria; thus, this process would also contribute its presence in the area.

In the beginning , there were three main topics of negotiation in Astana talks: (1) the establishment of a mechanism that would be acceptable for the disputants and that could ensure the implementation of the ceasefire (although both the opponents and the regime blame the other for the breakdown of the ceasefire) which entered into force on 30 December 2016 by the guarantor states, (2) to ensure that the rebels and Al-Nusra and ISIS were distinguished, (3) to maintain the fight against radical groups in Syria by the rebels, regime and international actors.³²² At first, the main objective of the talks was consisted of conferring ceasefire alternatives between conflicting parties in the framework of the format, which based on direct talks among guarantor states, and negotiations between guarantors and disputant parties under their guarantee via “*semi-shuttle diplomacy*”³²³, in order to provide a dialogue between the

³²⁰Simon Speakman Cordall, *Astana talks achieve mixed results although crucial issues broached*. August 03, 2019. <https://thearabweekly.com/astana-talks-achieve-mixed-results-although-crucial-issues-broached> (accessed April 28, 2020).

³²¹During the process, Ankara exerted an influence on vetoing participation of PYD/YPG in order to prevent PYD from gaining ground in political processes in Syria: Al-Awsat. *Astana 8 Sets Sochi Congress Date, Keeps Kurds Away*. December 23, 2017. <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1121556/astana-8-sets-sochi-congress-date-keeps-kurds-away> (accessed April 27, 2020).

³²²Nurlan Baymoldauly Onjanov, *Ibid*.

³²³Russian representatives negotiated with the regime representatives while Turkish delegates maintain a dialogue with the opposition in the separate places. The result of these talks have been exchanged between Russia and Turkey in order to mediate between disputants; the contacts have been pursued with the guarantors. For instance, rebels maintained contacts with the regime via three steps: Regime-Moscow talks, Moscow-Ankara negotiations, and finally, Ankara-rebel meetings.

opposition and regime in the Astana meetings; subsequently, the agenda of the meetings also focused on humanitarian crisis and the establishment of de-escalation zones.³²⁴

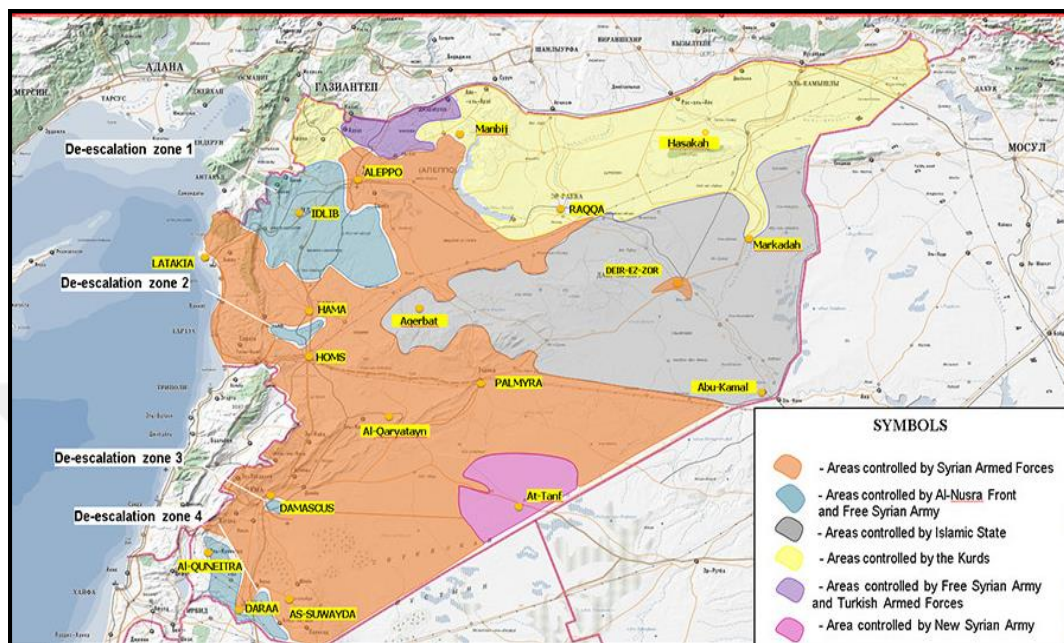


Fig.4.4.De-escalation Zones in Syria³²⁵

The figure above shows the map of Syria specifying de-escalation zones in the

Shuttle diplomacy is applied in the situations of disputants that would not maintain direct talks, but they pursue negotiations via a mediator. However, in this situation, neither Ankara nor Moscow were able to maintain direct talks with another conflicting party due to the deficit of their impartiality status. For more information on shuttle diplomacy: D. A. Hoffman, "Mediation and the Art of Shuttle Diplomacy". *Negotiation Journal* 27, no.3 (July 2011):263–309. doi:10.1111/j.1571-9979.2011.00309.x.

³²⁴ Nikolay Kozhanov, "From Russia's Military Deployment in Syria to the Astana Process" In *The War for Syria: Regional and International Dimensions of the Syrian Uprising*, edited by Raymond Hinnebusch & Adham Saouli, 245-260. New York: Routledge, 2020.; Patrick Wintour, *Russia in power-broking role as Syria peace talks begin in Astana*. January 23, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/22/russia-syria-talks-astana-kazakhstan-> (accessed May 02, 2020).; Nurlan Baymoldauly Onjanov, Ibid.

³²⁵ Russia Today. *Russian military police to control 3rd de-escalation zone coming into force in Syria's Homs – MoD*. August 03, 2017. <https://www.rt.com/news/398402-syria-homs-de-escalation-zone/> (accessed April 26, 2020).

country. As demonstrated from the chart, the parts dominated by ISIS, YPG, and the regime are not included in the de-escalation zones. On the other hand, four zones identified are composed of Al-Nusra and rebel forces together that also enable parties to fight against ISIS due to its exclusion of the zones. However, the distinction between the rebel forces and Al-Nusra has been problematic in the implementation of the counter-terrorism efforts in the zones, because the guarantor states also declared to fight against Al-Nusra while Turkey has been a guarantor of the rebel forces (distinguishing between Al-Nusra and rebel forces has been difficult task to achieve) to provide ceasefire.³²⁶ In addition, the foundation of de-escalation zones would help Russia to boost its leverage in the negotiations by adding this proposal on the agenda, besides by isolating armed groups against the regime, would provide conditions to set them against each other due to the divergence among them.³²⁷

Table of multiparty³²⁸ process in context with Astana format on below demonstrates that although some progress has been achieved in Syria, some disagreements still pose as impediment for the management of the conflict. The conclusions were generally reiterated previous ones, due to the lack of effect in implementation in the area, conflicting interests of the parties, and continuation of violence no matter how the conflict diminished.

³²⁶It should be noted that both rebel forces and the regime rejected the memorandum on de-escalation zones: Anne Barnard and Rick Gladstone, *Russia Reaches Deal for Syria Safe Zones, but Some Rebels Scoff*. May 04, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/04/world/middleeast/russia-iran-turkey-syria-de-escalation-zones.html?smp_r=0 (accessed May 04, 2020).

³²⁷Nikolay Kozhanov, *Ibid*.

³²⁸"Multiparty" paradigm is preferred over "multilateralism" on this research because multilateralism necessitates cooperation and practice of coordination of policies and agendas; however, multiparty action; parties may pursue conflicting agendas significantly and does not necessarily carry coherent policies, implications, and programs, while they endeavor to pursue coordination: Larry Crump, "Multiparty Negotiation and the Management of Complexity." *International Negotiation* 8, no. 2 (May 2003): 189–95. doi:10.1163/157180603322576103.; R. O. Keohane, "Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research." *International Journal* 45, no.4 (Autumn 1990): 731-764. doi:10.2307/40202705.

Table.4.4. Multiparty process in context with Astana format (2017-2019)

Time	Events	Conclusions
January 23-24, 2017 (First Round)	The meeting determined to strengthen the ceasefire provided by the agreement of December 29, 2016. Indirect negotiations took place between the armed opposition and the Syrian regime with the connection of Russia, Iran, and Turkey. The UN delegation mediated, the US delegation participated as an observer. These were the first negotiations in which both the Syrian regime and the armed opposition participated.	Guarantor states have agreed to establish a tripartite ceasefire monitoring mechanism in Syria; expressed readiness to cooperate in the fight against ISIS and Al-Nusra together and; agreed to hold meetings in the Astana platform on specific issues.
February 15-16, 2017 (Second Round)	Guarantor states, representatives of the Syrian government and the armed Syrian opposition participated in the negotiations. UN, US, and Jordan became observers in the platform.	Guarantor states adopted a mechanism to create a joint working group on monitoring ceasefire and reporting to the UN; agreed on a draft regulation on ceasefire areas; negotiated draft regulations on the exchange of prisoners.
March 14-15, 2017 (Third Round)	Guarantor states, and representatives of the Syrian regime participated in the talks. The UN, US, and Jordan attended as observers in the platform.	Guarantor states assessed the situation of the ceasefire in the areas; discussed prospects of establishing a working group on the new Syrian constitution as well as the provisions of the working group on the exchange of prisoners, and the formation of a single map locating the positions of armed opposition groups and terrorist groups such as ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front.
May 3-4, 2017 (Fourth Round)	The talks were held by the delegations of Guarantor states as well as representatives of the Syrian regime and the armed Syrian opposition. The delegations of the UN, US, and Jordan attended as observers.	Guarantor states signed a memorandum on the creation of de-escalation zones in Syria. According to the document, de-escalation zones would be established in Idlib province and certain parts of the neighbouring provinces (Latakia, Hama and Aleppo provinces), certain parts in the north of Homs province, in eastern Ghouta; and certain parts of southern Syria (Deraa and Al-Quneitra provinces) to end the violence as soon as possible, and creating security zones in order to prevent incidents and military confrontations between the conflicting parties, improving the humanitarian situation, creating conditions for the voluntary return of the refugees and creating favorable conditions for a political settlement in Syria. The document also remarked that it was "guided by the provisions of UNSC resolution 2254" and "reaffirming their strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic."
July 4-5, 2017 (Fifth Round)	The talks were held by the delegations of the Guarantor states as well as representatives of the Syrian regime and the armed Syrian opposition. The delegations of the US, and Jordan and also UN special envoy to Syria Steffan de Mistura attended as observers. Regime representatives discussed the issues with Russian delegations, and opposition held talks with Turkish delegations in separate locations.	Guarantor states declared their determination to the cessation of hostilities and welcomed the establishment of the Joint Working Group on de-escalation zones in accordance with the memorandum. They agreed on info-sharing and not all de-escalation zones were subject to extension. However, no serious agreement was reached, because of the Iranian objection pertaining to an extension of southern zone which is...

Table.4.4. Multiparty process in context with Astana format (2017-2019) (continued)

		...also a part of Iranian corridor to Hezbollah
September 14-15, 2017 (Sixth Round)	The delegations of the Syrian regime and the Syrian armed opposition (including Ahrar al-Sham, Jaish al-Islam, representatives of the Southern Front, and approximately 80% of the northern Syrian factions), Guarantor states and de Mistura, as well as high representatives of Jordan and the US, attended the talks. During the negotiation process on the Idlib de-escalation zone, Turkey, as the guarantor of the opposition, negotiated in order to consider the opposition's aspects.	It was announced that the creation of de-escalation zones especially in Idlib province (which shares borders with Turkey and captured in 2015 by an alliance of jihadists and rebels), in Eastern Ghouta, in certain parts in the north of Homs province, and in certain parts of neighboring provinces (Latakia, Hama, and Aleppo), as well as in certain areas in southern Syria. It was also agreed on the deployment of forces to the locations along boundaries of the zones to monitor compliance.
October 30-31, 2017 (Seventh Round)	The 7th round of the talks took place after the events of recapturing Raqqa from ISIS. Russian representative to Astana Alexandre Lavrentiev remarked that Moscow is ready to act as a "mediator" between Turkey and the Syrian regime, who "qualify as "illegal" with the presence of Ankara troops on the territory."	The signed document calls for stepping up efforts to progressing the political settlement under the auspices of the UN in Geneva, as well as assessing the Russian proposal to hold the Syrian National Dialogue Congress at which negotiations on the future constitution for Syria held in Sochi (Turkey rejected the invitation to the Kurds in this platform) in accordance with the Geneva process. The necessity of increasing international humanitarian assistance and the importance of expanding confidence-building measures, such as the release of detainees, was mentioned.
November 22, 2017 Sochi-I Summit	Three presidents discussed the settlement in Syria, long-term normalization, and joint work for these objectives in context with Astana format.	It was stated to continue the efforts of peace and stability aims envisaged by UNSC Resolution 2254 and collaboration on the de-escalation regime. The parties agreed to establish conditions to curb refugee influx, to maintain the fight against ISIS and Al-Nusra, and to contribute the Syrian-led constitution with the participation of all <i>eligible</i> segments of the society under UN auspices. (Italics added: It could be understood that YPG was not considered as eligible actor). In the joint statement, it was also agreed on: "The Heads of state reaffirmed their strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of The Syrian Arab Republic and emphasized that under no circumstances the creation of the above-mentioned de-escalation areas and at the political initiative to solve the Syrian crisis undermine the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of The Syrian Arab Republic."
December 21-22, 2017 (Eighth Round)	The talks were held by the delegations of the Guarantor states as well as representatives of the Syrian regime and the armed Syrian opposition. The delegations of the US, and Jordan (as observers) and also UN special envoy to Syria Steffan de Mistura attended. The Syrian opposition blamed Iran and the Syrian regime for damaging the process of adopting the document on detainees.	It was agreed on the creation of a joint working group on the release of detainees and meet in Sochi "as a facilitator of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, held under the UN auspices" to negotiating on SNDC with the participation of representatives of all segments of Syrian society except PYD. It was also decided to hold the...

Table.4.4. Multiparty process in context with Astana format (2017-2019) (continued)

		...next International High-Level Meeting on Syria in Astana in the second half of February 2018.
April 4, 2018 Istanbul Summit	The summit realized between three presidents, after Trump announced his intention to withdraw the remaining 2,000 American troops from Syria.	In addition to the previous joint statement, the parties remarked in this joint statement that: "Astana was the <i>only effective international initiative</i> to contribute to peace and stability in Syria by contributing to the reduction of violence throughout Syria and by <i>accelerating the Geneva process</i> to find a permanent political solution to the Syrian conflict." They also confirmed their determination to continue their active cooperation on Syria in order to establish a permanent ceasefire between the conflicting parties and to progress in the political process envisaged by the UN Security Council Resolution 2254. Presidents also welcomed the UN Security Council Resolution 2401, taken in response to the grave humanitarian situation throughout Syria, urged the conflicting parties to comply with the provisions of this Resolution, including avoiding ceasefire violations.
May 14-15, 2018 (Ninth Round)	The talks were held by the delegations of the Guarantor states as well as representatives of the Syrian regime and the armed opposition. The delegation of UN led by de Mistura also attended.	Guarantors confirmed their strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Syria. They noted that these principles are subject to universal compliance and that it is necessary to avoid any actions that may violate them and undermine the achievements of the Astana process. The guarantors also noted the importance of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation zones on May 4, 2017, and other agreements reached in the framework of the Astana format of negotiations. It was declared that fight against terrorist groups would be maintained until the end of ISIS and Al-Nusra and other groups and organizations associated with them and Al-Qaeda. The establishment of the further observation points was agreed in Idlib province, which has been hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees transferred from other rebel-held areas such as Homs evacuated and have faced the repeated airstrikes from the regime forces. Following the ninth round, Turkey established the 12th observation point in Idlib province.
July 30-31, 2018 (Tenth Round)	Following the events of recapturing the de-escalation zones in the Homs region, Daraa, and Quneitra by regime forces and their allies with massive offensive, Idlib is set to be a top issue during the Sochi meeting. Turkey remarked on the importance of the cease-fire in the area. The voluntary and safe return of internally displaced people in Syria and refugees were mentioned. The US did not attend the talks. The establishment of the Constitutional Committee was discussed with de Mistura. Russian side told that:	No serious agreement was achieved. It was decided to continue discussions on establishing the Constitutional Committee in September in Geneva.

Table.4.4. Multiparty process in context with Astana format (2017-2019) (continued)

	<i>"We consider the US refusal to send its representatives to Sochi as an intention to downplay the importance of the Astana format, and to discredit the implementation of mediation efforts in Syrian affairs that Washington is unable to put under its control."</i>	
September 7, 2018 Tehran Summit	The summit began when simultaneously Russian and regime forces had been bombing Idlib. Meanwhile, de Mistura proposed the establishment of civilian evacuation corridors and the departure of HTS and other armed groups from civilian-populated areas in Idlib. Erdogan's ceasefire calls were rejected by Putin. Putin also stated on this issue: <i>"We consider it unacceptable when, under the pretext of protecting the civilian population, they want to withdraw terrorists from being under attack, as well as inflict damage on Syrian government troops."</i>	There was no agreement on Idlib located as the last stronghold of the rebel forces. The parties agreed to maintain cooperation and coordination in context with the decisions of the SNC Congress in Sochi and the UNSC Resolution 2254 and it was highlighted to the necessity of creating conditions for the voluntary return of refugees.
November 28-29, 2018 (11th Round)	Ceasefire in Idlib was one of the main issues in the talks. The "pilot project" within the framework of the Working Group on the release of detainees/abductees and handover of the bodies as well as the identification of missing persons was discussed. De Mistura remarked that no progress was made and defined the talks as <i>"missed opportunity"</i> for Syria.	A joint statement was made to pursuing the fight against ISIS and Al-Nusra, remarking determination to enhance trilateral cooperation, providing the ceasefire in Idlib, intensifying consultations to establish the committee as soon as possible and rejecting "all attempts to create new realities on the ground under the pretext of combating terrorism and expressed their determination to stand against separatist agendas aimed at undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria as well as the national security of neighboring countries." And the next international meeting on Syria in Astana is planned in early February 2019.
February 14, 2019 Sochi-II Summit	The summit focused on the situations in Idlib (which is defined as "terrorist nest" by Russia) and East of the Euphrates and also Constitutional Committee. Turkey demanded a 'safe zone' establishment concerning Kurds would seize control on the east of Euphrates after the US withdrawal. This demand rejected by Iran and Russia, referring that such a situation (military incursion against YPG) should have approved by Assad.	The main objectives of the other joint statements were repeated. Three guarantor states welcomed the American withdrawal from Syria, mentioning that it would support "strengthen stability and security" in the country. HTS was denounced because of its increasing presence in Idlib. Mutual releases on 24 November 2018 and 12 February 2019 was assessed as successful development. The launch of the Constitutional Committee was reaffirmed to be aimed to facilitate as soon as possible.
April 25-26, 2019 (12th Round)	The guarantors held intensive talks in a bilateral and trilateral format. Representatives of Damascus, the opposition, the observer from Jordan, and the newly appointed special envoy Geir Pedersen also participated. Constitutional Committee, bringing new countries into the format and solutions to the terrorism issue in Idlib were main issues.	It was reiterated previous conclusions. Also, it was agreed on the invitation of Syria's neighboring countries (Iraq and Lebanon) to join the Astana format, and decided to held thirteenth round of talks in July 2019.
August 1-2, 2019 (13th Round)	It was discussed the completion of the formation and launch of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva in accordance with the decisions of the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue in Sochi.	It was agreed to take specific measures to ensure the safety of civilians in Idlib, and parties decided to hold 14th round of talks in October 2019.
September 16, 2019 Ankara Summit	The summit was intended to create conditions for the elections in Syria. The situation in Idlib and the voluntary return of the refugees were other concerns. Putin and Rouhani defended the operations in Idlib because of the presence of HTS. At the same time...	Three presidents announced the formation of the constitutional committee comprising of the regime, opposition, and civil society members. It was also stated that the ...

Table.4.4. Multiparty process in context with Astana format (2017-2019) (continued)

	...Turkey hoped to establish a 30 km extended safe zone into the northeast of Syria to provide a safe return of the refugees and reassure its security concerns. Iran added Israeli and American policies in Syria on the schedule to gain support from Turkey and Russia, against the US and Israeli activities.	...constitutional committee would proceed in Geneva under auspices of the UN.
December 10-11, 2019 (14th Round)	Situations in the east of Euphrates and in Idlib were discussed as well as the progress in the Constitutional Committee.	Previous statements were reiterated and parties opposed the illegal seizure and transfer of oil revenues as well as emphasized the full implementation of the Constitutional Committee. ³²⁹

³²⁹ ПОСОЛЬСТВО РЕСПУБЛИКИ КАЗАХСТАН В РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ. *Астанинский процесс*. n.d. https://www.kazembassy.ru/rus/mnogostoronnee_sotrudnichestvo/astaninskii_process/ (accessed March 02, 2020).; BBC News. *Syria war: Turkey, Russia, Iran agree Idlib 'ceasefire' zone*. September 15, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41279686> (accessed April 04, 2020).; Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *No: 288, 15 September 2017, Press Release Regarding the Declaration of the Idlib De-Escalation Area at the Sixth Astana Meeting Held on 14-15 September 2017*. n.d. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-288_-14-15-eylul-2017-tarihlerinde-gerceklestirilen-altinci-astana-toplantisinde-idlib-catismasizlik-bolgesinin-ilani-hk_en.en.mfa (accessed April 26, 2020).; Syria Call. *Yasser Abdel Rahim illustrates the latest developments of "Astana 6" .. What he said about "HTS"?* September 16, 2017. <https://nedaa-sy.com/en/reports/35> (accessed April 26, 2020).; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. *Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic*. May 06, 2017. https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2746041 (accessed April 26, 2020).; The Syrian Observer, translated from Alsouria Net. *Astana 5: Tehran Fears De-Escalation Zones Could Cut Land Path to Lebanon*. July 05, 2017. https://syrianobserver.com/EN/news/22880/astana_tehran_fears_de_escalation_zones_could_cut_land_path_lebanon.html (accessed April 26, 2020).; The Times of Israel. *Russia, Iran, Turkey to police Syria Idlib safe zone*. September 15, 2017. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/russia-iran-turkey-to-police-syria-idlib-safe-zone/> (accessed April 26, 2020).; Patrick Wintour, *Syrian opposition rejects Russia talks as west frets over influence*. Ibid.; Asianews.it. *Seventh round of Astana talks: Syrian conflict, military and humanitarian issues*. October 31, 2017. <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Seventh-round-of-Astana-talks-Syrian-conflict-military-and-humanitarian-issues-42194.html> (accessed April 26, 2020).; ASSEL SATUBALDINA, *Latest Syrian peace talks in Astana focus on humanitarian issues*. November 02, 2017. <https://astanatimes.com/2017/11/latest-syrian-peace-talks-in-astana-focus-on-humanitarian-issues/> (accessed April 27, 2020).; Sputnik News. *Astana-8 Brings Russia-Iran-Turkey Agreement on Detainees, Demining, Sochi Talks*. December 22, 2017. <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201712221060252404-astana-8-sochi-talks/> (accessed April 27, 2020).; Al-Awsat. Ibid.; Middle East Eye. *Turkey builds final outpost in protective ring around Syria's Idlib*. May 16, 2018. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-builds-final-outpost-protective-ring-around-syrias-idlib> (accessed April 27, 2020).; TRT World. *Sochi hosts 10th round of Syrian Astana Peace Process*. July 31, 2018. <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/sochi-hosts-10th-round-of-syrian-astana-peace-process-19275> (accessed April 28, 2020).; Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *No: 205, 31 July 2018, Press Release regarding the High Level Meeting held on 30-31 July 2018 in Sochi in the Astana format*. n.d. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-205_-30-31-temmuz-2018-tarihlerinde-socide-astana-formatinda-duzenlenen-suriye-konulu-yuksek-duzeyli-toplanti-hk.en.mfa (accessed April 27, 2020).; Orient Net. *Tenth round of Astana talks starts in Sochi*. July 31, 2018. https://orient-news.net/en/news_show/151958/0/Tenth-round-of-Astana-talks-starts-in-Sochi (accessed April 27, 2020).; Reuters. *U.N. says Astana meeting on Syria a missed opportunity, no progress*. November 29, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis->

As seen from the table of multiparty process in context with Astana format, despite policy differences and priorities; Turkey, Iran and Russia aimed to maintain tripartite coordination; guarantors struggled to meet in the common ground in Syria, and the frequency of the meetings declined when the presence and power of ISIS significantly declined. Indeed trilateral and bilateral summits have emerged in order to maintain the process, overcome the deficiencies in coordination and meeting in the common ground despite their conflicting interests and priorities, via direct negotiations.

When ISIS started to lose power and decline in the region, one of the common

syria-talks/u-n-says-astana-meeting-on-syria-a-missed-opportunity-no-progress-idUSKCN1NY0VS (accessed April 28, 2020).; (Letter dated 30 November 2018 from the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council 2018).; Web. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2018_1076.pdf.; United World. *Results of the Syria peace talks in Nur-Sultan*. April 26, 2019. <https://uwidata.com/3220-results-of-the-syria-peace-talks-in-nur-sultan/> (accessed April 28, 2020).; Sena Güler, *14th Round of Syria talks discusses latest developments*. December 11, 2019. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/14th-round-of-syria-talks-discusses-latest-developments/1670867> (Accessed April 28, 2020).; Kremlin.ru. *Meeting with President of Iran Hassan Rouhani and President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan*. November 22, 2017. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56152> (accessed May 02, 2020).; Kremlin.ru. *Joint statement by Presidents of Iran, Russia and Turkey*. November 22, 2017. <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5256> (accessed May 02, 2020).; Al-Monitor. *Putin, Erdogan, Rouhani extend circle of trust in Syria*. April 08, 2018. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/04/trump-syria-withdrawal-iran-turkey-russia.html> (accessed May 02, 2020).; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı. *İran İslam Cumhuriyeti, Rusya Federasyonu ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Devlet Başkanları'nın Ortak Açıklaması, 4 Nisan 2018, Ankara*. n.d. <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/iran-islam-cumhuriyeti-rusya-federasyonu-ve-turkiye-cumhuriyeti-devlet-baskanlari-nin-ortak-aciklamasi.tr.mfa> (accessed May 02, 2020).; Al Jazeera. *Idlib: Turkey's ceasefire call rejected by Russia, Iran*. September 7, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/09/erdogan-calls-idlib-ceasefire-tehran-summit-180907122805420.html> (accessed May 02, 2020).; Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Joint Statement by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the President of the Russian Federation and the President of the Republic of Turkey, Tehran, 7 September 2018*. n.d. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/iran-rusya-turkiye-ortak-aciklamasi_en.en.mfa (accessed May 02, 2020).; Warsaw Institute. *Putin versus Erdogan, or the Sochi Summit*. February 15, 2019. <https://warsawinstitute.org/putin-versus-erdogan-sochi-summit/> (accessed May 02, 2020).; Deutsche Welle. *Putin, Erdogan, Rouhani talk Syria in Sochi*. February 14, 2019. <https://www.dw.com/en/putin-erdogan-rouhani-talk-syria-in-sochi/a-47512393> (accessed May 02, 2020).; Kremlin.ru. *Joint Statement by the Islamic Republic of Iran, the President of the Russian Federation and the President of the Republic of Turkey*. February 14, 2019. <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5388> (accessed May 02, 2020).; Andrew Wilks, *Ankara Summit on Syria: 'A win for Moscow and al-Assad'*. September 17, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/ankara-summit-syria-win-moscow-assad-190917051916123.html> (accessed May 02, 2020).; Hamidreza Azizi, *Why the Ankara Summit Is Important*. Ibid.

objectives of the parties that also caused factor in cooperating had been missing the ground in Syria³³⁰, nevertheless, the Astana process has tended to include negotiations on the new Syrian constitution³³¹ to maintain the progress. However, the conflicting agendas of the guarantor states (especially between Russia and Turkey) have become more apparent due to the developments in the area. The parties' efforts applied in conflict management measures while aiming to maintain a common objective of the solution to their conflicting agendas; on the other hand, the escalation in Idlib has become more problematic due to the disagreements over developments and events in the province.

With the support of Russian intervention, Assad had already recaptured rebel and jihadist-held areas such as Homs, Aleppo, and, Deir el-Zour; also, in late of 2017 aligning with Moscow, regime forces managed to enter Idlib province governed by and comprised of rebel and (mostly dominated by) HTS alliance for the first time.³³² Nevertheless, regime forces still had limitations on militarily and political control in the area, even with the assistance of Russia and Iran, because some parts of the country were still out of control of the regime in the areas of Kurdish enclaves, jihadist and rebel strongholds.³³³

As a result of the recapture of other rebel areas by Assad, Idlib remained the only rebel stronghold in the country; after Astana guarantors failed to agree on the Idlib ceasefire during the Tehran Summit, the regime forces commenced offensive attacks

³³⁰Andrey Kortunov, "The Astana Model: Methods and Ambitions of Russian Political Action" In *the MENA Region: A Great Power Competition*, edited by Karim Mezran & Arturo Varvelli, 53-64. Milano: LediPublishing, 2019. doi: 10.14672/55260718.

³³¹After ISIS had a big defeat in its *de facto* capital Raqqa, by SDF with the support of the US-led coalition, 7th round of Astana talks focused on the humanitarian issues and it was concluded that the Syrian National Dialogue Congress at which negotiations on the future constitution for Syria would be in Sochi: Asianews.it. Ibid.

³³²Haaretz. *As Syria War Simmers, Tangled Map Previews Conflicts Still Ahead*. December 22, 2017. <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/syria/syria-war-winds-down-but-tangled-map-belies-conflict-ahead-1.5629420> (accessed April 27, 2020).

³³³Ibid.

against rebels in Idlib, which increased the tensions between Ankara and Moscow while Tehran remained in silence in order to prevent to harm relations with Ankara.³³⁴

To alleviate the crisis in Idlib, Turkey and Russia agreed on the Sochi memorandum on 22 October 2019 which requires, Turkey to remove the extremist groups (HTS) and their heavy weapons along with the line between Idlib and the regime as well as 15-20 km depth demilitarized zone would be founded in this border which entails joint patrol by Russia and Turkey for implementation of the cease of hostilities.³³⁵ While Ankara was concerning another refugee influx pertaining to Idlib offensive and preventing Damascus to reclaim under regime control, Moscow sought to target HTS elements and enable the regime to take over remaining parts of Syria; moreover, Putin narrated this memorandum as a “temporary measure” and indicated that he was “running out of patience” due to the developments of strengthening HTS in the area while it was expected to happen the opposite; nonetheless, it is argued that Ankara's task which required elimination of insecurities deriving from HTS exceeded Turkey's capabilities in the area.³³⁶ Because of these developments and already existed disagreements, the Sochi agreement was never fully realized by 2019³³⁷, and hitherto progress in the Astana process has maintained its uncertainties due to increasing disagreements and tensions among the parties in the complex nature of the civil war.

³³⁴Hamidreza Azizi, *Why Iran has been quiet when it comes to Syria's Idlib, safe zone*. August 26, 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/08/iran-silent-developments-idlib-syria-russia.ac.html> (accessed April 29, 2020).; Chandrika Narayan, *Airstrikes hit Syria's Idlib province, the last remaining rebel stronghold*. September 08, 2018. <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/09/08/middleeast/syria-idlib-airstrikes/index.html> (accessed May 04, 2020).

³³⁵Joyce Karam, *Full text of Turkey-Russia memorandum on Idlib revealed*. September 19, 2018. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/full-text-of-turkey-russia-memorandum-on-idlib-revealed-1.771953> (accessed May 04, 2020).

³³⁶Henry Foy and Chloe Cornish et al., *Idlib: Russia and Turkey dig in for a final Syria battle*. March 06, 2019. <https://www.ft.com/content/60d234fa-3e6a-11e9-9bee-efab61506f44> (accessed May 04, 2020).

³³⁷RFI. *A year after Sochi agreement, still no peace in Syria*. September 16, 2019. <http://www.rfi.fr/en/middle-east/20190916-one-year-after-sochi-agreement-still-no-peace-syria-russia-iran-turkey-astana> (accessed May 04, 2020).

Astana process is also based on an extension of the Russian compartmentalization³³⁸ strategy with Turkey into the multiparty mediation process. While there is a structural delicacy in the bilateral relations, this strategy may revitalize the relations and mediation process despite competing policies in Syria. Because unlike similar agendas on Assad's fate, shared with Iran, contrasting agendas would not enable "cooperation" while competing in Syria with Turkey. On the other hand, the "compartmentalization" strategy, which has been applied in Turkish-Russian relations³³⁹, may provide proper ground to boost the peace process caused by Ankara-Moscow rapprochement in different compartments as in the Syrian crisis. While parties sought common ground in Syria by "agreeing on disagreements"³⁴⁰, they made an effort to respect their strategic priorities in the area and avoid damaging the Astana process. For instance, to demonstrate its "bona fide" to Turkey, Moscow "allowed" Ankara and FSA to conduct Afrin operation except for Tal Rifat against the YPG in where Russia had sponsored the organization's enclave in the west of the Euphrates.³⁴¹

³³⁸ Compartmentalization is a form of relationship based on developing political, economic, energy and humanitarian relations while maintaining respect for divergent security and strategic concerns as well as their influence areas: Seçkin Köstem, "Türkiye-Rusya İlişkilerinde Karşılıklı Bağımlılığı Yeniden Düşünmek." Edited by Buğrahan Bayram. *Türkiye-Rusya İlişkileri: Türkiye'nin Dış İlişkilerinin Son On Yılı Panel Serisi-7*. Ankara: ULİSAANALİZ, May 2017. 6-11. Web. https://aybu.edu.tr/yulisa/contents/files/ULISA%20ANALİZ%203%20-%20Türkiye-R%20usya%20%C4%B0li%C5%9Fkileri_yeni.pdf.

³³⁹ During the Crimean and Syrian crisis until November 2015, Moscow and Ankara maintained compartmentalize economic relations and their rivalry in the areas in order to avert hampering positive bilateral relations and cooperation on specific issues from negative spillover to their rapprochement. However, enhancing significant disagreements may also damage this form of relationship. It is also argued that this form of relationship creates asymmetric interdependence in favor of Moscow between Turkey and Russia, considering especially the gas trade: Ziya Öniş and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, "Turkey and Russia in a Shifting Global Order: Cooperation, Conflict and Asymmetric Interdependence in a Turbulent Region." *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (January 2016): 71–95. doi:10.1080/01436597.2015.1086638.

³⁴⁰ Emre Erşen, "2000'li Yıllarda Türkiye-Rusya İlişkileri, "Kompartımanlaştırma" Stratejisinin Sorunları." In *Türkiye ve Rusya İlişkilerinde Değişen Dinamikler, Kuşku ve Komşuluk*, edited by Gencer Özcan, Evren Balta, & Burç Beşgül, 147-162. İstanbul: İletişim, 2017.

³⁴¹ Şener Aktürk, Ibid.

Furthermore, with the events of the US withdrawal from the east of Euphrates, Russia had determined to fill the vacuum while Turkey aimed to utilize the opportunity from American withdrawal to weaken YPG in those zones and establish safe zones in those areas, thus, when OPS started, Moscow extended its bases in the area while Turkey fought against YPG.³⁴² Nevertheless, Russia maintained strategic relations with the YPG and limited Turkish safe-zone and presence while enabled Ankara to fight against YPG, with joint patrols in the region.³⁴³ In response to this, Ankara avoided blaming Russia on Assad's offensives against rebel forces and violation of ceasefires in the de-escalation zones despite active Russian support to the regime. As seen from these examples, both of the parties aimed to reach *modus vivendi* in the area despite conflicting strategic interests in order to maintain the Astana process by *ad hoc* "respecting" their divergent interests in the region. It should also be taken into account that Moscow's strategy of uniting the diplomatic and military front under one umbrella with the effort to casting Turkey away from the Western camp would boost its leverage relatively accordingly to the US in Syria; nonetheless, Moscow's initial strategy to keep Assad in power in an attempt to recure his power by the foundation of de-escalation zones to gain time for the regime is also subject to concessions with Turkey due to co-evolution of the dynamics.³⁴⁴ Because of underlying fragilities (as seen from the Idlib crisis), the process inclined to follow non-linear dynamics and to cause crises between Russia and Turkey; thus, disagreements over the developments in the area and future of Syria are based on sensitive balances in the common ground in the course of time and interdependent on the changing dynamics as well as reiterated events in the Syrian complexity.

³⁴²Middle East Monitor. *US stops Russian advances in Syria*. 09 April 2020. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200409-us-stops-russian-advances-in-syria/> (accessed April 24, 2020).

³⁴³Марианна Беленькая, *Новое время. Каковы итоги встречи Путина и Эрдогана в Сочи*. October 23, 2019. <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/80162> (accessed May 05, 2020).

³⁴⁴Charles Thépaut, *The Astana Process: A Flexible but Fragile Showcase for Russia*. April 28, 2020. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-astana-process-a-flexible-but-fragile-showcase-for-russia> (accessed May 30, 2020).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In order to have a better understanding, the Astana process cannot be solely reduced into the relational dynamics among Iran, Russia, and Turkey; nevertheless, this process' underlying factors also derive from the interconnected relational interactions between varied and diversified actors and their interactions with those abovementioned states on the changing dynamics and on the emergence of the newly founded phenomena in the course of time in which actors co-adapt to changing dynamics to pursue their divergent core interests as far as possible. The essentials of the Astana Process' guarantor states' policies in Syria are based on various causes and interests, in which their separate but interconnected and interdependent relational interactions with various and different actors are also effective.

The international system is not directed by the linear static orientation; nevertheless, due to the vivid characteristics of the system, the dynamics are inclined to change and form other causalities (whether slowly or abrupt change by the emergence of other factors) that many calls "unpredicted" in the changing dynamics of international events. Indeed, changing dynamics would be unpredicted when the linear *ceteris paribus* assumptions are made to explain and describe international events; however non-linear assumptions ontologically based on complexity paradigm offers a better understanding of the analyzes and predictions of "unpredictability" and "uncertainty"

in order to include more varied and diverse actors and their interconnected role in the shaping of events in the area.

The complexity paradigm offers an alternative framework in order to understand the process-oriented interconnected power struggle in disorder. The changing dynamics in disorder in Syria have not reached any equilibrium, but attractors of the reiterated as well as emergent events which would establish the new circumstances far from the equilibrium that variety and diversity of actors have to co-adapt in the changing environment in the process of time. The characteristics of the “processes” in the Syrian disorder symbolizes the fracturing component in the power struggle that brings non-linear orientation. The Astana Process demonstrates itself as one of the emergent events in the Syrian Civil War that depend on the co-adaptation of the three states in the area and with the environment of the disorder, compartmentalization on the conflicting and overlapping interests in Syria, the diversity and variety of the actors’ action in Syria and their relations with Iran, Russia, and Turkey.

The power struggle shaped by the non-linear dynamics by the time and processes in the changing dynamics brings about flexibility in the behaviors of the actors in order to maintain their initial priorities in their foreign policies or their main objectives in the changing dynamics. That results in the co-evolutionary dynamics in the interactions between the relative power distributed actors restrained or allowed activism in structure, and between the actors and structure that co-shaped each other in the area. Because there are diverse, connected, interdependent, adapt, and non-linear characteristics in the events, the Syrian case’s ontological structure is compatible with the complexity paradigm. The power struggle between the actors has not only determined by the interactions, overlapping, and conflicting interests in the area; but also changing dynamics in the area, interrelated interactions between the third parties, and the emergence of diverse actors pose as prominent intertwined cause and effect on the Astana Process.

Mediation efforts in Syria are highly dependent on and connected to actors’ interests and agendas in the area; in fact, both Geneva and Astana processes have been determined by the distribution of the capabilities and powers of the conflicting actors

and their agendas in Syria. As a matter of fact, the conflicting agendas of the regional and global powers, changing dynamics, and the balance of the powers between disputants of the civil war in the area have shaped the course of the Syrian complexity.

As elaborated in Chapter 3, the foreign policies of Russia, Turkey, and Iran on Syrian complexity have been based on the differential interests and agendas; the common interests of the trio has been constituted as the countering the ISIS threat, cessation of armed struggle between conflicting parties (opposition and regime) and coordination in the area. Even though Russia and Iran have met on common ground to support the regime, their motivation to sustain the regime in power has been formed by different objectives and priorities in their foreign policies. When ISIS' power and territories in the area started to decline, the main common objective of the guarantors reduced its impact on the process and yielded to the surface the conflicting agendas more. Because of that, the frequency of the rounds (which includes opposition and regime forces) in Astana decreased while tripartite summits (among Ankara, Moscow and Tehran) and Russian-Turkish (which hold the disagreements on the future of Assad and support different conflicting sides in the area) talks' frequency increased in order to overcome the conflicting agendas, policies, and priorities. These attempts to overcome difficulties deriving from conflicting interests demonstrate the actors' willingness to adapt to the changing dynamics to pursue their interests that necessitates flexibility in their agendas as well as contributing to altering the dynamics.

A developed complex adaptive elliptical billiard balls model in the Syrian complex offers to enhance the horizon in Syria's changing dynamics and relations among the actors. Accordant with this model based on the complexity paradigm in the power struggle, the Astana Process also demonstrates flexibility in the foreign policies of the guarantor states in accordance with the non-linear changing dynamics and also possess considerable impact on the Syrian complexity. The relations between other actors (for instance, the relations between the US-YPG and the US-Israel) and interactions with those actors in the relations between separately Iran, Russia, and Turkey had a significant impact on the interrelational dynamics between those three states that formed the Astana process. Indeed the role of the other actors cannot be

excluded in order to understand the ground dynamics in the Astana process. On the other hand, neither state has the capability to alter the events in accordance with their core objectives totally. For this reason, to pursue the main interests in the area, Ankara, Moscow, and Tehran adapted their foreign policies in the changing dynamics and self-organized their positions without excluding their core priorities in the area. Astana process is the output and input of this adaptation to the changing dynamics in the Syrian complexity. Hitherto the Astana process' success cannot be neglected; however, its future achievements to manage the conflict are bound to guarantor states' adaptability in their relations despite their apparent conflicting interests in the area.



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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: TURKISH SUMMARY / TRKE ZET

Suriye İ Savaşı aędaş dnya sistemindeki en byk kırılma noktalarından biri olduęu gibi sayısız tartıřmayı da beraberinde getirmiřtir. Orta Doęu ve Kuzey Afrika (ODKA) blgesinde meydana gelen ‘‘Arap Baharı’’nın ana nedenleri olarak baskıcı rejimler ve 2008 ekonomik krizinin artırdıęı yksek enflasyon ve iřsizlik gibi sosyo-ekonomik zorluklar gsterilmiřtir. Olayların katalizrleri ise blgesel ve kresel glerin gsterilere veya ayaklanmalara tepkisi, gsterilerde sosyal medyanın hızlandırıcı ve harekete geirici rol, baskıcı rejimlerin bu gsterilere tepkisi ve aynı zamanda otoriter liderlerin geleceęi zerinde nemli bir etkiye sahip olan orduların rol idi. Suriye ordusu, bařından beri Suriye’deki mevcut rejimin lehine, Suriye devlet bařkanı ve Suriye Baas Partisi’nin lideri Beřar Esad’ın yanında yer almıřtır.

İnsani mdahale baęlamında 2011’de NATO’nun Libya’ya mdahalesi lkede rejim deęiřiklięi ile sonulanmıştı ve bu durum Batı mdahalesiyle Suriye’deki Esad rejiminin de sonunun geleceęi zerine hesaplamalara neden olmuřtur. Bylelikle Libya deneyimi, Suriye’deki blgesel g rekabetinin yanı sıra Rusya ile Batı arasındaki g rekabetini de hızlandırmıřtır. Mart 2011’de Suriye’deki Baas rejimine karřı Dera řehrinde bařlayan gsteriler tm Suriye’ye kısa srede yayılmıştı. Rejimin protestoculara karřı sert tepkisi, atıřan taraflara dıř destek ve finansman, eřitli etnik kompozisyon ve mezhep dinamikleri lkede i savařa neden olan sosyal ve siyasi dinamiklerin kutuplařmasını artırmıřtır.

Küresel ve bölgesel güçlerin yanı sıra, bu iç savaşta çatışan taraflar ülkede farklılaşmış ve çeşitlenmiştir; çatışan yerel güçler temel olarak şu şekilde farklılaşmaktadır:

(1) Tüm muhalif güçleri terörist ilan eden ve Suriye’deki iç savaş gerçeğini görmezden gelip, bu savaşı “teröristlere” karşı verilen bir savaş olduğunu iddia eden ve YPG ile pragmatik ilişkiler kurarken taleplerine de karşı çıkan Baas rejimi, (2) Birçok farklı gruptan oluşan ve Baas rejiminin sona ermesini talep eden muhalif güçler, (3) Suriye’de özerklik arayan Kürt güçleri, (4) IŞİD ve El Nusra gibi radikal Selefi gruplar.

Bölgedeki dinamikler küresel güç mücadelesi, bölgesel güç rekabeti ve yerel düzensizlik olmak üzere iç içe geçmiş üç katmanlı karmaşık bir sistem tarafından yönlendirilmiştir. Bu iç içe geçmiş katmanlar, Suriye İç Savaşı’nda karmaşıklığa ve belirsizliklere yol açar; bu nedenle, hesaplamalar orantısız sonuçlara ve düzensizlikten meydana gelen güvenlik zafiyetleri de diğer ülkelere yayılmaya meyillidir. İç savaştaki yerel dinamikler, özellikle IŞİD gibi sınıraşan silahlı gruplar, güvensizliklerin yayılmasına ve ayrıyeten bölge ve dünya genelinde sınırların daha geçirgen hale gelmesine sebep olmuştur.

Bu tez, Astana Sürecini Suriye’deki iç savaşa ilişkin Rus, Türk ve İran dış politikaları bağlamında neorealizm ve karmaşıklık (complexity) paradigmasının eklektik olarak uygulanarak değişen dinamiklerin tanımlanmasına dayalı olarak açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Karmaşıklık paradigmasının neorealizm teorisiyle birleşimi Suriye’deki değişen dinamikleri ve güç politikalarını daha iyi tanımlamakla birlikte Suriye karmaşıklığındaki birçok ve çeşitli aktörlerin de bu güç mücadelesindeki yerini daha iyi bir çerçeveye oturtmaktadır. Suriye karmaşıklığında bölgesel ve küresel güçler arasındaki güç rekabeti ve güvenlik algısının yeri bu araştırmanın kapsamındadır. Ocak 2017’de başlayan ve Suriye’deki çatışmanın yönetimini amaçlayan ve İran, Rusya ve Türkiye’nin girişimleriyle başlayan Astana Sürecindeki garantör devletlerin (Rusya, Türkiye, İran) Suriye’deki ana politikalarının ve Suriye karmaşıklığındaki önceliklerinin ana itici güçlerinin neler olduğu, bu aktörlerin rolleri ile çatışan ve farklılaşan çıkarlarının karşılaştırmalı olarak netleştirilmesi bu

araştırma kapsamında bir önem arz etmektedir. Ayrıyeten Suriye’deki “tahmin edilemeyen” değişen dinamikleri anlamlandırmak, Astana Sürecine giden süreçleri incelerken BM’nin girişimlerinin neden başarısız olduğu, sözügeçen sürecin neden Astana’da başladığı ve Sürecin altında yatan temel dinamiklerin neler olduğunu belirtmek bu araştırmanın kapsamına girmektedir. Bu tez, Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplinindeki karmaşıklık paradigmasının araştırılmasına ek olarak Astana Sürecine ilişkin ilk araştırmalardan biri olarak da öne çıkmaktadır.

Suriye’deki iç savaş güç mücadelesi için uygun bir zemin oluşturmuştur; hem bölgesel hem de küresel güçler, Suriye krizini fırsata dönüştürmeye ve krizin olumsuz etkilerini en aza indirmeye çalışarak, bölgede nüfuzlarını oluşturmak veya genişletmek, bölgelerindeki çıkarlarını güvenceye almak ve aynı zamanda küresel ve bölgesel meselelerde konumlarını güçlendirebilmek için mücadele etmektedirler. Bununla birlikte, bu güç mücadelesi iç savaşın uzamasının da bir boyutunu oluşturmaktadır.

Uluslararası ilişkilerde güç mücadelesi en iyi neorealizm yaklaşımının merceğinden anlaşılabirse de, neorealizm tek başına Suriye karmaşıklığındaki değişen dinamikleri doğrusal statik ontoloji üzerine temellendirmesi nedeniyle tam olarak açıklayamaz ve tahmin edemez. Öte yandan karmaşıklık paradigması, Suriye karmaşıklığında ve Astana Sürecindeki güç mücadelesi, rekabet ve iş birliği dinamiklerinin anlaşılmasında fayda sağlar ve neorealizmi tamamlar.

Karmaşıklık paradigmasının Uluslararası İlişkiler teorilerinin yerini alması gerekmemektedir; ancak, karmaşıklık, daha iyi bir çerçeveye ulaşmak ve değişen dinamiklerdeki belirsizliklerle ilgili olarak diğer Uluslararası İlişkiler teorilerini tamamlayabilir. Bu araştırma aynı zamanda, aktörlerin kendi çıkarlarının peşinde koştuğu, güvenliklerini sürdürmeye çalıştıkları ve güçlerini artırmaya istekli olduklarına dair belirli neorealizm varsayımlarının Suriye örneğinin dinamiklerindeki uygulanmasında daha iyi anlaşılması ve tanımlanması için karmaşıklık paradigmasından da yararlanacaktır. Neorealizmdeki sistem, fazla sayıda olmayan aktörlerin (kapalı birimler (units)) faaliyetlerinin sonuçlarında tahmin edilebilir çıktılarının olduğu, bu aktörlerin birkaç geri bildirim döngüsüyle etkileşime

girdikleri basit, statik bir sistem olarak gösterilmektedir. Tersine, karmaşıklık yaklaşımı ise sistemi karmaşık, daha dinamik ve canlı olarak varsayar; birçok aktör (kapalı birimler olarak çevresine dışsal olmayan) birçok geri bildirim döngüsüyle etkileşime girer. Bu nedenle olayların sonucu tahmin edilemeyebilir ve Uİ, birbiriyle bağlantılı ve birbirine bağımlı birçok farklı parametre ve değişkenden etkilenir. Bununla birlikte, ulusötesi terörist gruplar gibi devlet dışı aktörlerin kritik etkisi ve diğer birçok değişken etkenlerle birlikte bunların uluslararası ilişkilerde değişen ve birlikte evrimselleşen dinamiklerdeki etkileşimleri de göz önüne alındığında; sistemdeki ana aktörler yalnızca sosyalleşen ve etkileşimlerinde yapıdan etkilenen devletlerle sınırlandırılmaz.

Neorealizmin tek başına olaylardaki “tahmin edilemeyecek şekilde” değişen dinamikleri göstermekte ve açıklamakta güçlük çekmesi nedeniyle; neorealizmin yardımıyla karmaşıklık yaklaşımı, Suriye karmaşıklığında birçok ve çeşitli aktörlerin (sadece devletlerin olmadığı aynı zamanda devlet dışı aktörlerin de dahil olduğu) birçok geri bildirim döngüsüyle etkileşime girmeleri ile ortaya çıkan doğrusal olmayan değişken dinamiklerin olduğu bir ortamda meydana gelen Astana Sürecini tanımlama ve açıklamada daha iyi bir çerçeveye sahiptir. Ayrıca, Suriye karmaşıklığında aktörler -yayılan güvensizliklerin (radikal terörizm gibi) ve mültecilerin kitlesel akışının özellikle bazı aktörler üzerinde muazzam bir etkiye sahip olduğu ve bu durumların aktörlerin bölge üzerine olan dış politikalarındaki değişikliklere de yansımından görülebileceği üzere- dışsal olarak ortama kapalı değildirler.

Karmaşıklık paradigması, birçok ve çeşitli birbirine bağlı unsuru ve değişkenleri de varsayarak aktörlerin, dinamiklerin bütünsel yapısının zaman içinde değiştiği bir ortamda, etkileşime girdiğini belirtir; sayılamayan birbirine bağımlı birçok değişken olduğundan dolayı küçük değişimler bile (olayları doğrusal bir akış halinde tahmin etmeye ve hesaplamaya çalışan paradigmaların aksine) dinamikleri öngörülemeyen akışlar halinde değiştirebilir.

Çeşitli aktörlerin birbirine bağlı olması, eylemleri ve etkileşimleri sistemi tanımlamak için yeterli değildir; ancak dolaylı etkiler ve istenmeyen sonuçlar diğer

aktörlerin etkileşimlerinden de mümkündür. Devletler arasındaki ilişkiler ikili etkileşimlerinin ötesindedir ve buradaki bütünlük, parçaların veya etkileşimlerin toplamı değildir, değişkenler devletler arasındaki ilişkilerde çeşitlenir ve bu da aktörlerin arasındaki etkileşimlerin doğrusal bir şekilde ilerlemesini engeller. Aslında, çeşitlendirilmiş değişkenler, orantılı olmayan etkiler üzerinde önemli bir etkiye de sahip olabilir.

Karmaşık sistemdeki aktörler arasındaki bağlantılı etkileşimleri, ortaya çıkan davranışları ve yapan-yapı ile yapan-yapan ilişkilerinin birlikte evrimini tanımlamak için “Karmaşık Uyarlamalı Sistemler” (KUS) kavramı geliştirilmiştir. KUS kavramı bir biyoloji deneyinden esinlenerek ilk başta doğa bilimlerinde yer almış daha sonra bu kavram sosyal bilimlerde de kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. Bahsi geçen deney civık mantar hücreleri ve bulundukları ortam ile etkileşimleri üzerinedir. Bu deneyde civık mantar hücreleri değişen ortamla birlikte kendi kendilerini organize etmiş, değişen ortama uyum sağlayarak ve geri besleme mekanizmaları aracılığıyla yer aldığı ortam ile birlikte evrimleşerek birbirlerini etkilemişlerdir; gerçekten de, hücrelerin adaptasyonundaki eşik değişimi doğrusal olmayan dinamiklerden ortaya çıkmıştır. KUS, doğrusal denklemlere dayanan basit nedenselliklerle çelişir ve bu yaklaşım süreçlerin, aktörlerin kendi kendine organize olurken ve sistemin kendisi tarafından şekillendirilirken farklı aktörlerin ilişkilerinin ve etkileşimlerinin sistemi veya ortamı (yapıyı) etkilediği dinamik ve doğrusal olmayan bir şekilde gerçekleştiğini öne sürer. Etkileşim halinde olan devletler arasındaki “rekabet ve iş birliğinin birlikte evrimsel dansı”, her aktörün uluslararası süreçlere uyum sağlamasına imkan verirken, aktörlerin çıkarlarını sürdürme hedefleri güç ve alandaki yetenek kapasitelerinin bir derecesine kadar gündemde tutulmaktadır. Yine de, görece zayıf güç, tek başına görece daha güçlü bir devletle herhangi bir çatışmadan kaçınacak ve karmaşık sistemdeki geri bildirim döngülerine yanıt olarak değişen dinamiklere kendini uyarlamak için aktivizmini değiştirecektir, büyük güç de dinamik süreçlerdeki ve alandaki sınırlı yetenek ve kapasitesine göre politikalarını yeni ortaya çıkan değişimlere göre uyarlayacaktır. Her bir aktörün değişen ortamda çıkarlarını ve bekalı ile birlikte güvenliklerini sürdürmeye dayalı olarak gelişen birbirine bağlı roller, paylaşılan politika alanında aktörlerin dış politikalarında adaptasyona ve ardından aktörlerin uygulamalarında birlikte evrime sebep olur. İster aktörlerin

aktivizminden isterse de içsel dinamiklerden kaynaklanıyor olsun, alandaki her bir değişim, diğer aktörlerin duruma dair siyasalarında kendi tutumlarını yeniden düzenlemesine ve aynı zamanda alana dahil olmuş farklı aktörler üzerinde de zincirleme bir etkiye neden olan bir adaptasyona sebebiyet verir. Aslında bu sinerjik adaptasyon, çeşitli aktörlerin doğrusal olmayan dinamiklere bağlı olarak siyasalarında bir birlikte evrimi ifade eder. Birlikte evrim, Suriye İç Savaşı'ndan da gözlemlenebileceği üzere ortaya çıkan (emergent) özelliklere ve yapıdaki geri bildirim döngüleri (feedback loops) aracılığıyla ortaya çıkan yeni fenomenlerle etkileşimlerin oluşumuna hizmet eden değişken dinamiklere bağlı olarak; birbiri ile ilişkili aktörler arasında iş birliği, eşgüdüm veya artan bir rekabete uygun bir alan sağlayabilir.

Aktörler arasındaki birbiri ile ilişkili geri bildirim döngülerini ve etkileşimleri açıklığa kavuşturmak için, bu iç savaş üzerine neorealist bir model çizilmiştir ve ardından bu model daha da geliştirilerek KUS modeli Suriye karmaşıklığına uyarlanmıştır. Böylece aktörlerin birbirleri ile ilişkili, bağlı ve uyumsal etkileşim ve siyasalarının tanımlanmasına yardımcı olmak amaçlanmıştır. Nitekim bu araştırmada, öncelikle neorealist “eliptik bilardo topu modeli” tanımlanmış ve anlatılmış, ikinci olarak bu modelin KUS modeli bağlamında uyumlu hale getirilerek etkileşim, birlikte evrimler ve değişimler netleştirilmiştir. Bilardo toplarının eliptik olmasının sebebi anarşik yapı içerisinde aktörlerin yapı tarafından dikey olarak baskılanması yani aktivizmlerinin sistem tarafından sınırlandırılması ve yatay olarak da geniş olmasıdır, bu da devletlerin politikalarında ve aktivizmlerinde sistem içerisinde yetenekleri ölçüsünde serbestliklerini ifade eder. Neorealist modelde sadece kapalı birimler olarak devletler ve etkileşimleri gösterilmekle birlikte, bu model KUS ile geliştirildiğinde belirli bir süreç içerisinde devlet dışı aktörlerin de dahil olduğu ve bu bilardo toplarının şekillerinin ortaya çıkan durumlara bağlı olarak birlikte evrimsel dinamikleri gösterebilmek amacıyla net çizgilerle gösterilmediği görülmektedir. Aktörler kapalı birimler olarak ifade edilmediği gibi aktörlerin sayısı ve çeşitliliği bu modelde daha da artmakta ve birbirine bağlı geri bildirim döngüleri ve etkileşimler de artış göstermektedir. Bu araştırmada aktörler olarak ABD, AB, Rusya, Türkiye, İran, Suudi Arabistan, İsrail, Hizbullah, El-Nusra, IŞİD ve YPG verilmiştir. Suriye krizindeki ana kırılma noktaları olarak IŞİD'in yükselişi ve

Rusya'nın Esad'ın talebi ile Suriye'ye müdahalesi aktörlerin davranışlarında, siyasalarında ve gündemlerindeki önceliklerinde değişime ve adaptasyona yön vermiştir.

Astana Sürecini tanımlamak ve açıklamak için bu sürecin garantörleri olan İran, Rusya ve Türkiye'nin Suriye'deki politikalarına değinmek önem arz etmektedir. Bu aktörler krize ilişkin farklı politikalar izleyip olaya ilişkin farklı bakış açıları sergilemişlerdir. Nitekim, Suriye'deki parçalı ve çeşitli dinamiklerin ortaya çıkardığı düzensizlikte aktörlerin amaçları, öncelikleri ve belirlenen gündemleri birbirinden ayrılmaktadır. Esad'ın devrilmesi İran için “varoluşsal bir tehdit” oluşturabiliyorken, bu durum Rusya için Moskova'nın yaptığı küresel hesaplamaların aksine stratejik bir ortağı kaybetmek anlamına gelecektir. Öte yandan ABD'nin “arkadan liderlik ettiği” Türkiye, Suriye'de yeni bir hükümet kurmayı hedeflemekteydi. Ancak değişen dinamiklerin “öngörülemeyen” olayları, devletlerin gündemlerinin çeşitlenmesine neden olmuştur. İç savaşın uzaması beraberinde yeni aktörlerin ortaya çıkmasına sebebiyet vermiş ve özellikle Suriye ile sınırı paylaşan devletler de yeni tehditlere maruz kalmıştır.

Vladimir Putin'in yönetimi altındaki Rusya, Ortadoğu siyasetindeki varlığını, ABD'nin Obama yönetimi altında ODKA bölgesine aktif olarak dahil olma konusundaki isteksizliğinden yararlanarak artırmıştır. Putin, Moskova'nın ODKA ve küresel meseleler üzerindeki gücünü artırmak, küresel gündemde Batı ile eşit bir diyalog ortağı olarak kendini göstermek ve ABD'nin küresel siyaset üzerindeki tekeli kırarak için bölgesel rekabetlere taraf olmaktan kaçınırken bölgesel güçlerle pragmatik ilişkiler kurmuştur. Rusya, küresel siyasetteki statüsünü artırmak ve nüfuzunu sürdürmek amacıyla Suriye'de askeri müdahaleye sıcak bakmıştır. ABD ile eşit diyalog ortağı olmayı hedefleyen Rusya, 30 Eylül 2015 tarihinde Suriye'ye yaptığı müdahaleyle bölgede kurulacak düzende vazgeçilmez bir aktör olarak öne çıkmaya çalışmaktadır. Putin, küresel siyasette Rusya'nın vazgeçilmez bir güç olduğunu öne sürmekte ve Suriye'deki aktif askeri angajmanla bölgede belirleyici bir rol oynama girişimlerinde bulunmaktadır. Rusya bu müdahalesiyle, bölgedeki güçlerin kendisiyle eşgüdüm ve iyi ilişkiler içinde olma politikalarını da etkilemiştir. Her ne kadar İran ile iyi ilişkiler geliştirilmiş ve hava saldırıları İran'la eşgüdüm

içinde olsa da; Kremlin, bölgesel rekabetteki dengeleri de göz önünde bulundurarak İsrail ve Suudi Arabistan ile ilişkilerine de büyük önem vermekte ve İran'ın Suriye'de büyük bir nüfuz kazanmasını engellemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bunların yanısıra Ukrayna krizinin gündemden düşmesini sağlamak, Batılı devletlerin otoriter ya da totaliter devletlerde insani müdahale ile rejim değişikliğinin bir nebze önüne geçebilmek, Tartus limanı ve diğer stratejik üslerini koruyabilmek ve Yakın Çevresinde ve kendi içinde (Çeçen problemi göz önüne alınırsa) radikal İslamcı terörist grupların Suriye'deki durumdan faydalananarak güçlenmelerini engellemek Rusya'nın Suriye'de aktif olmasının diğer nedenlerindendir.

Arap ayaklanmaları sırasında Türkiye bu olayları, bölgede kendi nüfuzu altında karşılıklı ekonomik bağımlılık, siyasi dönüşüm ve demokratikleşme gibi liberal politikalarını geliştirebilecek ve gerçekleştirebilecek bir fırsat olarak değerlendirmiştir. ODKA'daki eski düzenin değişeceği, otoriter liderlerin koltuklarını terk edeceği ve bölgede yeni rejimler kurulacağı tahminlerine dayanarak; Türkiye, Arap ayaklanmalarından kaynaklanan değişim sürecinde yapıcı bir rol oynamak ve bu bölgedeki dönüşümü şekillendirmeye dahil olmak konusunda hevesliydi.

Nitekim 2011 sonrası olaylar ve ODKA'daki yumuşak güç önlemlerinin başarısızlığı Türk dış politikasını 90'larda olduğu gibi daha güvenlik odaklı bir bakış açısına sevk etmiştir. Ayrıyeten Türkiye'nin maruz kaldığı yoğun Suriyeli göçmen akımı ve sınır güvenliği meseleleri de Türkiye'nin politikalarında değişikliklere neden olmuştur. Özellikle 2016 yılının Mart ayında PYD tarafından "federal demokratik sistemin" ilan edilmesi, Türkiye'nin bu konudaki hassasiyetine rağmen PYD / YPG'ye olan Batı desteği, 2000'lerdeki yeni Türk dış politikasının mimarı Davutoğlu'nun iktidar seçkinleriyle anlaşmazlıklarından dolayı Mayıs 2016'da Başbakanlıktan ayrılması, Temmuz 2016'daki FETÖ'nün başarısız darbe girişimi ve bu darbe girişiminin ardından Batılı devletlerin Erdoğan'a destek olma konusunda isteksizlikleri dış politikada da sertliğin artarak doktrinsel bir değişime gidilmesine neden olmuştur. Bu yeni doktrine göre Türkiye bölgede tek taraflı eylemlerine daha fazla önem göstermeye başlamakla birlikte sert güç önlemlerini arttırmış, geleneksel Batılı

müttefiklere karşı kuşkularını artırmış ve karşılıklı kuşku ile çatışan çikarlara rağmen Moskava ile daha fazla yakınlaşmıştır.

İran ise Arap ayaklanmalarını ilk başta ABD'nin bölgedeki gücünün zayıflaması olarak yorumlamış ve kendi 1979 İslam Devrimi deneyiminden yararlanarak ayaklanmalara örnek olma ve böylelikle bölgedeki nüfuzunu artırma fırsatı olarak değerlendirmiştir. Fakat bu ayaklanmalar Suriye'ye sıçradığı zaman da farklı bir pozisyon almıştır. İç savaşın başlangıcında Tahran, askeri danışmanlarını Şam'la temasa geçirmiş ve Esad'a desteğini açıkça dile getirmiştir. Zamanla Tahran, Şii vekillerini İran Devrim Muhafızları Ordusu himayesinde gönderdi ve Lübnan Hizbullahı ile eşgüdömlü bir stratejiye yöneldi. 2013'te dinamikler çöküşün eşiğinde olan Esad rejiminin aleyhine ivme kazandığında ise; İran isyancı güçler, El Nusra ve IŞİD ile savaşmak için Şii milis güçlerini ve askeri personelinin Suriye'de artırmıştır. Bu da İsrail'e karşı muhtemel bir cephe açılması halinde İran'a kuvvetlerini Levant boyunca konuşlandırmak için bir fırsat sunmuştur. İran'ın Şii vekilleri üzerinde olan nüfuzu ve bu milislerle olan eşgüdümüne ek olarak; "direniş eksenin" (axis of resistance) devlet merkezli temeli ile birlikte silahlı hareketler ağını da daha çok dahil etmeye yönelmiş ve IŞİD gibi yeni aktörlerle olan düşmanlık vizyonunu genişlettiği gibi alanını da olabildiğince genişletmeye çalışmıştır.

Bir "yarı ittifak" olarak "direniş eksenin"; Batılı ve bölgesel güçlerin Suriye ve (özellikle) İran'ı tecrit etmelerine karşılık ortak bir dayanışmanın oluşturulması ve "hakim olana direnmek" (bölgedeki ABD varlığı ve İsrail kastedilmektedir) amacıyla devletler ve silahlı gruplar arasında koalisyon kurulması etrafında şekillenmiştir. Nitekim bu eksen, İran'ın bölgesel stratejisinin ve büyük güçlerle olan ilişkilerinin omurgasını oluşturmaktadır. Esad rejiminin ve İran'ın İsrail'e karşı ortak anlayışı, Suriye'nin Lübnan Hizbullahı ve İran arasında mal ve silah koridorunun üstünde yer alması, Suriye'nin aynı zamanda İran için ABD tecritine karşı çıkış noktalarından biri olması gibi nedenler Tahran'ı açık bir şekilde Esad rejiminin yanında yer almasını sağlamıştır.

Peki çıkarları ve amaçları birbirinden farklı olup bazı durumlarda da çıkarları çatışan ve hatta uyguladıkları bazı politikaları çelişen bu üç aktörü ortak bir arabulucuk çalışmasına iten nedir?

Bir çatışma yönetimi süreci olarak arabuluculuk, Suriye krizinin karmaşıklığında pek çok zorlukla karşılaşmıştır. Tecrübeli diplomatlar Kofi Annan, Lakhdar Brahimi ve Staffan de Mistura, bu karmaşık alanda yangını durdurmak için ciddi girişimlerde bulunsalar da çabaları başarısız olmuştur çünkü; ilk olarak, Esad her şekilde rejimde kalmak için direniyordu, ikinci olarak zaten bölünmüş olan muhalefet siyasi şartlardan ödün vermek istemiyordu (Esad'ın yönetimden ayrılmasını önkoşul olarak öne sürüyordu) ve üçüncüsü, farklı tarafları destekleyen bölgesel ve küresel güçler arabuluculuk çabalarını zorlaştırmıştır. Arabulucu önlemlerin geçici olarak kalmasına ek olarak; sürecin geleceğini dış güçlerin çatışan çıkarları belirlerken, düzensizlikten yararlanan başka aktörler (İŞİD gibi) de ortaya çıkmıştır ve bu da iç savaşın karmaşık ortamına bir boyut daha eklemiştir. Bu karmaşık ortamda, Suriye'deki barış sürecinde ve çatışmanın yönetiminde etkili olabilmek ve Türkiye, İran ve Rusya'nın (garantör devletlerin) kendi aralarında da bir uzlaşmayı sağlayabilmek amacıyla 2017 Ocak'ta rejim ve silahlı muhalif güçlerin temsilcilerinin de dahil olduğu Astana görüşmeleri başlatılmıştır.

Astana süreci, Rusya, İran ve Türkiye arasında gelişen ancak yapısal olarak sınırlı bir yakınlaşmanın çıktısı olmasının yanı sıra tarafların bu platformu kullanarak Suriye'deki dış politikalarını olabildiğince sürdürme ve çıkarlarının diğer aktörler tarafından kabul edilmesinin sağlanması hedeflerinden dolayı ortaya çıkmıştır. Astana platformu tarafların aralarında olası çatışmaları önlemek için bir eşgüdüm zemininin oluşmasına da yardımcı olmuştur.

Astana görüşmeleri, öncelikle bölgeye askeri olarak dahil olmuş ve Suriye barış sürecinin aktif bir parçası olmaya istekli olan üç garantör devletin dış politikalarının bir uzantısı olmuştur. Her ne kadar Astana platformunun Cenevre görüşmelerini devre dışı bırakmak amacıyla da oluşturulduğu bazılarınca iddia edilse de, BM'nin Astana platformuna katılmaması hem turların geçerliliğine ve meşruiyetine zarar verecektir hem de iç savaştaki diğer aktörlerin (örneğin Suudi Arabistan ve ABD'nin)

alandaki çıktılarına yönelik olası itirazlarına karşı meşru bir zemin oluşturulamayacaktır. Öte yandan, bu platform (başarılı olursa) garantör devletlerin, özellikle de Rusya'nın Cenevre sürecini ve bölgedeki dinamikleri öncelikleri bağlamında etkilemesini sağlayacaktır. Türkiye açısından da bu üçlü sürece katılmak, Ankara'nın Suriye'deki Türk güçlerini meşrulaştırmasını, Esad güçlerinin muhalif güçlere yönelik saldırılarını sınırlandırmasını ve YPG/PYD'nin diplomatik forumlarda ve bölgedeki gücü ile rolünü sınırlandırmasını sağlayabilecektir. İran için ise, alanda elde ettiği başarıları ve İran-Hizbullah koridorunu Suriye üzerinden korumak elzemdir; dolayısıyla bu süreç ile bölgedeki varlığını sağlamlaştırmak ve Suriye'de diplomatik olarak süreçlerde yer almak amaçlanmaktadır.

Başlangıçta Astana görüşmelerinde üç ana müzakere konusu vardı: (1) çatışan taraflar için kabul edilebilir ve garantör devletler tarafından 30 Aralık 2016 tarihinde yürürlüğe giren (hem muhalif hem de rejim tarafı ateşkesin bozulmasında birbirlerini suçlasa da) ateşkesin uygulanmasını sağlayabilecek bir mekanizmanın kurulması, (2) isyancı güçler ile El Nusra ve IŞİD'in ayırt edilmesini sağlamak, (3) isyancı güçler, rejim ve uluslararası aktörlerle birlikte Suriye'deki radikal gruplarla mücadeleyi sürdürmeyi sağlamak. İlk başlarda görüşmelerin temel amacı, garantör devletler arasında doğrudan görüşmelere ve müzakerelere dayanan ve çatışan taraflar arasında ateşkes alternatiflerinin sunulması olarak garantörlerin aracılığıyla çatışan taraflar (rejim ve muhalif güçler) arasında dolaylı bir diyalogu sağlamak amacıyla bir nevi “yarı mekik diplomasisini” devreye geçirerek toplantıların yapılmasıydı. Akabinde, toplantıların gündeminde gerilim azaltma bölgelerinin kurulmasına da odaklanıldı.

Politika ve öncelik farklılıklarına rağmen; Türkiye, İran ve Rusya sahada üçlü eşgüdümünü sürdürmeyi amaçladı; fakat garantörler Suriye'de ortak paydada buluşmak için çabalarken çıkar farklılıkları gene gözlenebilmekteydi. Ortak çıkarlardan birini oluşturan IŞİD ile mücadele konusunda IŞİD'in varlığı ve gücü önemli ölçüde azalınca görüşme sıklığı da azaldı. Nitekim doğrudan müzakereler yoluyla uyuşmazlıkların üstesinden gelmek, eşgüdümü sürdürmek ve çatışan çıkar ile önceliklere rağmen ortak bir noktada buluşabilmek için garantörler arasında ikili ve üçlü zirveler ortaya çıkmıştır.

IŞİD'in güç kaybetmeye ve bölgede gerilemeye başlamasıyla birlikte, taraflar arasındaki iş birliğine de ortam hazırlayan ve tarafların ortak hedeflerinden biri olan IŞİD'le mücadele konusu da müzakerelerde zeminini kaçırmaktaydı; ancak Astana Süreci böylelikle Suriye müzakerelerini ileriye taşıyabilmek ve devam ettirebilmek için Suriye anayasası tartışmalarını da içermeye eğiliminde oldu. Ancak garantör devletlerin (özellikle Rusya ile Türkiye arasında) çatışan gündemleri, bölgedeki gelişmeler nedeniyle daha da belirgin hale geldi. Çatışan gündemlere ortak bir çözüm bulma hedefi sürdürülürken, tarafların çabaları çatışma çözümünden ziyade çatışma yönetimi üzerine odaklanmıştır. Öte yandan İdlib'deki gerginlik, adı geçen Suriye'deki yönetim bölgesindeki gelişmeler ve olaylarla ilgili anlaşmazlıklar nedeniyle Suriye'deki anlaşmazlıklar daha da sorunlu hale gelmiştir.

Rejim güçleri, Rus müdahalesinin de desteğiyle Humus, Halep ve Deyrizor gibi isyancıların veya cihatçıların elindeki bölgeleri çoktan geri almış durumdaydı. Ayrıca, 2017'nin sonlarında Moskova ile iş birliği içinde olan rejim güçleri, ilk kez isyancıların (HTŞ ve muhalif güçlerin ortaklaşa yönettiği) son kalelerinden biri olan İdlib vilayetine girmeyi başaramamıştı. Yine de rejim güçleri, Rusya ve İran'ın desteği olsa bile bölgede askeri ve siyasi kontrol konusunda hâlâ bazı kısıtlamalara sahiptir; çünkü ülkenin bazı bölgeleri, Kürt enklavları, muhalif güçler ve cihatçıların kaleleri hala rejimin tam kontrolü içinde değildir.

Diğer isyancı bölgelerin Esad tarafından yeniden ele geçirilmesinin bir sonucu olarak İdlib, ülkedeki tek isyancı kalesi olarak kalmıştır; Tahran Zirvesi'nde Astana garantörlerinin İdlib ateşkesi konusunda anlaşamamaları üzerine rejim güçlerinin İdlib'deki isyancılara yönelik saldırılar başlatması, Ankara ile Moskova arasındaki gerginliği artırırken Tahran, Ankara ile ilişkilerin zarar görmemesi için sessiz kalmıştır. Nitekim İdlib, HTŞ ve muhalif güçlerin ortaklaşa bir yönetimine sahip olduğu ve aynı zamanda Türkiye sınırına yakın bir vilayettir. Moskova HTŞ'ye karşı saldırıların bir an önce yapılmasını hedeflerken, Ankara ise böyle bir saldırının zaten ülke içinde yoğun olan Suriyeli mültecilerin üstüne yeni bir kitlesel göçe sebep olacağını ve bu olası yeni mülteci akımını kaldıramayacağını ifade etmektedir.

Daha iyi bir anlayışa sahip olabilmek için, Astana süreci yalnızca İran, Rusya ve Türkiye arasındaki ilişkisel dinamiklere indirgenemez. Bununla birlikte, bu sürecin temelini oluşturan faktörler, aynı zamanda, birçok ve çeşitli aktörler arasındaki birbiriyle bağlantılı, Türkiye, İran ve Rusya ile olan ilişkisel etkileşimlerden ve bu üç devletin uyumsuz ama asıl çıkarlarını olabildiğince sürdürebilmek için, zaman içinde değişen dinamiklere ve yeni oluşan fenomenlere birlikte uyum sağlaması üzerine kuruludur. Nitekim, Astana Sürecinin garantör devletlerinin Suriye'deki politikalarının temelleri, çeşitli ve farklı aktörlerle ayrı, ancak iç içe geçmiş ve birbirine bağlı ilişkisel etkileşimlerin de etkili olduğu çeşitli nedenlere ve çıkarlara da dayanmaktadır.

Karmaşıklık paradigması, düzensizlikteki süreç odaklı birbirine bağlı güç mücadelesini anlamak için alternatif bir çerçeve sunar. Suriye düzensizliğindeki “süreçlerin” özellikleri, güç mücadelesinde doğrusal olmayan bir yönelim getiren düzen içindeki parçalama bileşenini (düzensizlik) simgelemektedir. Astana süreci, düzensizlik ortamı ile üç devletin birlikte adaptasyonuna, Suriye'deki çatışan ve örtüşen çıkarların bölümlendirilmesine, birçok ve çeşitli aktörün Suriye'deki eylemlerine ve bu aktörlerin İran, Türkiye ve Rusya olan etkileşimlerine bağlı olarak oluşmuş bir ortaya çıkan (emergent) durum olarak kendini göstermektedir.

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:Mehmet İlbey

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ASTANA PROCESS IN CONTEXT WITH IRANIAN, RUSSIAN AND TURKISH FOREIGN POLICIES ON SYRIAN COMPLEXITY

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