

# Analyzing Foreign Policy Crises in Turkey



# Analyzing Foreign Policy Crises in Turkey:

*Conceptual, Theoretical  
and Practical Discussions*

Edited by

Fuat Aksu and Helin Sarı Ertem

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This book is dedicated to:

**NURETTİN AKSU,**

*missing you, your curious questions and encouraging comments...*

and

**MELİH MURAT ERTEM,**

*thank you for your inspiring ideas and generous support...*



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In alphabetical order.

## PREFACE

This book resulted from a three-year long TÜBİTAK (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey) Project, examining the Turkish foreign policy crises and crisis management strategies in the Republican Era. The project, which received remarkable interest in Turkish academia, allowed us to examine 34 foreign policy crises in the last 92 years since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. It is worth underlining here that the brainstorming in our “Coercive Diplomacy and Crisis Management in Turkish Foreign Policy” course made a valuable contribution to the embodiment of this project. Colleagues and students, who encouraged us for a much comprehensive study of this critical issue, believed in the necessity of making it a book and gave their kind support by writing the chapters of it.

This book requires us to thank not only these esteemed contributors, but many other names and institutions. Among them, TÜBİTAK and Yıldız Technical University, Scientific Research Projects Coordinatorship (YTU - BAPK), deserve our special thanks for the academic and financial assistance they gave to this project. We would also like to thank the participants/staff officers of the Turkish War Colleges, The Armed Forces Higher Command and Management College, which made eye-opening contributions during our discussions there especially on the military decision making processes of the Turkish crisis management.

Prof. Dr. Klaus Brummer, our Section Chair in the 2014 ECPR General Conference in Glasgow, where the first findings of this project were shared with the academia, and a leading name in crisis studies, Prof. Dr. Charles F. Hermann also deserve our thanks due to their comments and questions that improved our researches. We also have to thank the Deans of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences at Yıldız Technical University, Prof. Dr. Güler Aras and Prof. Dr. Kenan Aydın, and Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their kind support during the research and publishing processes of this book.

Finally, our special thanks goes to our family members, especially our spouses and children, without whose love and patience this book would not be finished. We would also like to commemorate dear Nurettin Aksu,

whom we lost during the preparation of this book. His loving-kindness and support for his children and grandchildren will never be forgotten.

We hope this book can inspire further academic studies in the area of foreign policy crises.

Fuat Aksu and Helin Sarı Ertem  
Istanbul, November 2016

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DP	Democrat Party ( <i>Demokrat Parti</i> )
FP	Felicity Party ( <i>Saadet Partisi</i> )
FIR	Flight Information Region
EOKA	Ethniki Organosis Kyrion Agoniston or National Organization of Greek Cypriot Fighters
FSA	Free Syrian Army
GCA	Greek Cypriot Administration
GUP	Great Union Party
ICBP	International Crisis Behavior Project
IHH	The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief
ISIS	Al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham or Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JDP	Justice and Development Party ( <i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i> )
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MIT	Turkish National Intelligence ( <i>Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı</i> )
MP	Motherland Party ( <i>Anavatan Partisi</i> )
NMP	Nationalist Movement Party ( <i>Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi</i> )
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan or Kurdistan Workers' Party
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat or Democratic Union Party
RPP	Republican People's Party ( <i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i> )
SNC	Syrian National Council
TFPC	Turkish Foreign Policy Crises
THY	Turkish Airlines
TMT	Turkish Resistance Organization ( <i>Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı</i> )
TPAO	Turkish Petroleum Corporation ( <i>Türkiye Petrolleri Anonim Ortaklığı</i> )
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
TUBITAK	Technological Research Council of Turkey
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
YPG	Yekitina Parastine Gel or People's Protection Units

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# IF THE CRISIS IS WHAT WE MAKE OF IT: TURKEY AND THE UPRISINGS IN SYRIA\*

GENCER ÖZCAN

### Introduction

With its longevity, manifold of tragic outcomes and deadly fallouts, the crisis in Syria has already been deemed one of the historical events that changed the political landscape in the Middle East. Although the uprisings were set off by Syria's own political dynamics, the crisis they instigated was manifestation of a power struggle for regional supremacy. Of those that took side in the struggle, Turkey was one of the countries that immediately became involved in the crisis and, alongside the others, had significant impact on the course of events. Given the intimate relations the Justice and Development Party (JDP) governments cultivated with the Syrian regime, Turkey's reaction to the uprisings was of special interest.

Before the uprisings, Syria had been the jewel in the crown of the JDP governments' the "Zero Problem with Neighbors Policy". JDP governments had forged extensive cooperation schemes with Syria concluding free trade agreements or lifting visa requirements. "Common history, common destiny and common future", the leitmotif of the party's discourse on the Middle East, had been best exemplified in the context of Turkish-Syrian relations. Moreover, the JDP governments had stood by the Syrian regime whenever it seemed vulnerable in the 2000s. Expecting that the regime is doomed, however, JDP leadership threw its weight behind the opposition and committed itself to a regime change policy after uprisings broke out in Syria. Turkey's policies during the crisis stand as a unique case in foreign policy making since the JDP governments adopted unprecedented practices to oust the Syrian regime, through overtly supporting the

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\* The research on which this chapter was based was supported by The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey - TÜBİTAK 1001 Project (Project No.:112K172).

opposition, a practice that Turkey deliberately refrained from throughout the republican history. However, while the JDP's expectations came true in other Arab countries where existing regimes were ousted one after another, the Syrian regime could have held out. Furthermore, devastating consequences that the crisis caused did not remain within the confines of Syria, spilt over the neighboring countries and Turkey was no exception. As the crisis unfolded, its fallouts that Turkey should deal with snowballed at an unprecedented degree. After five years of interventionist policies, Turkey seems to have been bogged down in the Syrian quagmire.

### **Arab Uprisings and the JDP's Aim to Establish a "New Regional Order"**

When the uprisings engulfed the Middle East, the JDP leadership decided to leap at the opportunity to bolster Turkey's regional position and sided with the opposition movements. Turkey's decision to become actively involved in the uprisings was in line with the active engagement policy in regional politics that the JDP government put in effect since 2008. Increasing preoccupation with the Palestinian question and involvement in Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations had already brought Turkey to the fore in regional politics. Turkey's election to the non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council in 2009 and its participation to the inaugural summit of G-20 in November 2009 were deemed to be representations of Turkey's increasing prestige in World politics. Among other demarches, the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's reaction to the then President of Israel, Shimon Peres, in Davos World Summit in January 2009 would later be trumpeted to foster his image as a new regional leader who earnestly supports the Palestinian cause. A new discourse had been devised to manifest the JDP's assertive regional approach. In September 2009, the then Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu had already claimed that Turkey "shall pioneer the new order"<sup>1</sup>

Intertwined with the party's various power strategies, new discourse was strongly emphasized by the JDP leadership making foreign policy one of the pivotal aspects of election campaigns. The campaigns were geared towards underscoring the qualities that Erdoğan was having as an international statesman who could have made Turkey, after so many years, assume the role it deserved in World politics. The campaign designed for the June 12, 2011 Elections depicted Erdoğan as "the voice in the

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<sup>1</sup> Utku Çakırözer, "Yeni Düzenin Öncüsü Türkiye Olacak", *Akşam*, September 8, 2009; Bülent Aras, "Düzen Kurucu Aktör", *Sabah*, September 30, 2009.



international arena for those who had been silenced and intimidated for years, [who] launched an international social campaign that became the symbol of peace and brotherhood in the East and in the West.”<sup>2</sup> In the period preceding the Arab uprisings, the JDP was successful in creating the image that Turkey’s international posture had become more powerful. By the same token, the party administration seemed to make careful calculations about the impact that the party’s foreign policy had on the electorate’s support for the party.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, “among the primary reasons for the electorate to vote for the JDP”, as a pollster later claimed, the JDP government’s “foreign policy performance” was the most outstanding.<sup>4</sup> Even in 2013 when the JDP’s regional policy had already been stuck in Egypt and Syria, a pro JDP thinktank publication could have claimed that “Turkey is not just seen as a regional power/actor but as ‘global actor’” boasting that “no order can be established without Turkey”.<sup>5</sup>

The Arab uprisings provided new possibilities that the JDP leadership could have used to promote regional image of the then Prime Minister Erdoğan. At the beginning of the uprisings, Turkey hesitated, yet afterwards resolutely supported the opposition in Arab countries. In the wake of successful takeovers in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, many were speaking of emulating the ‘Turkish model’ pioneered by Erdoğan’s Islamist JDP. Turkey’s active support for Libya operation paved the way for rising expectations in the West that Turkey would effectively contribute to such operations. Erdoğan seemed to take benefit of the moment by visiting Cairo, Tunisia and Tripoli before he joined the U.N. General Assembly in New York in late September 2011. Implications of his talks and contacts there were obvious that the JDP leadership was very keen to become, to say the least, part of the transformation evolving in those countries. In September 2011, the *New Statesman* ranked Erdoğan 11<sup>th</sup> among the 50 people who mattered in 2011 because he “proved himself to be a master of alliance-building” and “exploited a power vacuum in the Middle East to transform his country into a regional diplomatic giant.”<sup>6</sup> As yet another token of his rising popularity as well as

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<sup>2</sup> “Dış Politika: Türkiye’nin Dünyada İtibarını Yükselttik,” İstanbul: AK Parti İstanbul İl Başkanlığı, 2011, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Murat Yetkin, “Dış Politika Hükümete Puan Getiriyor”, *Radikal*, June 12, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Barçın Yinanç, “Why does Erdoğan Support Davutoğlu’s Foreign Policy?,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, June 12, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş and Ali Balcı, *A Dictionary of Turkish Foreign Policy in the AK Parti Era: A Conceptual Map*, (Ankara: Seta, 2013): 15-16.

<sup>6</sup> Mehdi Hasan, “50 People Who Matter 2011: 11. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Turkish Delight”, *New Statesman*, September 26, 2011.

the expectations attached to him in the power corridors of the West, he was on the cover of Time magazine in November 2011 with a caption reading that “Turkey’s pro-Islamic leader has built his (secular, democratic, Western friendly) nation into a regional powerhouse... but can his example save the Arab Spring?”

After the Muslim Brotherhood [MB] in Egypt won the elections in June 2012, the JDP leadership seemed to be sure that winds of change would replace the existing regimes and pave the way for a new regional order. Ushering that the collapse of the Camp David order is immediate<sup>7</sup>, editorial articles in *Yeni Şafak*, the flagship of the pro-JDP media, prophesied that the backbone of the new regional order would be “a belt of the Muslim Brotherhood from Sudan to Egypt... From Egypt to Jordan and Syria”. Its prophecy foretold what lied ahead of the region: “within ten years to come, the same political structures, the same political language, the same vision of future would prevail in the belt stretching from Sudan to Syria”.<sup>8</sup> By the end of 2012, chanting “Raise your head Egypt! Raise your head Palestine; Syria; Lebanon, Afghanistan!”, another *Yeni Şafak* editorial was heralding that “century of solitude” for Muslims ended.<sup>9</sup> However, the trajectory of uprisings in North Africa misled the JDP leadership to make fatal mistakes in another country where the stakes were much higher for Turkey.

It was obvious that the uprisings in Syria impaled the JDP leadership on the horns of a dilemma forcing a choice between standing by the regime or supporting the rebels. Given the intimate relations that the JDP leadership had with Bashar al-Assad, it was much easier to take sides with those who rose up against the existing regimes in Egypt, Tunisia or Libya than those so did against the Syrian regime.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the JDP did not have time to reprint the propaganda booklet prepared for the June 12, 2011 Elections, first page of which depicted Erdoğan and Assad arm in arm. Throughout the propaganda period, JDP spokespersons levelled moderately toned criticism at the Syrian regime in the context of calls for

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<sup>7</sup> İbrahim Karagül, “Türk-İsrail Ekseni de Camp David de Çöktü”, *Yeni Şafak*, May 1, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> İbrahim Karagül, “Müslüman Kardeşler Dünyası Kuruluyor!”, *Yeni Şafak*, June 19, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> İbrahim Karagül, “Yüzyıllık Yalnızlık Bitti”, *Yeni Şafak*, November 19, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> In May 2011, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu underlined that he paid 60 visits to Damascus in the 8 years since the JDP came to power in November 2002. “Türkiye’den Esad’a Şok Terapi Tavsiyesi”, *Milliyet*, May 27, 2011.

democratic reforms.<sup>11</sup> It might be the same reason that made Erdoğan delay making his first warning to President al-Assad until the very eve of elections that Turkey “would not remain silent on what is happening in Syria and that good relations will not continue for good.”<sup>12</sup> However, behind the smokescreen of calls for democratic reforms, the JDP government was reported to have already begun to support the opposition groups from the early days of the uprisings. In July 2011, Prime Minister Erdoğan was quoted to have stated that “if Syrian President Bashar al-Assad ensured between a quarter and a third of ministers in his government were members of the Muslim Brotherhood, to make a commitment to use all his influence to end the rebellion.” Although denied by the Turkish authorities, similar information was endorsed by the Syrian officials with knowledge of the talks that the then Foreign Minister Davutoğlu had “called for the return of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria”.<sup>13</sup> In the meantime, first reports indicating Turkey’s support to the armed groups appeared as early as June 2011 when armed groups killed 120 Syrian troops in Jisr al-Shoughour, the city in close vicinity of Turkey.<sup>14</sup> The Syrian regime claimed that “a group of terrorists apprehended around Jisr al-Shoughour was carrying Turkish passports and SIM cards.”<sup>15</sup> Right after the elections, the JDP leadership veered from its policy in Syria, framed the issue as “national matter” and started pursue a regime change policy. Although congratulated by President Bashar Assad for his victory at the elections of June 12, 2011; Erdoğan increasingly became critical of the Syrian regime after the elections.<sup>16</sup> On July 27,

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<sup>11</sup> “Sözde Değil Özde Uygulanmalı”, *Milliyet*, March 29, 2011; “Esad’ın Gitmesi için Daha Erken”, *Milliyet*, May 13, 2011; Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, “Esad Hâlâ Reform Yapabilir”, *Milliyet*, June 9, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> “Erdoğan’dan Esad Ailesine Sert Mesaj”, *Hürriyet*, June 10, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> “Turkey ‘Offered Syria Support’ if Brotherhood Given Posts,” *AFP*, September 29, 2011 quoted in *ahram online*, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/22896.aspx>, [26.11.2015]; “Erdoğan’dan Müslüman Kardeşler Teklifi”, *Milliyet*, September 30, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Fehim Taştekin, *Suriye: Yıkıl Git, Diren Kal*, (İstanbul: İletişim, 2015):86-93; Hediye Levent, “Suriye’de Medya Savaşı,” *Milliyet*, June 7, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> “Ordu Gelişmiş Silahlar Türk Pasaportları ve Sim Kartları Ele Geçirdi”, <http://www.sana.sy/tur/339/2011/06/14/352474.htm>, June 14, 2011, quoted in Veysel Ayhan, “Erdoğan-Esad Görüşmesi: İlişkilerde Çatışmacı Dönem”, <http://www.tuicakademi.org/index.php/kategoriler/diger/1593-erdogan-esad-gorusmesiiliskilerde-catismaci-donem> [20.6.2011]

<sup>16</sup> “Erdoğan’dan Suriye Açıklaması”, *Hürriyet*, August 6, 2011.

2011, as if to confirm claims that Turkey supports armed groups, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was founded and given sanctuary in Turkey.<sup>17</sup>

Anticipating that the course of events in Syria would follow the trajectory of revolution in Egypt, Erdoğan implicitly warned Assad that he would not get away with what he has done to his people.<sup>18</sup> Davutoğlu, on the other hand, paid his last visit on August 8 to Damascus where hours of deliberations with President Assad produced no result.<sup>19</sup> On September 21, Turkey closed its airspace for flights bound for Syria and four days later announced that the regime lost its legitimacy and called the regime to abandon power and initiated sanctions against the regime.<sup>20</sup> Erdoğan declared that he did not see “the Syrian issue as an external matter” but “a domestic one” adding that: “what happens there [in Syria] never lets us remain as beholders.”<sup>21</sup>

With the MB having come to power in Egypt and increasing opposition control in swathes of Syria, the JDP government’s assertiveness became palpable in 2012.<sup>22</sup> While the discourse on the uprisings was previously focusing on democracy, human rights and political freedoms, 2012 witnessed formulation of a new discourse calling for a new regional order and a bigger role for Turkey in the making of it. In February 2012, speaking at the end of the Friends of Syria Conference, the then Foreign Minister Davutoğlu asserted that “From now on we shall sit at the table and have a say. Exactly like what we did in Somalia. Should there be a table of Syria, we should naturally be in the front of it. Be global or regional, now we are sitting at all tables.”<sup>23</sup> On April 26, 2012 Davutoğlu in his speech before the parliament claimed that “among the Middle Eastern societies, Turkey is not only considered as a friendly and brother country, but seen as a country having a new idea to determine future of the

<sup>17</sup> Tufan Türeç, “‘Ana Üs: Hatay’ Ne Anlama Geliyor?,” *Hürriyet*, 29 August 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Umut Tütüncü, “Erdoğan, Davutoğlu’nu Şam’a Gönderiyor”, *Habertürk*, August 8, 2011,

<sup>19</sup> Deniz Zeyrek, “‘Gorbaçov Olmazsan, Saddam Olursun’”, *Radikal*, August 8, 2011; Deniz Zeyrek, “‘6, 5 Saatlik Görüşmede Bol Sitem’”, *Radikal*, August 10, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Nafiz Albayrak, “Suriye’nin Silahına İzin Verilmeyecek”, *Milliyet*, 25 September 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Tütüncü, “Erdoğan, Davutoğlu’nu Şam’a Gönderiyor”....,

<sup>22</sup> Ufuk Ulutaş, “Türkiye’nin İsrail-Filistin Politikası 2012,” in *Türk Dış Politikası Yılığ 2012*, (Eds.) Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat and Ufuk Ulutaş, (Ankara: Seta, 2013):229-258.

<sup>23</sup> Duygu Güvenç, “Suriye’ye Müdahale Olasılığı Masada”, *Sabah*, February 26, 2012.

region and being both the pioneer of a new regional order... Turkey would be both the pioneer and speaker of this order of peace.”<sup>24</sup>

### Miscalculations on Syria

By the mid-2012, with the armed opposition gaining upper hand, top level defections increasing and the regime retreating from key positions in Syria, even leading experts were claiming that the end of the regime was drawing nearer. In Steven Heydemann’s words, “if the exact timing of its demise cannot be predicted, there are nonetheless growing indications that governments opposed to the Assad regime, and even those still supporting it, are increasingly concerned with how to manage the end game in Syria and protect their interests in a post-al-Assad era.”<sup>25</sup> The JDP leadership was also expressing its predictions with confidence that the regime would collapse soon. By the latter part of 2012 the JDP leadership seemed to be sure as to when the Syrian regime would fall. On August 24, Davutoğlu professed that the days of the Syrian regime were numbered. “I do not think that this painful process will last long. I have not fixed a date as to when Esad will leave; but a regime which would get alienated to its people will not stay alive.”<sup>26</sup> On 5 September 2012, Erdoğan confidently declared that

“God willing, we shall soon go to Damascus, embrace our brothers with love. That day is also getting closer. We shall recite Fatiha [the opening sura of the Quran] before the tomb of Salahaddin Ayyubi and pray in the Ummayad Mosque. We shall freely pray for our brotherhood in the tomb of Bilal al-Habashi and of Ibn al-Arabi, in the Suleimaniya complex and Hejaz railway station”<sup>27</sup>

The JDP’s anticipations on the future of the regime were accompanied by explorations about the post al-Assad period. In October 2012, Davutoğlu suggested that the Syrian Vice President Farouk al-Sharaa could replace Bashar Assad as president and lead a transition government.<sup>28</sup> In the meantime, the JDP spokespersons did not conceal

<sup>24</sup> “Ortadoğu’da Değişimi Yöneteceğiz,” *Milliyet*, April 27, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Steven Heydemann, “The Endgame in Syria”, *Foreign Policy*, July 11, 2012, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/07/11/the-end-game-in-syria/>.

<sup>26</sup> “Davutoğlu Esad’a Ömür Biçti”, *Hürriyet Planet*, August 25, 2012, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/planet/21300142.asp>. [19.10.2015].

<sup>27</sup> Sinan Tartanoğlu, “Erdoğan Suriye için Politika Değişikliği Sinyali Verdi: Esed Yine Esad mı Oluyor?” *Cumhuriyet*, 25 September 2015.

<sup>28</sup> “Beşar Esad’ın Yerine Faruk Şara Geçsin,” *Milliyet*, October 7, 2012.

that the regime change in Syria might create opportunities for the JDP to realize its “aspirations to make Turkey great again”. What Erdoğan declared in late June 2012 illustrates the extent of ambitious expectations prevailing among the JDP’s top brass. Referring to the Syrian crisis, Erdoğan would draw comparisons between the foreign policy visions of his party and of the RPP (the main opposition, Republican People’s Party) charging the latter lack vision of making Turkey greater.

“The great states are envied. If you do not have a claim of being greater, of being stronger, you just shut your eyes to everyone and everything, but stuck to where you were. The RPP’s foreign policy has never had a foreign policy vision for becoming great and active. They shut their eyes to and even supported cruelty, injustice, unlawfulness. They should excuse us; but such a Turkey no longer exists. We have great targets. We, God willing, endeavour to make Turkey one of the biggest ten countries of the World until 1923”.<sup>29</sup>

Ankara’s reactions to the developments of the latter part of the 2012 reflected the JDP government’s resoluteness to topple the al-Assad regime. After Turkish RF4E reconnaissance aircraft was intercepted and downed by the Syrian air defense on June 22, the government demanded from the parliament a mandate for war. When Syrian artillery fire killed 5 civilians on October 3 in border town Akçakale, the then Prime Minister Erdoğan called on preparations for a possible war with Syria: “One has to be ready for war at every moment, if it becomes necessary. If you are not ready, you are not a state and you cannot be a nation. The state that is not ready for war at any moment is not fully developed. Turkey must be ready for war no matter what.”<sup>30</sup> Editorials published in *Yeni Şafak* probably resonated with the mind-set of the JDP leadership that Turkey would come to the fore as the “pivotal country” and become “the architect of the change in Syria”.<sup>31</sup>

However, the second half of 2013 witnessed the reversal of fortunes for the JDP when the Syrian regime consolidated its position and the Egyptian military ousted the Muslim Brotherhood government in July 2013. During the first week of June, the Syrian army expelled the FSA from Al-Qusayr, the strategic stronghold controlling an important supply route between Syria and Lebanon. The battle of Al-Qusayr gave renewed

<sup>29</sup> “Erdoğan: Baas mı CHP mi?”, *Cumhuriyet*, June 29, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> “Turkey has to be Ready for War, Says Erdoğan”, *Today’s Zaman*, October 08, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> İbrahim Karagül, “Oyun Bitti, Esad İçin Yolun Sonuna Gelindi”, *Yeni Şafak*, November 16, 2011.

momentum to the Syrian army and frustrated hopes that the regime would fall soon. The role that Hezbollah played in the battle of Al-Qusayr was criticized by Hüseyin Çelik, the JDP government's then spokesperson, who labelled the organization as the party of the devil rather than of God.<sup>32</sup> However, Hezbollah's reaction was swift that THY (Türk Hava Yolları/Turkish Airlines) staff in Beirut was kidnapped on August 8, 2013 by an organization hitherto unknown. On August 10, the Turkish army contingent deployed in Lebanon had to withdraw. Nevertheless, the greatest blow came from Egypt on July 3, when the military ousted the MB government. The military coup in Egypt meant the loss of the most precious reward that the JDP government gained during the Arab Spring. Given the centrality of Egypt in the Middle East, the loss was irreplaceable for Ankara. Moreover, the JDP government's protests against the coup led to a crisis in bilateral relations that Egypt declared Turkey's ambassador persona non grata. In August 2013, Turkey's despair increased when the US desisted from a bombing campaign to punish the Syrian regime for the chemical attack it carried out in Guta near Damascus. In sum, the year 2013 witnessed that diversification of fallouts caused by the Syrian crisis went far beyond Turkey's capacity. All contingent upon the will of its allies, the three policy aims that the JDP government focused on after 2013 were manifesting in the sense that Turkey had already reached the limit of its capabilities: "One, for a no-fly zone to be created; two, for a secure zone parallel to the region to be declared; and for the moderate opposition in Syria and Iraq to be trained and equipped."<sup>33</sup> In this respect, three wrong assumptions, which worsened, if not caused, these ramifications, may provide a relevant frame of analysis to understand entanglements of JDP governments during the crisis in Syria.<sup>34</sup>

The JDP's Syrian policy was based on three discernible assumptions which proved misleading. The policy was primarily based on the assumption that the Assad regime was weak and would collapse in a short span of time like did the regimes in Egypt and Tunisia. On the contrary, the regime could have met challenges raised by armed opposition. On Turkey's part, the assumption of weaknesses of the regime led to a number of miscalculations about the capacities that the regime could have mobilized when threatened. The commonplace knowledge that the regime

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<sup>32</sup> "Hizbuşeytan", *Hürriyet*, May 27, 2013; Sertaç Koç, "Hizbulah'ın Kararı Türkiye'de Eylem", *Milliyet*, May 27, 2013.

<sup>33</sup> "Erdogan Warns Kobani is 'About to Fall to Isis' as Militants Advance on Syria-Turkey Border Town," *Independent*, October 7, 2104.

<sup>34</sup> Christopher Phillips, "Turkey's Syria Problem", *Open Democracy*, September 28, 2012.

does not represent any segment of society, but a narrow Alawite minority was disproved. The course of events displayed that the extent of domestic support given to the regime was larger than it had been presumed. Another miscalculation caused by this assumption was that the regime would soon be left alone in the international arena. However, it was soon understood that allies of the regime abroad would stand by it rather than abandon it like the allies of the Egyptian regime did. Contrarily, Iran, Russia and Hezbollah unceasingly supported the regime by all means. After late September 2015, the support provided by the Russian air force became even more decisive when the regime began to display signs of collapse. As Cafiero and Wagner observed in late 2015, Turkey's role in the conflict has been "dwarfed by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah's military intervention against the regime's enemies."<sup>35</sup> The asymmetry became more conspicuous when Russia imposed its own no-fly-zone over northern Syria compelling Turkey to suspend its flights there after the Russian SU-24 bomber downed by Turkish Air Force on November 24, 2015. In addition to the military backing, diplomatic support that its allies extended to the Syrian regime was even more conclusive. As permanent members of the Security Council, Russia and China effectively blocked the UN to pass resolutions for sanctions against the regime. In November 2015, the invitation extended to Tehran to join Vienna Talks meant the inclusion of another key ally of the Syrian regime to the negotiating table.

This assumption also led to a misbegotten course of action on behalf of the JDP government and caused other miscalculations that the Syrian regime would be easily paralyzed and downed by uprisings. However, the Syrian regime was not belated to respond to Turkey's interferences by revitalizing its former *modus vivendi* with the PKK.

### **Dealing with the PYD and ISIS**

The signs that the Syrian regime would recycle its connections with the PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan/Kurdistan Workers' Party) became conspicuous in early April 2011 when the regime allowed PKK militias coming from Qandil bases enter Syria. Saleh Muslim, the co-chair of the PYD (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat/ Democratic Union Party), the Syrian branch of PKK, was among those who were allowed to come back in April. The regime also began to release some of the PKK operatives from

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<sup>35</sup> Giorgio Cafiero and Daniel Wagner, "Turkey and Qatar: Close Allies, Sharing a Doomed Syria Policy," *The National Interest*, November 9, 2015.



prison in May.<sup>36</sup> It was also reported that the PKK dispatched hundreds of armed fighters to form the PYD's military wing, the YPG."<sup>37</sup> Amidst accusations of "silencing" other Kurdish figures and of monopolizing the Kurdish political scenery, the PYD secured an overwhelming position among the Syrian Kurds.<sup>38</sup> The PKK declared his policy as the third way meaning that it will neither collaborate with the opposition nor the regime, but pursue its own policies. However, the course of events did not corroborate the PKK's third way policy, but in many cases the regime and PKK acted in tandem. Although the existence of a formal agreement between the PYD and the regime was not confirmed yet, it is almost certain that the parties had reached a tacit *modus vivendi*.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, on July 19, 2012, Turkey was stunned after the Syrian regime allowed the PYD take control over large swathes of alongside Turkish-Syrian border. Perceived as an embryonic state, the establishment of Kurdish cantons in Northern Syria evidently became a source of irritation in Ankara.<sup>40</sup>

However, Turkey's warnings that the PYD is the extension of PKK in Syria and Kurdish cantons constituted "an unacceptable situation" did have little impact on the course of events.<sup>41</sup> On the contrary, the proclamation of ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) in Syria and its attempt to seize the Kurdish town Kobani provided the PYD with new opportunities to gain international legitimacy. Cast as the Stalingrad of Kurds, the resistance that the PYD forces put up in Kobani prompted worldwide sympathy. Turning deaf ears to Turkey's complaints that it was the extension of the PKK in Syria, the US began in October 2014 to support the YPG, the armed wing of the PYD. Evidently, the US policy was in contrast to Turkey's reluctance to provide support to the resistance in Kobani. When the KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government) asked Ankara's permission to let peshmergas reinforcements for YPG fighters be transferred through Turkey, the initial reaction of the JDP government was negative. On October 16, Davutoğlu, who was the then Prime Minister of Turkey as Erdoğan became the President, resolutely declared that "even for purposes of humanitarian aid, Turkey will not open a corridor" and

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<sup>36</sup> Khaled Jacob Oweiss, "The West's Darling in Syria", *SWP Comments*, 47, (October 2015):47-48.

<sup>37</sup> "Syria's Kurds: A Struggle within a Struggle", *International Crisis Group, Middle East Report*, N°136, (22 January 2013): 2.

<sup>38</sup> Gunther Seufert, "The Return of the Kurdish Question on the Situation of the Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey", *SWP Comments*, 38, (August 2015): 3.

<sup>39</sup> "Syria's Kurds: A Struggle within a Struggle" p.2.

<sup>40</sup> Deniz Zeyrek, "Kürt Kartını Düşünme!", *Radikal*, October 26, 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Yalçın Akdoğan, "Yeni Kandil'lere İzin Verilemez", *Star*, July 27, 2012.

“not meddle with Kobani issue”<sup>42</sup> However, the JDP’s intransigence did not produce an effect as Turkey’s allies remained indifference to Ankara’s complaints and kept supporting the PYD. On the contrary, Turkey was targeted for “showing that it would prefer ISIS to hold the town: anything was better than the PYD.”<sup>43</sup>

Eventually, in the face of strong pressure coming from its allies, the government stepped back.<sup>44</sup> “Within hours of Erdoğan saying that Turkey wouldn’t help the PYD terrorists”, as Patrick Cockburn noted, “that permission was being given for Iraqi Kurds to reinforce the PYD fighters at Kobani.”<sup>45</sup> Although KRG reinforcements were allowed to go through Turkey, the impression lingered that the JDP government did not support Kurdish defenders at a time help was needed the most. After 134 days of the siege, on January 27, 2015, ISIS had to retreat from Kobani.<sup>46</sup> In October, the PYD could repel the ISIS forces in Tel Abyad, and seized the territory stretching between Haseke and Kobani cantons. It increased Ankara’s concerns of being encircled by a Kurdish belt. As a consequence of successful campaigns, the PYD gained recognition as the only significant force on the ground fighting against ISIS. As a token of its increasing legitimacy, the co-chairpersons of the PYD were given official receptions in European capitals. In this respect, the Rojava Revolution, as named by the PKK, has indicated the extent of damage that the Syrian regime could have been able to inflict on Turkey. With its spill over impact on the Kurds of Turkey, the damage seems not to have confined to Syria. Given tremendous efforts to get the opposition consolidated in Syria, what JDP governments accomplished was much less significant by comparison with the damage the Syrian regime could have given Turkey only through revitalizing its ties with the PKK. This point leads us to the second assumption that misled the JDP government in Syria

The second assumption that the JDP government counted on had been that the opposition was strong enough to mobilize large groups of people and swiftly topple the regime. Almost five weeks after demonstrations broke out in Deraa, the Istanbul Meeting for Syria was held by several

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<sup>42</sup> “Davutoğlu: Türkiye Kobani’ye Köprü Açmayacak”, *Türkiye*, October 16, 2104.

<sup>43</sup> Patrick Cockburn, “Whose Side is Turkey on?” *London Review of Books*, Vol. 36 No.21, (6 November 2014): 8.

<sup>44</sup> “Obama, Erdoğan’ı Aradı, Kobani’ye Koridor Açıldı,” *Cumhuriyet*, October 21, 2104.

<sup>45</sup> Cockburn, “Whose Side is Turkey on?”..., 8.

<sup>46</sup> İdris Emen, “Sınırım Her İki Yakasında Bayram”, *Radikal*, January 27, 2015.

opposition groups on April 26-27, 2011.<sup>47</sup> On May 31, the opposition convened its first large scale congress in Antalya which called for regime change. The Antalya Congress was marked by the active participation of the members of Syrian MB.<sup>48</sup> After the June 12, 2011 Elections, Turkey stepped up its efforts to get the Syrian opposition organized. With a strong MB contingent, the Syrian National Salvation Congress was convened on July 16 in Istanbul. On August 23, the Istanbul based group including independent opposition figures and pro-MB Islamists announced plans for the Syrian National Council (SNC). On August 29, the “Transitional National Council”, including 94 members, was formed in Ankara and Burhan Ghalioun, with strong JDP support, became its chairman. On September 15, the Istanbul Group formally established SNC and endorsed Ghalioun’s leadership. Another conference held on October 2 expanded the SNC including activists from other opposition groups.<sup>49</sup> Of the opposition groups, the MB was the one that the JDP attached great expectations. However, as a movement in exile with little social basis at home, the MB failed to meet the expectations. In addition to their weakness within Syria, MB leaders misled Ankara in the sense that the regime was doomed. In an interview given in June 2011, Muhammad Shaqfa, the leader of the Syrian MB, had claimed that the regime would not be able to survive the year to come.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the JDP’s support for the MB was counterproductive for it dissuaded other secular groups to join the opposition. Therefore, the disappointment with the MB compelled the JDP government to extend support to armed groups with, to say the least, controversial political agendas.

The lack of capability was also evident for the rest of the opposition. However, none of the other opposition groups were strong enough to resist the regime forces or able to act in unison. Let alone unity, even significant degree of cooperation among the opposition groups has never been accomplished. As the civil war prolonged, these groups began to fight among them rather than to get allied and resist the regime. Given the difficulty of accurately assessing loyalties among the opposition, Turkey indiscriminately allowed weapons and fighters to flow across its border with Syria, Turkey increased its support for armed groups. After 2012, the amount of media reports highlighting the details of support that Turkey

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<sup>47</sup> Fehim Taştekin, “Özgürlük Talebi Bu Kez Bastırılmayacak”, *Radikal*, April 27, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Aron Lund, *Divided They Stand: An Overview of Syria’s Opposition Factions*, (Upsala, International Center, 2012).

<sup>49</sup> Lund, *Divided They Stand...*,

<sup>50</sup> Aslı Aydıntaşbaşı, “Rejim Önümüzdeki Yıl Pes Eder”, *Milliyet*, 23 June 2011.

was providing the armed groups with increased. The support included that members of the armed opposition were given refuge, medical care and various transportation facilities.<sup>51</sup> The Apaydın refugee camp was specified as one of the camps where renegade Syrian officers could take rest and medical attention before they rejoin their comrades back in Syria.<sup>52</sup>

Beginning from January 3, 2012, Turkey took part in joint operations for shipping arms to the Syrian opposition allowing significant amount of shipment go through Turkey.<sup>53</sup> However, in spite of extensive support from abroad, the FSA failed to become an effective military force on the ground.<sup>54</sup> As the crisis prolonged, the JDP government opted to collaborate with radical groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and other Al-Qaida affiliated groups which had been fighting more efficiently. Media reports raised allegations of extensive assistance to such groups, which ranged from arms transfers to logistics, and the provision of medical services. Towards the end of 2012, Turkey's support for Jabhat al-Nusra became even more controversial after members of the organization claimed to get involved in the deadly raid to the US Embassy in Bingazi in September 2012. The JDP government came under criticism from its Western allies that Al-Qaida affiliated groups in Syria were supported by Turkey. Despite the JDP government denied shipments, even Turkey's own exports statistics indicated Turkey exported 47 tonnes of military equipment to Syria only in the latter part of 2013.<sup>55</sup> Another report based on official figures indicated that Turkey's arms export to Syria continued in 2014 and amounted to USD 759.594.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> "Suriye'de Türkiye'den Gönderilen Silahlar Paylaşılamıyor", *BBC Türkçe*, September 14, 2012;

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2012/09/120914\\_syria\\_turkey\\_arms.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2012/09/120914_syria_turkey_arms.shtml) [28.062013]; Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "Syria Civil War: We Expend the One Thing We Have: Men Are Dying", *The Guardian*, September 25, 2012; Liz Sly, "Turkey Confronts Policy Missteps on Syria with Rise of Al-Qaeda across the Border", *The Washington Post*, November 16, 2013.

<sup>52</sup> Tolga Tanış, *POTUS ve Beyefendi*, (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2015):72-73.

<sup>53</sup> C. J. Chivers and Eric Schmitt, "Arms Airlift to Syria Rebels Expands, With Aid From the C.I.A.", *The New York Times*, March 24, 2013; Greg Miller and Joby Warrick, "CIA Preparing to Deliver Arms Through Turkey and Jordan", *The Washington Post*, June 14, 2013; Tanış, *POTUS ve Beyefendi*., 214; Ömer Ödemiş, *AKP'nin Suriye Yenilgisi*, (Ankara: Notebene, 2014):245-250.

<sup>54</sup> Liz Sly, "In Syria, Defectors Form Dissident Army in Sign Uprising May Be Entering New Phase", *The Washington Post*, 26 September 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Tolga Tanış, "Suriye'ye Silahın Belgesi", *Hürriyet*, December 15, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Çiğdem Toker, "Suriye'ye Resmi Silah İhracatı", *Cumhuriyet*, June 3, 2015.

The JDP government's support for armed salafi groups highlighted the divergence of views between Ankara and Washington. After the Bingazi attack in September 2012, the US suspended its support for Jabhat al Nusra, the Syrian branch of the Al Qaida and demanded Turkey terminate its support for the groups. In light of the changing US attitude towards Al Nusra, Turkey's support to the Salafi groupings increasingly came under criticism. Despite Turkey's declarations that Al Nusra was put on the list of terrorist organizations, allegations that the JDP government maintains its support for the organization continued. In September 2013 further claims were raised that not only did Al Nusra keep transferring its fighters through Turkey, but begin to recruit them from within Turkey.<sup>57</sup> When ISIS broke with the Al Qaida-Iraq and proclaimed its own state in Syria in 2013, US pressure on Turkey increased due to allegations of its support for the so called state.<sup>58</sup> Ongoing claims that Turkey, alongside Saudi Arabia and Qatar, support the radical Islamist groups drove another wedge between Turkey and its Western allies. In July 2014, ISIS solidified its hold on eastern banks of the Euphrates in Syria, expelling its rivals from the region, and declared a caliphate extending its control over the city of Mosul. Nevertheless, the JDP government refrained from taking an active coalition led by the United States to fight ISIS when forty-nine of its citizens were being held hostage by ISIS militants having been abducted from the Turkish consulate in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. After securing their freedom in an operation which resulted in the release of 50 ISIS fighters, President Erdoğan said Turkey's position had changed, signalling a more robust stance towards the group.<sup>59</sup> However, these statements did not end accusations of support that Turkey extends to jihadist groups. Turkey's role to facilitate jihadist groups' mobility across its southern borders continued to be increasing concern and criticism from European countries."<sup>60</sup> On October 2, 2014, Vice President Joe Biden named Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the UAE which "promoted a proxy

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<sup>57</sup> İdris Emen, "Adıyaman-Suriye Cihat Hattı", *Radikal*, September 29, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> Anthony Faiola and Souad Mekhennet, "In Turkey, a Late Crackdown on Islamist Fighters", *Washington Post*, August 12, 2014 and David L. Phillips, *ISIS-Turkey Links*, Research Paper published by Institute for The Study of Human Rights, September 11, 2014.

<sup>59</sup> "Turkish Tanks Take up Position on Syrian Border Next to Besieged Kurdish Town", *Hürriyet Daily News*, September 29, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Guido Steinberg, "A Chechen al-Qaeda? Caucasian Groups Further Internationalise the Syrian Struggle?", *SWP Comments*, 2014/C 31, (June 2014):7; Souad Ahmadoun, "Turkey's Policy toward Syrian Refugees: Domestic Repercussions and the Need for International Support", *SWP Comments 2014/C* 47, (November 2014): 4.

Sunni-Shia war in Syria and poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad”.<sup>61</sup> In mid-November 2014, Turkey was charged by the report published by the UN Security Council with “being used as one of the primary routes for weapons” dispatched to ISIS and al-Nusra. Despite it prompted a denial from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the report reinforced Turkey’s image of arm supplier for the jihadist organizations.<sup>62</sup> Turkey’s unsuccessful attempts to convince its allies to set a no fly zone or a security zone in North Syria should also be noted as one of the indicators of its failure.<sup>63</sup>

Closely intertwined with the first two, the course of events displayed that Turkey lacks relevant means to deal with fallouts of the crisis. Overwhelmed by the manifold ramifications that the crisis caused, Turkey’s incapability became conspicuous at several levels. On a humanitarian level, the number of refugees reached unprecedented levels marking the most serious refugee crisis of the republican history. In the wake of skirmishes in Jisr al-Shoughour in the early June 2011, first wave of refugees reached to Turkish border. The government launched unconditional “open door” policy, according to which migrants were accepted as guests rather than refugees. Soon after the refugee flow began, the infrastructure failed to meet contingencies despite the enormous efforts to open and maintain refugee camps. In October 2011, the policy was revised so that the “guests” were granted status of “temporary protection” and additional rights enabling them to stay in Turkey as long as they wish to do so.<sup>64</sup>

In mid-2012, the number of refugees was only 100.000. As of the end of 2014, the cost of refugees to the government amounted to \$3 billion. The new migration law, which was put in effect in April 2014, gave the refugees “conditional refugee status”.<sup>65</sup> As of the end of 2015, number of refugees reached to 2 million, two third of who are women and children. Even the number of refugee families’ children who were born in Turkey was over 60.000. In spite of the enormous efforts, Turkey’s policy for

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<sup>61</sup> Cockburn, “Whose Side is Turkey on?”..., 8-9.

<sup>62</sup> Fırat Kozok and Duygu Güvenç, “Türkiye’den IŞİD’e Kaçak Silah Hattı”, *Cumhuriyet*, 29 December 2014; “Ankara Refutes UN Report Claiming Turkey Route for Arms to al-Qaeda”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, December 30, 2014.

<sup>63</sup> “Washington Dubs Syria No-fly Zone Plans as ‘Pre-mature’”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, December 4, 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Murat Onur, “Türkiye’nin Sorunlu Mülteci Politikası”, *Radikal İki*, November 4, 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Ahmadoun, “Turkey’s Policy toward Syrian Refugees”..., 1.

refugees was criticized on the grounds that refugees were instrumentalized for the JDP government's Syrian policy. In a clear violation of international regulations, some camps were disguised as refugee camps, but used as sanctuaries for the members of the armed groups who crisscrossed border on regular basis. The media attention and debates in the parliament did not change the official position and demands for site inspection were refused on the basis of security of the refugees there.<sup>66</sup> By mid-2012, overwhelmed by the influx of refugees, Ankara started to complain of international community's indifference to the refugee crisis and asked assistance to share the burden.<sup>67</sup> Refugees who tried to migrate to Europe caused yet another crisis between Turkey and the EU.

### Internal Disturbances

Events of 2013 within Turkey highlighted that its capacity to lead democratic transformation in the Middle East by example was not sufficient either. The harsh treatment that the JDP government gave to the peaceful demonstrators during the Gezi Park protests undermined international prestige and credibility the JDP government gained during the Arab uprisings. The poor political performance of the JDP government during the protests stood in a stark contrast to the image of Erdoğan, who used to be illustrated as the leader who could be able to provide the leadership that Arab streets aspired to have. Let alone taking a positive attitude and resorting to a reconciliatory discourse, as Soli Özel pointed out, "the protesters were accused of being foreign agents, terrorists, enemies of Turkey's stability and prosperity, or lackeys of the main opposition party."<sup>68</sup> Demonizing protestors or raising the spectre of chaos, the discourse that the JDP leadership employed resembled rhetoric that authoritarian leaders resorted when coping with the Arab uprisings. However, not only did the Gezi protestors, but those opposed to the government's policy in Syria fall victim to the JDP's divisive discourse.

Instead of using an inclusive rhetoric to build a nationwide consensus, the JDP government deliberately employed a rhetoric through which opposition parties were constantly accused of supporting or collaborated with the Syrian regime. The JDP propaganda reiterated that "the main opposition party RPP was acting as the Baath Party of Turkey or the

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<sup>66</sup> "Apaydın'a Özel Muamele", *Radikal*, August 30, 2012.

<sup>67</sup> Deniz Zeyrek, "'Suriyeli Misafir' için Uyarı" *Radikal*, August 27, 2012.

<sup>68</sup> Soli Özel, "A Moment of Elation: The Gezi Protests/Resistance and the Fading of the AKP Project", in *The Making of a Protest Movement in Turkey: #Occupygezi*, (Ed.) Umut Özkırımlı, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Pivot, 2014): 7-24.

accomplice of the Syrian regime”. In September 2011 the JDP’s then spokesperson Hüseyin Çelik professed “a genetic linkage between the RPP and Baath parties in Arab countries”. In order to despise RPP’s leader Kılıçdaroğlu, he went so far as to claim that confessional identity of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, as an Alawite by origin, could have been influential in the formulation of RPP’s policy towards the Syrian regime.<sup>69</sup> So let alone building a consensus on the Syrian crisis, at a time solidarity and unity are required the most, the JDP’s sectarian discourse deepened the existing social and political cleavages.

The most striking setback that the Syrian crisis caused for the JDP government was probably that the crisis invoked the intra governmental frictions among the security agencies including the national intelligence service, the police and the gendarmerie. It was unprecedented that frictions led to leakages from top secret confidential meetings or to severe turf fights within the security establishment. On November 7, 2013, the interception of a truck loaded with missile heads and ammunition bound for Syria highlighted the state of affairs among the most sensitive security agencies in charge of covert operations. It was later understood that the interception was a manifestation of a tug of war between national intelligence service and some clandestine organizations within the police. In a similar operation carried out on January 19, 2014 when two more trucks were intercepted by the gendarmerie, the extent of the cleavages among various agencies became more evident. On the eve of the June 7, 2015 Elections, when the debate on Turkey’s support to the Syrian opposition was rekindled, the photographs taken during these interceptions were published again.<sup>70</sup> Other reports indicating the transportation facilities provided to Jihadist groups en route to Syria followed the suit.<sup>71</sup>

The JDP government labeled publications as an attempt to oust government and sued the journalists who would be detained in November 2015 on charges of spying on issues of national security. The incident triggered another exchange of reprimands between the JDP government and opposition in which both sides blamed each other of high treason, highlighting once again the depth of fault lines that the Syrian crisis created in Turkish politics. While the government accused media outlets of uncovering secret operations for arming Turcomans of Syria,<sup>72</sup> the

<sup>69</sup> “CHP Türkiye’nin Baas Partisidir”, *Habertürk*, September 8, 2011. The same rhetoric remained in use until recently: “CHP-HDP Esad’ın Türkiye Temsilcisi”, *Sabah*, May 11, 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Can Dündar, “İşte Erdoğan’ın Yok Dediği Silahlar”, *Cumhuriyet*, May 29, 2015.

<sup>71</sup> Ahmet Şık, “MIT’ten Cihatçı Sevkiyatı”, *Cumhuriyet*, June 6, 2015.

<sup>72</sup> İsmail Uğur, “Türkiye Olmasaydı Ayakta Kalamazdık”, *Yeni Akit*, June 2, 2015.



opposition claimed that the arms and ammunition had been dispatched for Jihadist groups affiliated with Al Qaida. It has already become evident that the JDP's policies will rekindle more power struggles within the state establishment and venomous debates among political parties.

The crisis played the role of catalyst for turf fights among various security agencies whereas the military did not get entangled any sort of open quarrel with the government or other institutions. Despite the military assumed critical role during various stages of the crisis, as of the beginning of the 2016, it remained in sidelines. This aloofness was attributable to two significant factors. The military had been stripped of its legal leverages to intervene in mundane politics. Secondly, the Syrian crisis coincided with an institutional recovery of trauma inflicted by political trials which aimed to undercut the military's position. In particular, after 2013 the government and the military were in line with each other and no evidence was reported indicating serious friction between JDP governments and the military. In a stark contrast to the way it used to act before, the military refrained from making public statements or taking positions against the government policy over Syria. The military acted in unison and did not run the risk of being dragged into the Syrian quagmire. Its reluctance for a military intervention in Syria became palpable during the second half of June 2015. Alarmed by the nascent "corridor state" alongside the Syrian border, the government asked the military to move across the border to prevent the YPG's advance beyond the Euphrates. Ostensibly meant to set a safe zone for the displaced Syrians to take refuge, the military's reaction to the government's demand to enter Syria was cautious.<sup>73</sup> Sources known close to the military suggested that the top brass declined to implement the government's instructions on the grounds that the conditions were not ripe for such a contingency and that more detailed planning needed to be done for the unexpected outcomes since "the size of the fire was not seen clear enough".<sup>74</sup> It was interesting that the military drew attention to the likelihood of political complications given the fact that a new government had not been formed yet after the June 7 Elections, which did not give clear mandate for a single party government.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Murat Yetkin, "Army Reluctant on Gov't Call for Syria Intervention", *Hürriyet Daily News*, June 27-28, 2015; Serkan Demirtaş, "Türkiye Neden Suriye'ye Giremez?", *Radikal*, June 30, 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Ahmet Takan, "Davutoğlu'ndan TSK'ya Emir: Cerablus'a Girin", *Yeni Çağ*, June 26, 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Murat Kelkitlioğlu, "Hükümet 'Gir' Derse Gireriz", *Akşam*, June 28, 2015; Serpil Çevikcan, "'Sorumluluktan Asla Kaçmayız'", *Milliyet*, June 28, 2015.

## Conclusion

The uprisings in Syria seemed to have impaled the JDP leadership on the horns of a dilemma forcing a choice between standing by the regime or supporting the rebels. However, soon after the uprisings broke out, Turkey was among the regional powers that took sides in the conflict making Syria theatre of a war-by-proxy for regional supremacy. It was also the first time Ankara defined the unrest in another country as its own national matter and overtly interfered in the internal affairs of that country by all means at its disposal. In contrast to what Turkey abhorred what Syria did in 1990s, Turkey hosted, trained and armed opposition groups with an aim to oust the regime in Syria. As of the beginning of 2016, Turkey's regime change policy proved futile and even counterproductive.

Moreover, Turkey was left exposed to most serious fallouts that the turmoil in Syria caused. Of such manifold effects, the unending refugee flow towards Turkey has probably been the most serious consequence that the crisis set off. However, the Syrian crisis also took a heavy toll on Turkey's politics. Rather than to build a consensus in favor of government, the JDP's discursive strategy polarized society to an unprecedented degree charging the opposition for not supporting the government in its "righteous cause". Furthermore, the JDP's Syrian policy became a catalyst for severe turf fights among several agencies of Turkey's security establishment. The chain of crises instigated by the JDP's regime change policy revealed fragile relations between the security and intelligence agencies. Interventionist policies in Syria also put the JDP government at loggerheads with its neighbors such as Russia and Iran. And as the crisis was prolonged, it led to what one of the leading figures of the party called "Turkey's precious solitude" in the Middle East.

In spite of its huge political and strategic investment in the Syrian crisis since its beginning, the JDP has never gained control over what happened on the ground. When the Russian military fully engaged in the conflict to save the regime in late 2015, it also eliminated all prospects for Turkey's putative military involvement in Syria. Moreover, when the Syrian Army defeated the armed groups that controlled the northern part of Aleppo, it frustrated Turkey's efforts to bolster these armed groups that were fighting to hold on to northern Syria. The political turmoil that followed the failed putsch of July 15th dragged Turkey's security apparatus into a state of introversion, and inevitably compelled the JDP administration to come to terms with Russia and Iran. Turkey's *Operation Euphrates Shield* began in late August. What paradoxically made it possible was the rapprochement with Russia and Russian acquiescence. This episode epitomized Turkey's *modus operandi*

with Russia. Therefore, the Moscow Declaration of 20 December 2016 that aligned Turkey with its rivals in the Syrian conflict such as Iran and Russia, effectively stands as an obituary, if not a certificate of death, for the overambitious policies that Turkey pursued in Syria since 2011.