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TITLE: Suriye İç Savası ve Küresel Etkilerinin Siyasi Coğrafya Açısından Değerlendirilmesi

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PAGES: 315-326

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/327172>

EVALUATION OF SYRIAN CIVIL WAR AND ITS GLOBAL EFFECTS IN TERMS OF POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY¹

Suriye İç Savaşı ve Küresel Etkilerinin Siyasi Coğrafya Açısından Değerlendirilmesi

Muazzez Harunoğulları²

Abstract

Starting with the self-immolation of a Tunisian young man on 17 December 2010, the mass movements, as a result of a domino effect, has spread throughout the Arab world that have been plagued by similar problems. Events which took place in Tunisia and later in Egypt and Libya have affected the Middle East and finally led to a civil war ongoing in recent years in Syria. In this study, the civil war in Syria, interest conflicts of regional and global power centers emerging with the effect of this civil war and new political entities have been examined. The study has employed the case study approach and descriptive research method, both of which included among qualitative research methods. As a result of the Syrian Civil War, thousands of people have lost their lives and millions of people have been displaced. Benefiting from the political void caused by the effect of the civil war, many armed organizations have entered a great and unending power struggle. Using the terrorist organizations that came to the fore as a pretext, European countries and other countries like the USA, Russia and Iran have intervened with arms. Powerful countries began to create new policies in line with their ideologies to fulfill their objectives over the Middle East. A war environment has been fueled using the ethnic and sectarian differences as pretext. Asia's major powers, Russia and Iran, try all their best to reshape the borders that will be drawn in accordance with their own interests. Western powers constitute the other side of this struggle. As a result of mass movements happening in the Middle East and wars, a new political geography concept is emerging in the region.

Keywords: Syria, the Middle East, civil war, Arab Spring, energy

Özet

17 Aralık 2010 yılında Tunuslu bir gencin kendini yakması ile başlayan kitlesel hareketler, domino etkisi göstererek benzer sorunlar içerisinde olan Arap dünyasında kısa sürede yayılmıştır. Tunus'un ardından Mısır ve Libya gibi ülkelerde de yaşanan olaylar, Orta Doğu'da da etkisini göstermiş ve son olarak Suriye'de yıllarca süregelen bir iç savaşa sebep olmuştur. Bu çalışmada Suriye'de yaşanan iç savaş ve bu savaşın etkisiyle ortaya çıkan bölgesel ve küresel güç odaklarının çıkar mücadelesi ve yeni siyasi oluşumlar ele alınmıştır. Araştırma, nitel araştırmalar içinde yer alan durum çalışması yaklaşımıyla ve betimsel araştırma yöntemiyle ele alınmıştır. Suriye'de yaşanan iç savaş sonucu binlerce insan hayatın kaybetmiş, milyonlarca insan yerinden olmuştur. İç savaşın etkisiyle ortaya çıkan siyasal boşluktan faydalanan pek çok silahlı örgüt, Suriye'de büyük ve bitirilemez bir güç mücadelesine girmiştir. Savaşla birlikte gündeme oturan terör örgütlerini bahane eden ABD, AB devletleri, Rusya, İran gibi pek çok ülke Suriye'ye silahlı müdahalede bulunmuştur. Güçlü ülkeler Orta Doğu üzerindeki emellerini gerçekleştirmek için ideolojileri doğrultusunda yeni politikalar üretmeye başlamışlardır. Etnik ve mezhep farklılıkları bahane edilerek savaş ortamı beslenmektedir. Asya'nın büyük güçleri Rusya ve İran çizilecek sınırların kendi menfaatleri doğrultusunda yeniden şekillenmesi için ellerinden gelen tüm gayreti sergilemektedirler. Bu mücadelenin diğer kanadını da batılı güçler teşkil etmektedir. Orta Doğu'da yaşanan kitlesel hareketlerin ve savaşların etkisiyle bölgede, yeni bir siyasi coğrafya olgusu ortaya çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriye, Orta Doğu, iç savaş, Arap Baharı, enerji

¹ A portion of this article was presented as oral presentation "GEOMED 2016, The 4th International Geography Symposium (May 23-26, 2016)".

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INTRODUCTION

Ideas and applications that are produced without taking into account the space people live on, the characteristics of this place and the geographical, physical and human effects of this place will have flaws. The indispensable three pillars of politics and strategy are power, space and time. Space, one of these three pillars, represents geography at a geopolitical level. Each geography constitutes a potential value and power (İlhan, 2003 p.21).

The Middle East and Northern Africa are focus of interest for many countries due to their geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic importance. The region has always attracted attention with the existence of governments built after the downfall of the Ottoman Empire in line with the western interests, instabilities, rich hydrocarbon resources, sectarian violence, different ethnic structures and cultures and radical movements. Being the cradle of civilizations, this region is a geography which hosts many different beliefs, ethnic characteristics, cultures and which witnesses developments and changes that profoundly affect the world history (Akengin & Gürçay, 2014 p.27). The Middle East, the birthplace of all the monotheistic religions, has cultural and ethnic diversity and richness. Besides this, it also has the world's richest crude oil and natural gas reserves. Although the region has rich energy resources, only a certain amount of the high revenue derived from these resources are used for the people's benefit. Economic problems like unemployment and poverty and factors like political culture and autocratic structure made the region a problematic and conflicting environment where there is continuous tension (Akengin & Gürçay, 2014 p.27) starting on 18 December 2010 in. Protests that began in Tunisia on December 18, 2010 also spread to governments in North Africa and the Middle East. These led to civil war and foreign intervention in Libya and a civil war in Syria that has been going on for five years. In countries like Algeria, Jordan, Bahrain, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iraq, Lebanon and Morocco, people's movements ensured that reforms were made even if they were in small scale (Göçer & Çınar, 2015 p.51). The developments that showed up in Tunisia and Egypt with internal dynamics and limited human loss were also witnessed in countries like Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Saudi Arabia (Kuloğlu, 2011 p.50). The civil war in Syria has led to massive human loss. While the Gaddafi regime in Libya was ended with the support of international community, the conflict in Syria has been continuing unabated (Akkuş, 2012 p.225-226).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The Middle East and its surrounding area has always been a geography that many countries wanted to rule throughout history. This region has witnesses people's movements in recent years and many countries' citizens lost their lives or were displaced. Syrian civil war has turned into a war that not only affected the region but the entire world. In this study, the global and regional powers' policies over Syria and the Middle East and the reasons and results of these policies are analyzed and evaluated. A comprehensive literature review was conducted for the study. The data obtained about the countries that have been producing policies about the region's countries was evaluated through case study approach and the findings were synthesized and discussed through descriptive research method. Furthermore, various comparisons were made to explain the subject and the importance of the Middle Eastern geography, the people's movements in countries in this geography, the reasons and results of these movements and the global and regional powers' policies over this geography were discussed.

STUDY AREA

Syrian Arab Republic is located to the east of the Mediterranean, to the northeast of Israel and Lebanon, to the north of Jordan, to the west and northeast of Iraq and to the south of Turkey (Figure 1). The Syrian Arab Republic was within the borders of the Ottoman Empire before the World War I but came under the French mandate after the war and gained its independence on 17 April 1946 (Karaaslan, 1998 p s.67). The Middle East is one of the most important geographical regions in terms of location and resources. Although this study includes the countries where people's movements in North Africa and the Middle East called the Arab Spring in the literature happened, the focus of the study is on Syria. The effect of these movements that are called the Arab Spring but became the Arab Winter because of the losses have been tremendous in North Africa and the Middle East but especially in Syria. Just like its neighbor, Lebanon, Syria has a coastline along the Mediterranean that constitutes the western part of Syria. The eastern part of the country stretching from the east of Anti-Lebanon Mountains to Tigris is inside the Mesopotamian Plain. The northwest part of the desert area, i.e. the northern extension of the Arabian Desert, makes up the country's southeast region. With its unique characteristics among the Fertile Crescent countries, Syria is a part of the rainy region called "Levant". The southeastern parts of the country are extensions of the Central Arabian Plateau and Desert (Öngör, 1964 p.210).



Figure 1: Syria's geographical location

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Arab Spring / Winter and The Middle East

The starting point of the problems in the Middle East is the result of global powers' policies regarding the region. In addition to having rich energy resources, the Middle East is an important energy transportation line. Therefore, the security of these energy transportation lines is tremendously important (Ekin, 2012 p.84-85). Starting in Tunisia in December 2010, the riots, also called the "Jasmine Revolution", spread to the entire Arab world in a short time (Noi, 2012 p.13). After the protests in Tunisia, the so-called Arab Spring engulfed North Africa and the Middle East. As a result of a domino effect, these protests led to new people's uprisings in many countries (Bohman & Ekengren, 2016 p.2). Countries like Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt and Libya in North Africa, Syria, Jordan, Bahrain, Yemen, partially Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iraq, Lebanon and Kuwait in the Middle East and Sudan and Djibouti in Africa were affected from these uprisings (Figure 2). Internal turmoil in the Arab world was attempted to be covered up by rhetorics like "Jasmine Revolution", "Arab Spring" and "Arab Awakening". Although these terms were used to refer to "peace" and "democracy", it is difficult to digest these rhetorics because of the many human losses suffered during these people's movements in North Africa and the Middle East. Used to mask the civil wars and turmoil among the Muslims, these rhetorics were used by the American and European journalists (Donovan, 2011). In Tunisia, destabilization of the country's economy by the Bin Ali government over 20 years, IMF's fatal economic practices and the dictated economic and social policies by Washington brought the social dissolution with them. To weaken France's role in Tunisia and to consolidate its position in North Africa, through the so-called fair elections the US used the democratization program as a tool that led to political crisis. To this end, the United States used the press for democratic reforms in Tunisia and strong street protests were seen in the streets of Tunisia (Chossudovsky, 2015).



Figure 2: The countries that were affected by the people's movements called the Arab Spring

Because of reasons like economic stagnation, poverty, inequality, unemployment and increase in food prices, the people's movements in Egypt in 2011 turned into huge social uprisings in a short time with people using mass communication tools. With similar reasons to the people's movements in Tunisia, the huge mass events in Egypt spread fast in the other Arabic societies (Korotavey & Zinkina, 2011 p.139). During Mubarek's time (1981-2011), the Egyptian economy has grown 4.5 times for 30 years. Accelerating in 2004, the economic growth continued during the world economic crisis and the growth rates increased again in 2010. The increase in Egyptian population during this period has led to a steady decline in economy (Korotayev & Zinkina, 2011 p.140). Between the years 2008 and 2011, Egypt largely imported its food needs. During these years, with the increase in food prices in the world more than three million Egyptians fell below the poverty line. Increase in global food prices, poverty, unemployment (more than 43 % of university students were unemployed in 2010), population increase, lagging behind in developments that could meet the needs of the population and fast increase in the most basic nutrient, wheat, brought the Egyptian people together on Tahrir Square (Korotayev & Zinkina, 2011 p.156-167). The increase in food prices created a social crisis and this triggered the complaints against the national security state and neoliberal economic policy institutions. In countries like Tunisia and Egypt where a political culture developed by the protestors and labor movements, the leaders were ousted very soon. However, in other places the powers' interests were built on the derailing the development of the Arab Spring. Since people discussing the legitimacy of the Gulf regimes was risky for the US and the European allies, Bahrain and Yemen did not permit people's movements. When people began to question Riyadh and Doha, the freedom rhetoric was set aside (Prashad, 2012 p.98).

The Gaddafi regime trying to suppress the people's movements that started in Libya in 15 February 2011 violently increased the seriousness of the situation. Libya having a suitable environment for radical religious groups and Gaddafi bombing the ports and oil facilities and thus putting a spoke in oil export worried the US. To end the civil war in Libya, the United States had talks with many Arab counties and the US tried to avoid repeating the mistake it did in Iraq by taking a weaker role in the intervention. With France, Lebanon and the UK's proposal, the UN Security Council carried out a military operation to Libya on 19 March 2011. France started the first operation. The US who led the operation transferred the command to NATO on 31st March (Telatar, 2012 p.71-73). Five months after demonstrations against the regime started in Syria, the Bashar al-Assad regime was stuck in a difficult situation in the international arena. The reforms made by the regime did not satisfy the people. Assad used military force and internal and external pressures on Syria have increased. In this critical environment, the biggest support to Syria came from Iran. Although Iran supported many of the people's movements during the "Arab Spring" which they called the "Islamic Awakening", Iran has chosen to support the regime when it came to Syria (Sinkaya, 2011 p.39-40).

The demonstrations in Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria were financed by the US and various civil society organizations in these countries were supported. Founded by Reagan administration to overthrow foreign governments, CIA's active

role here came to light (Chossudovsky, 2015). Arab Spring that stirred the social dynamics in the Middle East brought social justice, demands of the young people, uneven population distribution, unemployment, freedom, democratization, human rights and constitutional reforms to the people's agenda. Even though this situation is not a threatening problem for the Gulf monarchies, increasing social and political demands have become a potential threat (Akengin & Gürçay, 2014 p.38).

Syrian Civil War and Its Effects

Today, there is a major change in global power structures that emerged during the last century. As a result of globalization, the national and international social, economic/financial and political power flows have picked up speed ideologically (Boening, 2014 p.1). With the end of Cold War era, declaration of Islam as the new enemy by the Western world pointed the way to border changes in the Middle East and mass deaths. These mass deaths are likely to happen not like in Iraq but sometimes through "Preemptive Strike Doctrine" that was announced and legalized by the US and sometimes through terrorism. In this context, Islam is the dominant religion of the Middle East that has rich energy resources. Just like Huntington mentioned in his "Clash of Civilizations", it is also seen as an "increasing power" with its growing population that the imperialistic powers need to fight. The Middle east is the most important region to establish the new world order because Jerusalem, the sacred place for all three religions, is considered the center of the Middle east, it is the center of energy resources and because Islam, the new global enemy, dominates these lands (Azer, 2007 p.79). Controlling the Middle Eastern geopolitics became vital for the US to restrain China in the new anti-Chinese military structuring the US has been trying to establish in the Pacific and to control the oil prices (SAM, 2015 p.4).

Changes in energy demands of countries like China and India and structural changes like the Arab Spring happening in the Middle East where the oil reserves are high led to redefinition of energy geopolitics (Sevim, 2012 p.23). What is important for China is to develop pragmatic relations towards economic cooperation with the regimes in the region whatever their nature is (Oğuzlu, 2011 p.75). It is not correct to see oil as the sole cause of conflicts in the Middle East. However, oil has a characteristic that increases the effect of events. The ethnic problems in the region has gained significant momentum in the power struggle towards the control of hydrocarbons (Bilgin, 2005 p.87-88). The historical roads (Silk Road, Spice Road, Pilgrimage roads, military and other caravan roads) going through Syria, the settlements founded and developed along these roads to control, trade and service, storage cities that were founded where these roads met the Mediterranean made these areas conflicts of interests. In terms of strategic events and geopolitical location, Syria has an important place among the Middle Eastern countries. The geopolitical location of Syria makes the country a gateway to the Mediterranean for the Middle Eastern countries. With Turkey to the north and Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich Arab countries to the south, Syria is a transitional region extending in east-west and north-south directions (Özgür, 2001 p.13).

The most important reasons behind the people's movements in Syria in March of 2011 were uneven distribution of income, unemployment, low economic prosperity, poverty and democratic demands (Yılmaz, 2011 p.19). The oppositional movements in Syria have turned into a civil war in which ethnic-sectarian conflicts became more important. Instability in Iraq and Syria, use of violence and political exclusion have created a new war zone for groups with radical beliefs and have led masses that succumbed to desperation to join these groups and sympathize with them (ORSAM, 2014 p.7). Starting after the demonstrations, the civil war in Syria led the US to seriously question American policies. The biggest expectation of opposition from the US was military and logistic support. However, Obama administration instead preferred to provide non-lethal logistic support and intelligence information to the opposition in the field (ORSAM, 2014 p.10). Syria is one of the rare Middle Eastern countries that the Soviet Union had establish influence over. It can be argued that Russia who does not find the demonstrations in Syria threatening enough for international security may consider Western interventions as having imperialistic goals. Furthermore, Russia has been avoiding the risks that may come from government change in Syria (Yılmaz, 2011 p.21). The US falling into a difficult situation in the region will open the way for China and Russia to influence the region through the new governments that may be formed at the end of the process (Akkuş, 2012 p.228). For this reason, Russia and China opposed any kind of sanctions to be taken and interventions made and thus used their veto power during the session about Syria. The Western powers' open support for the opposition and regime protecting strategies of Russia and China turned Syria into a place where international power struggles take place (Orhan, 2013 p.26).

Iran was pleased with the increased Shiite influence in the region as a result of people's movement. At the same time, Iran supported the Shiite movements in countries like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Bahrain and Libya. During the Syrian civil war continuing since 2011, the Assad regime got the support of countries like Russia, China and Iran and organizations like Hezbollah. The Arab people's movements lifted the implementation of Turkey's "zero problems" policy with its neighbors. Turkey and Iran, important powers in the region, began to create more effective policies. To a large extent,

the Syrian civil war adversely affected Turkish-Iranian relations. While convergence between Iran and Russia was materialized more effectively, surprising developments that emerged with also the influence of Turkey (military exercise of 26 Islamic countries in Saudi Arabia, opening of Incirlik Base in Turkey to Saudi Arabia, a potential military operation to Syria by Saudi Arabia and Turkey, Russia getting adversely affected by its economic embargo on Turkey) showed the accuracy of Turkey's policies regarding the Middle East and the necessity of the region's countries deciding their own faiths.

The Arab Spring has harmed Turkey's Middle Eastern policies aiming economic, politic and social integration on the basis of mutual interdependence. The developments outside the country increased the concerns about negatively affecting the transformation process within the country. This led Turkey towards a more security-oriented stand. There is a geopolitical competition between Turkey and France who want to lead in the region (Oğuzlu, 2012 p.25). Turkey's efforts to be a regional economic and political power caused a strategical competition between Turkey and the EU, especially Turkey and France. Turkey entering into bilateral economic relations with the region's countries hampered the coordination of Turkey's foreign policies with the EU. The difference in handling the Libyan crisis in 2011 between Turkey and the EU is a clear example to this. Economic success of Turkey, who is a soft power in the region but has a more effective position, made the region's countries to see Turkey as a center of attraction (Noi, 2012 p.18).

The global and regional powers' fight in Syria using anti-regime opposition and terror organizations led to the development of DAESH, which made operations in Syria after setting up a base in Iraq and later gained political and military control of the Sunni regions in Iraq. This structure opened up new windows of opportunity for other structures seriously threatening global and regional order and international norms. DAESH eliminating Iraq's territorial integrity created a regional security threat. Systematic crimes of humanity committed by DAESH like terrorist attacks, forced migration hostage taking, rape and mass murder necessitated Western and regional countries led by the US to take measures (Bingöl & Varlık, 2014 p.3). Instead of directly fighting the organization in the country, the Assad regime chose to advance on Free Syrian Army and this consolidated the field success of organizations in Syria. With prolonged civil war, both the number of foreign fighters coming to the country increased and local participation to the radical organizations increased with the moderate opposition making headway. DAESH's permanent role in the field strengthened when the moderate opposition in Syria was not supported and sanctions were not applied to the massacres committed by the Assad regime. Founded in Iraq, DAESH gained their major achievements in Syria (ORSAM, 2014 p.11).

Turkey and Saudi Arabia has developed a cooperation against Iran's expansionism during the fight against the situation that Iran sees as Sunni extremism in Syria. After King Salman coming to the throne in January 2015 and the new movement coming with him to the country, Turkey's support to Saudi Arabia has increased. Starting with Turkey and Saudi Arabia supporting the opposition forces in Syria, the tension between Russia and Turkey has escalated with Turkey shooting down a Russian fighter jet (Aras & Yorulmazlar, 2016 p.3). Iran's Syrian policy posed a threat to the security of Turkey in the region. Sectarian conflicts between Sunnis and Shiites that escalated during the Iran-Arab conflicts have weakened the security and stability of the region in addition to shaking the region's foundation. During this process, Iran has used the sectarian card successfully in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen. Iran's Shia-based acts in the region, i.e. its harassment towards Iraq, Syria, Yemen and other countries are worrying the Gulf countries (Aras & Yorulmazlar, 2016 p.4).

Syrian Policies of Some World Countries

United States of America (The Us)

Their own fossil energy resources and closeness to the oil reserves in South America provide a great advantage to the US, who produced petroleum for the first time in the world on an industrial scale, in terms of energy security demand and decrease their dependency to the fossil energy resources of the politically instable Middle East. In addition, other than fossil energy resources, the US has a rich potential in terms of wind, solar and geothermal energy resources (Sevim, 2012 p.54). For US to save its economy and to maintain its world leadership after the Cold War, the US had to control oil that is very important in the international markets and their domestic market. On the other hand, the US has been slowing the economic growth of their competitors by creating tension in the international arena, trying to militarily achieve what they could not achieve with economic mechanism and to monopolize oil by taking their competitors out of regional markets and to create market for their own products (İzzeti, 2006 p.175). After the World War II, the US took close interest in the Middle East which encompasses the Arab geography. US Middle East policies are mostly about energy, control of the region and security of Israel. However, they are also about the uninterrupted, safe and inexpensive flow of the Middle East oil to the international markets and about preventing an enemy of the West controlling the Middle East. For this reason, the US made the effort to prevent anti-American countries like Iraq

and Iran to become powerful and threatening. To protect their interests, the US entered into alliances with authoritarian ruling elites of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and other countries in the region. In this respect, they helped the armies of the region's countries to protect the status quo in the region. Maintaining the status quo was also preferred to control Islamic extremism and radical nationalism (Telatar, 2012 p.56).

Even though energy is the main reason why the Middle East is important for the US, it is not as dependent as to Middle East oil like other global players like the EU and China. The US the 25 % of the world's oil by itself. However, it procures more than half of its oil needs (567 million tonnes, 62 %) with its own resources and the other rest (347 million tonnes 38 %) mostly from Canada, Mexico, Venezuela and Nigeria (E I A, 2016). The real objective of the US is not to own the energy resources of the Middle East but to control the energy resources and energy transmission lines that the rival powers need (Davutoğlu, 2002 p.334) and thus to control the region as a tool of world domination. The Middle East has always been important for the US since it considers making the EU dependent on oil and controlling oil the only way to control Europe that is nearly comparable to the US in terms of economy and population (Göngen, 2014 p.3-4). The US does not want the oil resources of the Arabian Peninsula to fall into the hands of any other regional power. Since the time when the US started to be influential over the region, the US strategically preferred the Saudi royal family and other sheikhdoms relatively in alliance with the US to control the oil of the Arabian Peninsula (Sevim, 2012 p.55).

The protests in Tunisia did not arouse the attention of the US who was not expecting the developments but became concerned when the events spread to Egypt. With the start of demonstrations in Egypt who had good relations with Israel, the US did not hurry to take a stance by the demonstrators and wanted the Mubarak administration to make democratic reforms. As a result of the increased violence between the demonstrators and the security forces, it is understood that Mubarak could not remain in office. When administration change became irrevocable, the US preferred to give the impression that they were by the people. However, Obama avoided direct intervention in Mubarek's stepping down from office (Telatar, 2012 p.62-63). While the US followed an aggressive policy towards the Middle East within the framework of "War with Terror" concept during the Bush administration, during the Obama administration, on the other hand, the US disapproved military intervention during the Arab people's movements and followed a more cautious policy (Göngen, 2014 p.2). Serious conflicts in Syria might have led to results similar to Iraq and regional instability (Oğuzlu, 2011 p.71). Its failure in the region with Iraq, decrease in its energy dependency to outside, problems in economy, the need to decrease defense spending, the need to spend more time and political, military and economic resources for Asia are the reasons why the US acted more cautiously in Syria. However, the Arab people's movements forcing the US to difficult choices and dilemmas and their increase risk of being targets for terror because of their involvement in the region led to important changes in America's approach to the region. US wants to focus on Asia but cannot do this because of crisis and problems in the region. Also, to what extent countries like India and China want to be active in the region, whether they will do this in coordination with the US or against US and whether they will take responsibility in contributing to the region's security or not will become important (Koç, 2014).

To realize and protect its regional hegemony in the Middle East, the US wants to continue the asymmetric alliance system in the region and to continue their relationships with the other Arab countries in the region and Turkey. Because of its interests in the region, the US prefers weak allies to strong allies (Dostal, 2016 p.214). The Obama administration's thoughts on regime change and Assad's stepping down have changed in time. A regime change in Syria may lead to country's collapse, increase in terrorist groups and increase in separated areas just like in Iraq and Lebanon. The blending of the armed opposition groups in Syria with Nusra warriors further complicates the diplomatic efforts to end the war (Parasiliti et al., 2017 p.3). When the regional reconciliation did not happen and the violence increased, the US has increased its cooperation with Russia in order to find a solution to the Syrian conflict especially since the fall of 2015. The siege of Aleppo by the Russian and Iranian supported Syrian forces led to the end of US-Russian military and security cooperation. Although President Obama saw Iran, Russia, and Syria as responsible from the savagery in Aleppo, he continued his work to ease the humanitarian aid in Russia and United Nations and to move negotiations to a political level (Parasiliti et al., 2017 p.4). Since the American and Israel interests are on the market, solutions dictated by the US and Israel will come to the fore instead of solutions to the problems in North Syria (Bekin, 2016).

Russia

Producing new policies to again become a rising power in Eurasia, Russia has been increasing its role in the global energy equilibrium. Russia ranks second in the world after the US in terms of natural gas reserves. Iran follows the US and Russia (Enerdata, 2015). These countries will have the power to create natural gas monopoly in the world by acting together. However, Russia has been trying to strengthen its relations with Algeria who is a natural gas resource feeding Europe (Elsen, 2008 p.58). Being one of the most important players in producing policies regarding energy made Russia the world's most effective player in energy after the USSR's fall and led Russia to use the energy resources they own as

the most important political and economic power. In the 21st century, Russia used energy in international relations but did not leave its military power out (Bochkarev, 2006 p.1). The Syrian regime had tensions with the US and Israel and tried to survive by taking the support of China and Russia to eliminate these tensions. With the Syrian civil war, China and Russia have been trying to get their share from the region by using their influence (Ekin, 2012 p.88). In global-scale strategies, there should be four main elements like objective, location, time and implementation. Even if the objective and location are known, the element of time creates a conflict between the two. Since according to Russians the best time to implement their geopolitical, military or ideological strategies are the times of crisis, Russians generally choose the crisis periods of the region. In contrast, the West always needed stability and security to implement their strategies. Three regions have particular importance in terms of change in world's geopolitical structure: the Balkans for the unity of Europe, the Middle East for the unity of Asia and North Africa for the unity of Africa (İzzeti, 2006 p.71). Starting with the cooperation treaties between Russia and Syria in 1956, Russia became Syria's greatest ally in politics and military. At the same time, Syria is a market for Russia to export guns. In addition, there has been a Russian naval facility at the Syrian port of Tartus since 1971 (Göçer & Çınar, 2015 p.56-57). Tartus has a strategic importance in Russia's quest to expand toward warm waters. Russia used all its resources to support Syria in order to reach warm waters and become a more effective military and economic power in the Mediterranean. Their only military base in the region being in Syria, their investments in South Cyprus, significant natural gas and oil reserves off the island of Cyprus (Akkuş, 2012 p.229), reaching the Mediterranean safely through Syria and wanting to be an important player in the Middle East are among the main reasons why Russia supports Syria. In addition to these, Russia wants to stop Turkey's rising power in the region and to increase its regional power by eliminating Turkey.

The ongoing conflicts in the region provide opportunities for Russia to get involved in the UN's Security Council as an important international player. The decrease in oil prices caused severe economic constriction in Russia. Russia is trying to make up for this negative impact by selling guns in large quantities. Being already in a serious tension with the West because of the Ukrainian crisis, Russia wants to hold the events in Syria and Iran as bargaining chips. Russia wants to get closer to Egypt who has been having issues with the West because of Iran, Syria and Hezbollah and uses every opportunity to undermine the US. Russia's military and political support to Syria and Iran is an example of this (SAM, 2015 p.5).

Russia's position in the Middle East has changes significantly in recent years. In the context of Syrian conflict, Russia has become the most important super power in the region. Putin took risks in the region and invested in significant resources in the region (Amidror, 2016). The Russian air assaults carried out against the DAESH sites in Syria on 30 September 2015 were the beginning of Russia's active participation in the Syrian conflict. On 14 March 2016, Russia partially withdrew its military forces in Syria but continues its military operations. Russia has been actively involved both politically and militarily in the Syrian conflict (Cepurities, 2016 p.129). With its resources and opportunities in the Middle East, Russia has the power to be more effective in the region than Iran. Being a permanent member of the UN Security Council increases Russia's power over the region. The opening created by the US in Syria is being filled by Russia (Akgün, 2016).

European Union (The EU)

The EU's energy need has been gradually increasing since they are great energy consumers and their members are increasing. The most important way to meet the EU's energy needs is to transport the oil and natural gas resources to the region through pipe lines. Meeting most of their energy needs from Russia, the Middle East is also an important supplier of energy resources for the EU. To decrease their dependency to Russia and Norway, the EU started to implement new oil policies in recent years and thus the importance of the Middle East oil increased. The EU has been aiming to guarantee oil supply security through the new alliances they will establish in the Middle East. Compared to other oil production regions, the Middle Eastern countries have a greater capacity and has cost advantage. With their increased energy consumption due to industrial and technological developments, the EU countries want to be active in the Middle East as much as the US (Sevim, 2012 p.172). The EU countries do not seem to be in compliance with each other regarding their Middle East policies. Other than Britain, the EU countries generally want to get out of US's orbit and to follow policies that undermines US's dominance in the Middle East. However, The EU has followed policies in common with the US when their interests united and against the US when their interests conflicted. After energy resources were found in the Eastern Mediterranean and acceptance of the South Cyprus into the EU, their active role to take role in the Arab Spring in recent years is because of their want to have a say in the energy resources and transportation routes in Eastern Mediterranean and to increase their share in the cake (Ekin, 2012 p.92-93). While Germany, an EU member, tried to get out of the crisis with the least damage in line with its own interests, France actively took sides in the regional developments to have a say in the new design of the Middle East. France's attempts to take active role in the region and their attempts to implement the policies they wanted in Tunisia and Algeria did not

yield the results they wanted. Therefore, France was at the forefront in the Libyan intervention. Becoming an active player in the global platforms and competing with the other global players are difficult for the EU who did not and could not take active role in the developments in the region (Akkuş, 2012 p.228).

The EU targets the security interests regarding the region; it defines the countries from the East Mediterranean and North Africa as threats in terms of security, especially in terms of migration. This necessitates cooperation with the current regimes. The region became more valuable for the EU because it is very close to Europe, regional developments affect the developments in the EU very closely, and Eastern Mediterranean and Northern Africa are the ideal places to achieve EU's objectives of being an active political actor. An EU that cannot follow and shape the developments in the region and that cannot materialize transformations concurrent with their own values will lose its power to compete with the global powers (Oğuzlu, 2011 p.74).

Iran

Geopolitical structure, Western countries intervening in Iran's interior affairs, Iran's heterogeneous ethnic structure, Shiite Islamic understanding and embargos implemented by the West have all affected deeply Iran's foreign policy (Efegil, 2012 p.53). Syria's strategic partnership with Iran internationally isolates Syria but also increases the importance of Syria's regional location. Syria's relations with Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine establishes a sensitive balance in the region. The events that took place in Syria affected the countries at the regional and global level. In the people's movements and civil war following them, Russia, China and Iran continued their support for the Syrian regime (Şen, 2013 p.72).

In case of Assad regime's fall, not only Iran would have lost its biggest ally in the region but would have also lost its connection point with the Hezbollah that is critical in its foreign policy and defense strategy. For this reason, Iran unconditionally supported the Syrian regime unlike the other countries where Arab people's movements were effective (Sinkaya, 2011 p.44). Pursuing its national interests, Iran uses Shiism as a tool for this. Iran expresses the conflicts in the Middle East as a sectarian problem and emphasizes that the Shiite population in the region is under their control and for this reason Iran should be paid attention to (SAM, 2015 p.6-7).

During the Syrian civil war, Iran continued its determination to defend the Syrian government and its survival. Since 2011, Iran has strengthened its ties with Iraq, Lebanon and Syria through Hezbollah. With Iran's acceptance of restriction on its nuclear program, US sanctions on Iran have eased (Parasiliti et al., 2017 p.3). Even though Iran continues to play an active role in Syria, its power has been balanced due to the policies followed by Russia and Turkey (Akgün, 2016).

China

The US wants to China to have a say in the restructuring of the Middle East but the US relocating its military power from the Middle East to Asia-Pacific creates distrust China towards the US. China does not want the unrest in the Middle East to grow since the growth of turmoil in the region will damage the oil China gets from the region. Russia's support of Syria, and Iran giving guarantee to China about energy caused China to stand against the US and act together with Russia about Syria (Akkuş, 2012 p.229). China, another global power, is not directly interested in any development that does not affect the international stability enough to touch him. The closing of the Persian Gulf, prevention of free transportation of the region's resources or noticeable drop in the region's oil levels will be cases when China will get involved (SAM, 2015 p.6).

Turkey

The changes and problems encountered in the region after 2001 forced Turkey to develop solutions for the regional issues and to develop strategies in order to decrease risks with peace-loving policies. After 2002, Turkey developed the zero problems policy with her neighbors and preferred relations based on economic, cultural and cooperation dynamics. In this context, Turkey shows its influence as a soft power of the Middle East. Thus, bilateral relations were developed with the neighboring countries and Turkey played a mediator role during the Lebanon crisis, Iran nuclear crisis, problems between Syria and Saudi Arabia and government crisis in Iraq. Therefore, Turkey implemented its policies of spreading their influence area as a power center in the region (Sağsen, 2011 p.601-61). Since March 2011, Turkey's policy towards Syria has been in four stages. In the first stage, Turkey tried to convince Assad to implement the reforms the people wanted and supported Assad's attempts for reform. In the second stage, it cut off the ties with Syria when Assad began to oppress the civil population. Trying to get regional support and develop international political solutions, Turkey politically supported the opposition fighting against Assad. When Assad increased violence against his people and the deaths and displaced people increased, Turkey wanted a no-fly humanitarian corridor. Turkey wanted

to get the international support for this zone instead of acting alone. Assad's use of chemical weapons created a big fear among the civilians. Economic concerns were added on top of problems related to Turkey's territorial integrity. In addition, the risk of crisis being spread to the key market to the north of Iraq came into question. In 2012 Turkey offered to hold talks with Russia, Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia to solve the Syrian crisis, to stabilize Syria and to prevent the fall of the country (Phillips, 2012 p.1).

The risks and uncertainties surrounding the safe environment of the Middle East causes important problems for Turkey, too. The situation in Syria directly creates a security problem for Turkey. The war at its border and the refugees coming to Turkey are examples to this. While the current conflict deepens, the idea of Syria being divided between religious and ethnic groups comes to the fore (Kardaş, 2013 p.76). While Syria was Turkey's seventh biggest market, in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011, Syrian-Turkish trade stopped in 2012. Syrian civil war led to big losses in the region in terms of economy. The Arab people's movements in 2011 completely ruined the conditions in the region and tipped the balances (Phillips, 2012 p.5). Syrian troops opened fire to Turkey and killed two Turkish civilians in April. They also shot down a Turkish jet and killed its two pilots in June. In October, Turkey responded with fire to repel the Assad forces on the border who opened fire to Akçakale. NATO was reluctant to intervene in Syria (Phillips, 2012 p.8).

Turkey has intensified its cooperation with Saudi Arabia in order to establish a Islamic unity in the region against Russia and Iran. To save the Assad regime, Russia made Turkish and Saud-backed opposition groups its first target at the end of September 2015 (Özel, 2016 p.4). Following the plane crisis on November 24, 2015 between Turkey and Russia, which supported different sides in Syria, Turkey's took the first step to soften relations with Russia on June 27, 2016, and relations have improved with Russia.

With the renormalization of Russian-Turkish relations, Turkey began to realize a new strategy in the Middle East that would reshape Syria, Operation Euphrates Shield. Making efforts to normalize relations with Russia and Israel, with the Operation Euphrates Shield, Turkey has entered a period of active politics in Syria. Wanting to develop good relations with its neighbors, Turkey is also thinking of normalizing relations with Iran and Egypt. Turkey's new Syrian policy is on settling the Syrian problem as soon as possible. For this purpose, it is important to protect Syria's territorial integrity and prevent its separation on ethic basis. With the Operation Euphrates Shield, Turkey has made an intervention against the DAESH and has widened its movement area to prevent the crossing of PYD and thus PKK that are seen as threats to the integrity of Turkey (Akgün, 2016). Turkey's advancement in Al Bab and the possibility of a Turkish victory over DAESH have worried both the US and the US-supported YPG/PKK terror organizations. Turkey has intensified its negotiations with Russia in order to renew the ceasefire in Syria and realize peace talks (Humud et al., 2017 p.10). In order to end the war in Syria and to ensure peace, with Iran's leadership, Turkey and Russia held peace talks in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, on January 23-24, 2017. The Second Astana Talks were held on February 15-16, 2017, and opposition and regime delegations participated to the meeting. The Third Astana talks for peace in Syria started on March 14, 2017. Cooperation between these countries is considered important in ensuring peace in Syria.

Since the beginning of the Operation Euphrates Shield, the relations between Turkey, Russia and the US have been parallel. When regional balances and field conditions were taken into consideration, the US does not want Turkey to move towards Rakka after Al Bab. For 2.5 years, the US have identified PYD and YPG as key partners in Syria. Despite all instances of Turkey, the US has not stopped cooperating with YPG. The Obama administration's partnership with YPG will likely to continue during the Trump administration. Al Bab is a critical place to prevent DAESH threat. In this critical place, Turkey has defeated the DAESH threat but since PKK's terrorist threat in Turkey has continued, Turkey's perception of threat in northern Syria did not diminish (Erkmen, 2017). Operation Euphrates Shield has been successful in Syria. With this operation, Turkey has deeply affected the balances in the region. Turkey has had an impressive role on the policies of the US and Russia in the region, and has become an important force the region. Turkey is a state in which important tasks can be undertaken in the reconstruction of peace and security in Syria. Russia and the US should absolutely cooperate with Turkey in their regional policies.

RESULT

Today, the Middle East has been the focus of a power struggle over energy. The regions where energy is produced and the energy lines go force world countries to produce new policies. The real issues in the developments occurring in the Middle East are territory control, procuring energy resources and having a say in energy routes. Plans to establish new countries based on sectarian differences are trying to put into effect in the region. The goal is to be the dominant power over the energy resources and energy routes.

Restoration of stability in Syria can only be possible neighboring states become parties to the process. If Syria is divided, post-war stabilization will not be possible. Syria's relatively strong national identity and its central authority experience are strengthening hopes for a unified country (Parasiliti et al., 2017 p.7-8).

The fight over who will present the natural resources to world markets led to large-scale interest conflict in Syria. With this civil war, the region started to experience new big changes and transformations. The biggest reason of migrations in Syria is to change the demographic structure in the north of the country. By changing this structure, Syrian lands will also be dismantled just like Iraq. Created for this purpose, DAESH is the biggest reason why the Western powers, Russia and Iran has been intervening in the events occurring in the region.

In line with its national interests, Iran has been trying to achieve geopolitical gains in the region. Transportation of Iran's natural gas to the Mediterranean and west through Iraq and Syria will increase Iran's regional power and weaken the petro-dollar dominance in the global-scale energy markets. Since this will undermine US's global-scale economic and political power, the American administration is wary of Iran's policies towards the region. Syria's location is important for Russia since it can achieve its quest to reach warm waters. Russia is concerned about the drop in oil prices in recent years and treaties Turkey signed regarding energy transmission lines. Russia is planning to bypass Turkey with an energy line crossing through the north of Syria. To protect its dominance in the region, Russia is trying to prevent Turkey having an active role in energy transmission.

The US wants to protect its power and influence over the energy transmission and countries in the region. At the same time, American administration wants to continue the dollar hegemony in the world's energy markets and thus wants to create a balance between Russia, Iran and its own interests. With their energy resources, since Russia, Iran and the Turkic states will become the most important countries to provide energy in case of war, the West could not risk an uncertain regional war over Syria. The EU wants to protect the security of energy supply, to stand politically powerful against the US and Russia and to reduce its energy dependency on Russia. For these reasons, the EU is working on producing military and political solutions for the region.

Turkey is committed to the territorial integrity of the countries in the Middle East and follows an active policy in the Middle East as a soft power. The success of Turkey's regional policies and its firm stand on these policies has played an important role in the retreat of Russia and Iran from Syria.

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