



The Analysis of Israel – Turkey engagement on Syria and the US Foreign Policy of pulling out forces: Who controls what?

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Abstract

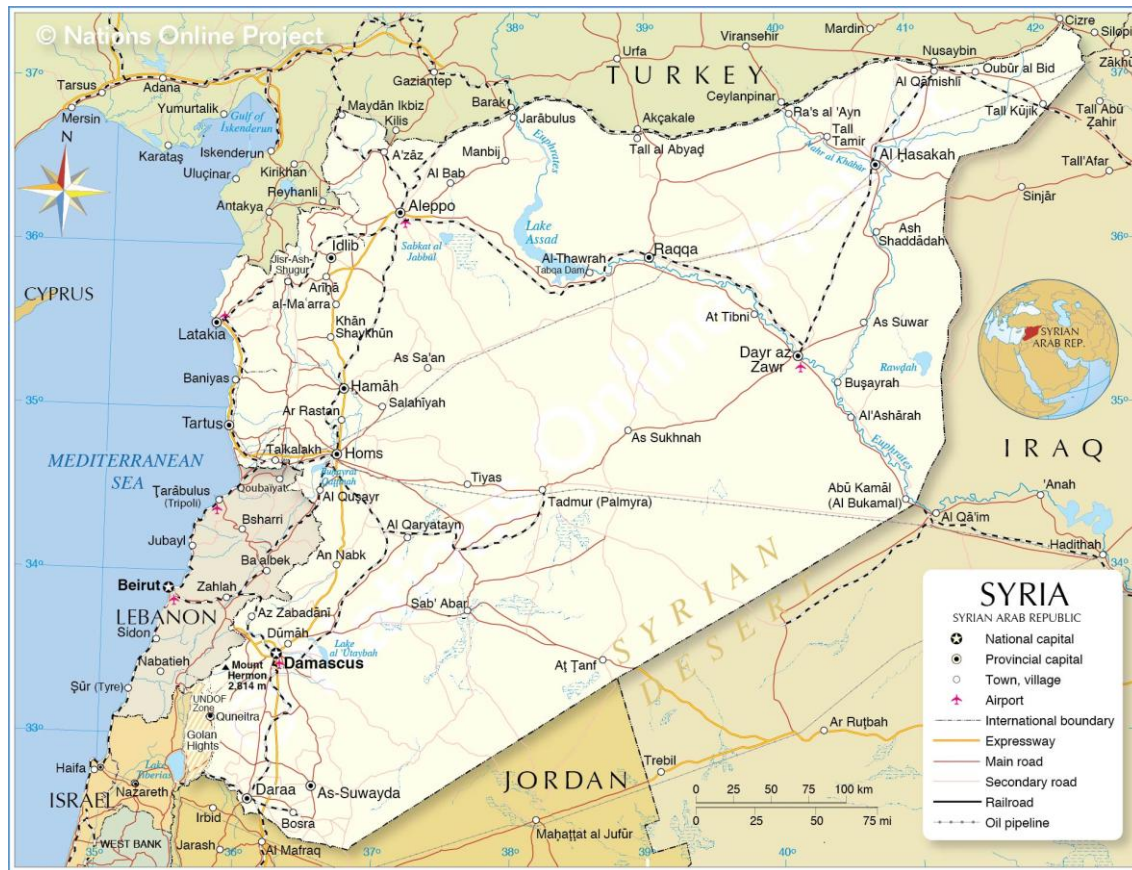
The issue of Syrian Civil war has tinted the International Relations issue at least from 2011 where a protest against President Assad's regime resulted to the large-scale war between the anti-government rebel group which get backed by the United States, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and their other supported ally in the region while the Syrian government has the back up from Russia and Iran. There are three campaigns that influence the full-scale of conflict; the effort against Islamic State, tension between the Syrian government and the opposition as well as related to Turkish forces military operations against Syrian Kurds. The US foreign policy to give sanctioned to Syrian government up to its decision of pulling out forces in President Donald Trump administration has contemplated the bloody drama in Syria. These phenomena are then created a new era of conflict between Israel and Turkey which some says, actually share the same strategy.

Keywords: Syrian Civil War, US Pulling Out Forces, Foreign Policy

Isu perang sipil Suriah telah mewarnai Hubungan Internasional setidaknya sejak 2011 ketika sebuah protes terhadap rezim Presiden Assad yang menghasilkan perang skala besar antara grup anti pemerintah yang di dukung oleh Ameika Serikat, Turki, Arab Saudi dan sekutu yang lainnya sementara pemerintah Suriah yang mendapat dukungan dari Rusia dan Iran. Ada tiga kampanye yang mempengaruhi konflik skala besar ini; usaha melahan pendirian negara Islam, ketegangan antara pemerintah Suriah dan oposisi serta operasi pasukan militer Turki melawan Kurdi Suriah. Kebijakan luar negeri Amerika Serikat dalam meberikan sanksi terhadap pemerintah Suriah hingga keputusannya untuk menarik keluar kekuatan pada era Presiden Donald Trump telah memberikan drama berdarah di Suriah. Fenomena-fenomena ini kemudian membentuk konflik era baru antara Israel dan Turki yang beberapa ahli mengatakan sebenarnya melakukan strategi yang sama.

1 Introduction

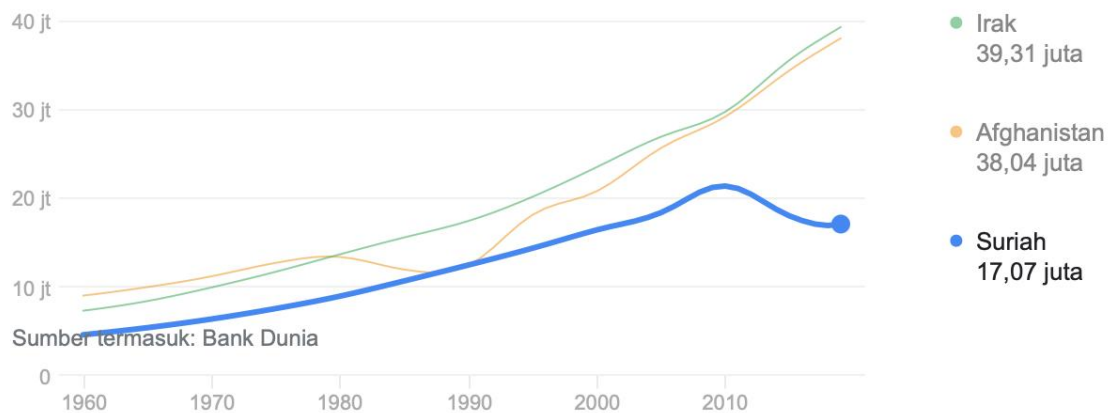
1.1 The Geopolitics and Population of Syria



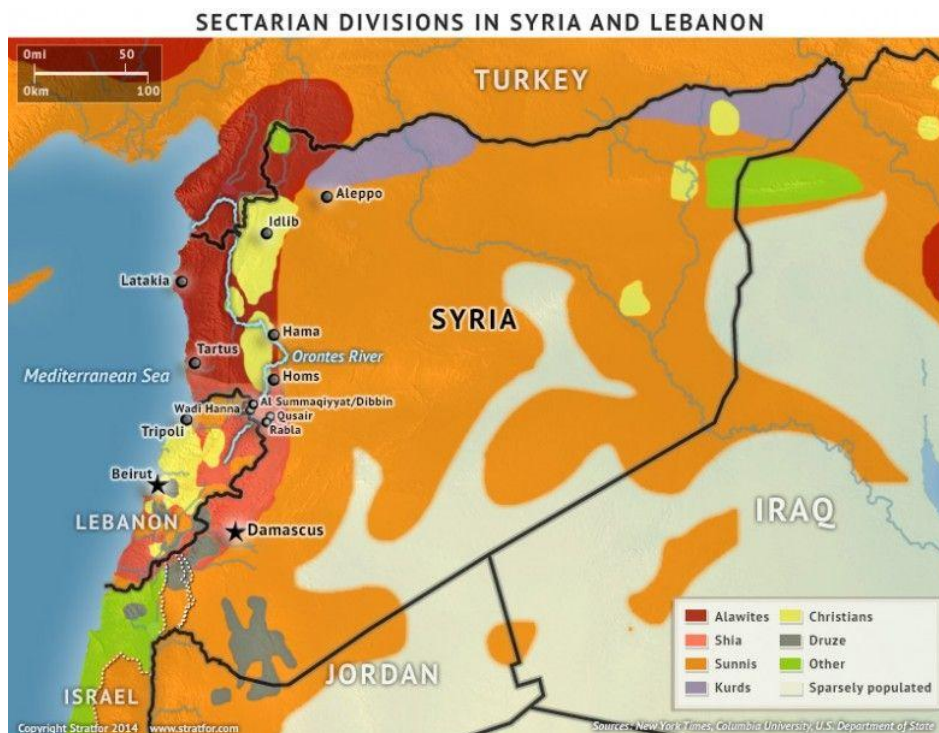
The above map shows the Syrian Arab Republic which is a country in the Middle East that bordered with Mediterranean Coastline which shares with Cyprus. It is also the neighbor of Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, and Lebanon. Syria covers an area of 185,180 km². The map shows important cities in Syria, including its capital and infrastructure (Nations Online, n.d).

Syria's challenge over its country geography is how to unite the diverse ethnic group under one domestic power, the mountainous terrain and the ethnics there are not in one particular border, it is contradicted with Syria as a state with its neighborhood (Goujon, 2015). Especially when we see that Syria is surrounded by a much stronger power that makes it hard to stand on its sovereignty.

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Data from the world bank shows that the current population of Syria is 17,07 million compared to Iraq that has 39,31 million and Afghanistan with 38,04 million. As shown, there is a decrease in 2010 above due to the Syrian Civil War. It has forced 2.7 million Syrians that seeking asylum outside of the country counted from 2011 to May 2014. Further, a new data according to UN High Commissioner on Refugees estimated the number will continuously rise to makes Syria's population be displace (Kinninmont, 2014).





Generally, the population of Syria is composed of Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Druze, Alawites, Shia, and Christians. The Alawite minority that has been the traditional core in Syria is located in the northern coastal plain until the west of the Jabal and Nussayrya mountains and to the north of the Anti-Lebanon mountains. The eastern part of Syria, the interior ones, is dominated by Sunni Arab peoples. Otherwise, the Syrian Desert is composed of two competing regions with a major local identity. It separated Damascus which is the historical capital as well as the modern seat of power for the Alawites and Aleppo that located in the agricultural heartlands of the Aleppo plateau. The Kurds situated in the top of the region mostly separated into two regions as colored in purple (Goujon, 2015).

1.2 The Ruling Government in Syria

The Syrian government, or officially, the Syrian Arab Republic is the ruling government of Syria. It leads by President Bashar Al-Assad which taken into power after succeeding his father in 2000. During his administration, he has struggled to face protests of the civilians against his rule. The repressive political structure and tight control of the government continuing the dictatorship of Hafez al-Assad has harmed the socio-political side of the country. Moreover, looking at the background of Assad's family is dominated by minority Alawite Shia community (BBC News, 2019). Something that cannot be denied, clash of socialisation is become the hardest part of this country to be united.

The clash in his government is rising due to the effect of the "Arab Spring" wave in 2011 massively spread over North Africa and the Middle East. This led to the Syrian Civil war, but the strong support from Iran and Russia to President Bashar al-Assad administration has influenced the government's favor from 2017 (BBC News, 2019). The media sees that the gesture of President Assad during this war is appeared to ensure how to respond. The president insisted that the calls for reform the government and give an economic grievance had been overshadowed by saboteurs who were part of an external conspiracy



that has a goal to destruct Syria's stability and unity. This response indirectly stated that the wave of protest is not fully influenced by the ruling government but emerge as the arranged agenda of an external actor that undermining Syria itself (BBC News, 2020).

1.3 The US Intervention

One month after the first protest in Syria, on 29 April 2011, the US imposes sanctions on several Syrian officials and continue to be extended to President Bashar al-Assad in May 2011. In August 2011, US President Barrack Obama and its Western Allies marked as the first time for those countries to explicitly call for stand down to President Assad. It later makes the US decide to call its ambassador back for security reasons and at the same time, the Syrian government also recalls its ambassador from Washington. Two years after in 2013, Washington accused the Syrian government to launch a chemical attack in Damascus that killed more than 1,400 people. In response to that, Obama did approach Russia that backing up the Assad regime to dismantle Syria's chemical weapons arsenal, even though in the very first place Obamas has promised to give a punitive strike over the Assad regime and infrastructure if their use such kind of attack.

The next year in 2014, the US and its Arab allies targeted a newly emerged separatist group in Syria called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS) group with air raids. The group is using this momentum to expand its way in Syria as it is closely neighboring Iraq and possibly other countries affiliated with ISIL/ ISIS. During this event, the US contributed 2000 special forces soldiers that consider as the biggest contributor to the coalition. In October 2015, the US also backed up the Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-Syrian Arab alliance with more or less 50,000 fighters. The forces are dominated by Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia, and the US supports are including training and air such as air support, arms, and intelligence. With this support, the SDF has overruns ISIL and push the jihadis from their last based of Baghouz in 2019.



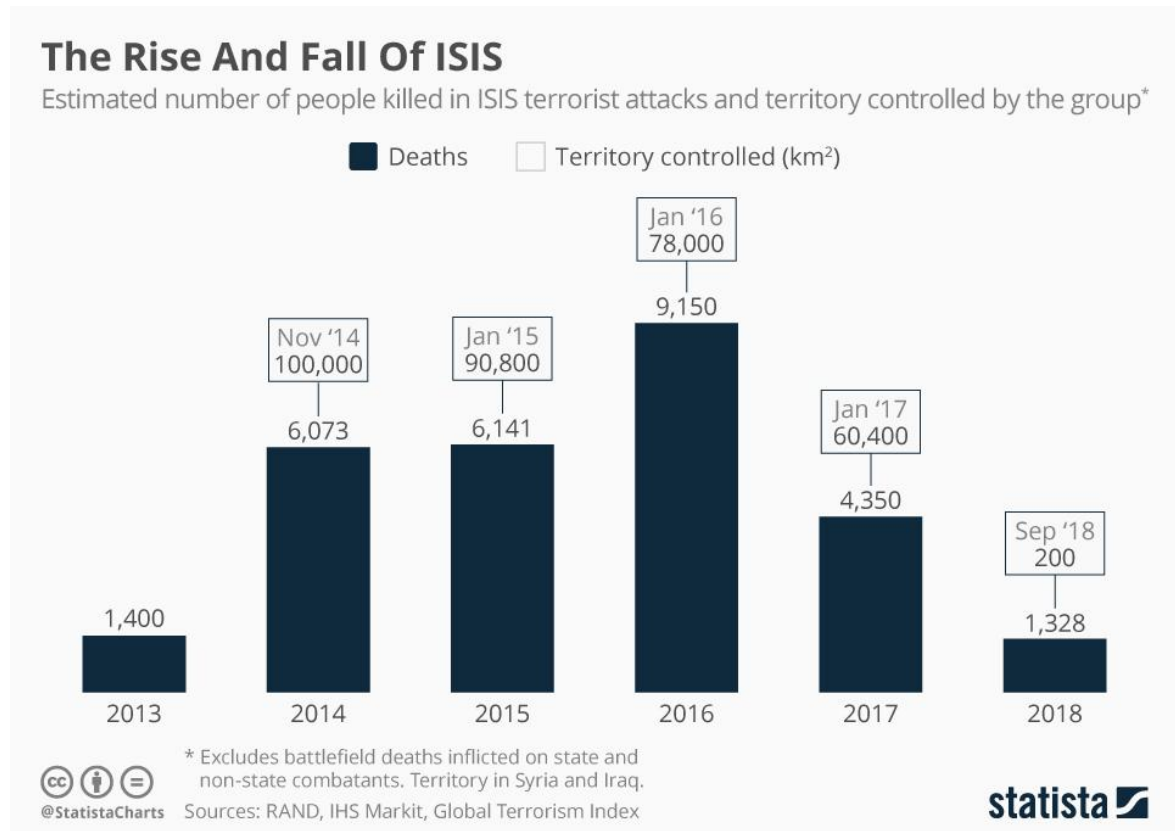
As changes in the US administration, President Donald Trump chooses to give an order to strikes President Assad's government 7 April 2017, US forces launch an attack to the barrage of cruise missiles at Syria's Sharyat airbase that the US considers as the place to be the launch site of a chemical attack in Idlib province which has killed 88 people. This action is the first direct attack launch by the US, especially in President Trump's administration since he taking into office at the beginning of 2017. The next year of 2018, another attack concludes by President Trump with France and the UK the same caused (Aljazeera & AFP, 2019).

2 Literature Review

2.1 US Foreign Policy of Pulling Our Forces – A right decision?

President Donald Trump, with his usual controversy, tweeted a declaration on Twitter on 19 December 2018 to called for a withdrawal of US forces from the Syrian Civil War: "We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there." At the beginning of his administration even started from his campaign, Trump is clear to promise to bring American forces back home from the prolonged entanglement in the Middle East. Even though this decision has impacted the resignation of General James Mattis, the US Secretary of Defense in that period. On the other side, some observers have also seen this decision positively. Looking at the context to withdraw all 2000 US troops from Syria is something that must be remembered. The civil war has resulted in hundreds of thousands of civilians died, even though not all this number is the cause of the US – Syrian impact. Looking at the economic side, the cost of the war project has given an economic loss to the US. Totaling the cost after 9/11 that led to the US war against terrorists in Iraq and Afghanistan adding with the related violence in Pakistan and Syria has reached USD 5.9 trillion. The victim of war, the US has lost 6.950 of its soldier and a total of 1.465 of its allied soldiers. The pulling out forces in Syria, or even in Afghanistan marks that President Trump is stick to his electoral mandate in avoiding perpetual war

(Zambakari, 2019). If the main reason of President Trump to pulling out forces from Syria is because the degradation of ISIS influence, then this US foreign policy could be considered as a right decision.

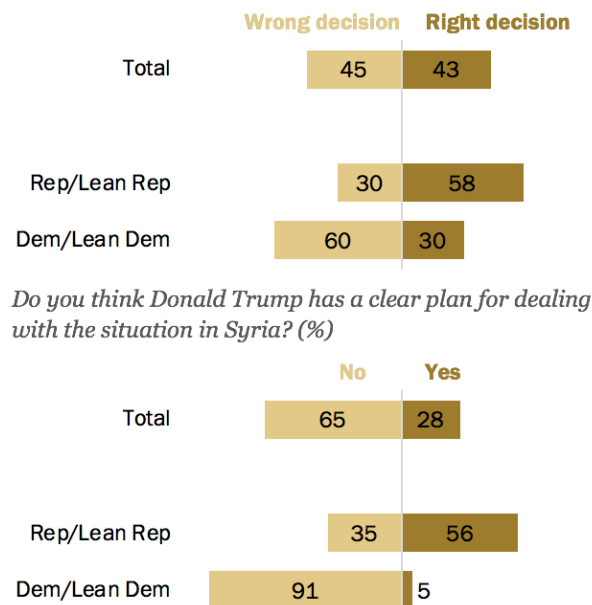


The above shows the data that ISIS influence – considering the estimated number of people killed in ISIS terrorist attacks and territory controlled by the group – has gradually decrease and the data of 2018 can become the consideration of President Trump toward that policy.

However, the foreign policy will still be going back to the national interest and the decision-making process of the actor who rules the regime. The public itself is also divided to see it as a wrong decision and the right decision.

U.S. public split over withdrawing troops from Syria, doubt Trump has clear plan

% who say withdrawing U.S. troops from Syria would be the ...



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 9-14, 2019.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

According to Pew Research Centre in their publication of American divided over the decision to withdraw from Syria. Overall, there are 45% say that withdrawing American troops from Syria is the wrong decision while the other 43% say that it would be the right decision. The new research surveyed 1,505 US adults conducting before the bombing in Syria on 16 January 2019 containing several American service members and civilians. Almost six-in-ten percent (58%) of Republicans and GOP-leaning independents think that it would be the right decision while 30% say it was a

wrong decision. More on this data could be reviewed online (Dunn & Jones, 2019).

President Trump's decision to pulling out forces from Syria might be the best policy of the time, however considering the spread of this jihadist group all over the world, there is a chance of ISIS influence to be increase years ahead. There is a consequence to the President Trump administration and the next of it to the same effort maintaining themselves from ISIS threat or even exceed to what they have been doing for a long period in the Middle East.

3 Research Method

This journal will be using an explanatory research method which intended to explain, rather than simply describe the phenomena being studied. Therefore, the explanatory



research plays an instrumental role in terms of identifying reasons in a wide range of processes as well as in assessing the impacts of changes in norms existed, process and etc. The journal would also be assessed through the qualitative method by adopting data from primary and secondary resources. The primary resources including government's official documents and publication retrieved through online. This method also consists of gathering statements from official governments such as president, ministers, high ranking military, etc. The primary resources also refer to the official documents, article and publications gathered directly from the site of related institutions while the secondary resources refer to the journal, independent media and scholar's publication: papers, reports, books and etc.

4 Result and Discussion

4.1 Turkey - Israel Engagement in Syria

4.1.1 Turkey Engagement

Through their official publication, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that *"Turkey has been facing serious political, security and humanitarian challenges and responsibilities caused by the conflict". Since the outset, the basic parameters of Turkey's policy with regard to the developments in Syria have been the preservation of the territorial integrity and unity of Syria, ending the bloodshed and the peaceful conclusion of the political transition process that would address the legitimate demands of the Syrian people.*" At least Turkey, shows several points on how they face the conflict in Syria (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d);



4.1.1.1 Fighting against terrorism emanating from Syria.

As the direct bordered country with Syria, Turkey perceived that the regime that leads Syria is not capable to secure and defend the territorial sovereignty of the country. It has triggered regional instability and creates a new dimension of regional threat where increase ISIS/ISIL and other extremist group influence in the region. Turkey has stated that fighting against them is a national security priority for Turkey, moreover, Turkey is also an active member of the Global Coalition Against DEASH. There are three important counter-terrorism operations has taken by Turkey per the right to self-defense as outline in Article 51 of the UN Charter and UNSC resolution on counter-terrorism. This operation was operated in the Syrian territories neighboring its border based on international law;

- Operation Euphrates Shield, this operation was held on 24 August 2016 which resulted in the decrease and loosing of territorial control of DEASH in Syria by the end of March 2019.
- Operation Olive Branch, this operation was held on 20 January 2018 that has the purpose to ensure Turkey's border security, neutralize terrorists in Afrin and support the liberation of the local people towards the tyranny against terrorists.
- Operation Peace Spring (OPS) was launched in 9 October 2019. Following Turkey's perception against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/YPJ) and another Syrian opposition group that got support from the US. Turkey was holding a talk with the US to establish a safe zone in the Syrian territories bordered by them between February and September 2019. Turkey has also conveyed that there is a fallacy in combating the DEASH and stabilization process by involving another kind of "terrorist group", the Kurdish combatant. Turkey stated that the US is not committed to the



Turkish-US Joint Operations Center and as the inability of the US to support their legitimization on security concerns, Turkey has launched Operation Peace Spring without the involvement of the US. Following the visit of US President Mike Pence in Ankara on 17 October 2019 a Joint Statement has been made as marks US acceptance of the legitimacy of the OPS (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d).

4.1.1.2 Efforts to Find a Solution to the Conflict

Other than the hard approach to Syrian soil, the government of Turkey has also been involved in the international initiative for a peaceful solution. At least two political efforts are exerting by Turkey to gather international support on the ground.

- Geneva Process, the UNSC adopted the first resolution that envisaged the steps for the political process on 18 December 2015, follows by the UNSC Resolution No. 2254 regarding the gathering of opposition and regime representative in Geneva under UN assistance. Turkey claims their contribution to the diplomacy agenda by gathering the representative of the Syrian opposition and the Syrian Negotiation Commission for mediation in Geneva in January 2016. Even though it ends with the regime to refused the political transition and continue to make an intense attack.
- Astana Platform, this platform is considered as the international initiative that give a concrete contribution to ending the conflict in Syria of its role to who established the de-escalation areas, launch the Constitutional Committee as well as the adoption of confidence-building measures between Syrian parties (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d).

4.1.1.3 Turkey's Support on the Syrian Opposition



Turkey has clearly stated its partiality to the Syrian opposition and promised to take responsibility for the transition process according to the demands of the people. The meeting titled the Friend of the Syria Group was held in Marrakech in December 2012 to create the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces that was perceived as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. This national Coalition is taking bases in Istanbul. Turkey also emphasize that this engagement will not be taking any discrimination following to the variety of political, ethnic, religious or sectarian interest in the light of upholding the pluralism of democracy to create the existence of effective opposition (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d).

4.1.2 Israel Engagement

Compared to Turkey policy that has set a parameter to what extend they engage in the Syrian Civil War and how they conclude it as their threat perception, Israel seems to have a passive actor in shaping the Levant, looking at the partiality whether to the government or the Syrian opposition and the actions against ISIS/ISIL in the designated area. The critical security interest of Israel in Syria at least to block the influence of Iran and Russia and filtering the transfer of advance weapons to Hezbollah, prevent Syria to own a credible military which can threaten the security of Israel, to secure the Golan Heights from Syria and last but not least to prevent Sunni militant to establish a sort of infrastructure of military bases in Israel border.

Israel is only having little capacity to influence issues on the ground in Syria which is why as mentioned earlier they remain passive due to a few tools for pursuing its goals directly. Research by Rand Corporation by Larry Hanauer emphasize the five main objectives in this conflict situation;



- Objective 1: Contain Iran and Prevent Iranian Transfer of Weapons to Hezbollah. Several news and updates claim that Iran has developed nuclear weapons that will change the threat perception in the surrounding neighboring country including Israel that significantly perceived them as an existential threat. Once Iran able to operate freely in Syria, it will add another kind of pressure on Israel which can be considered as sort of good weaponry armament in the region.
- Objective 2: Minimize Russian Political and Military Influence. Another fear is that; besides Iran, Russia's involvement in Syria is something that cannot be ignored by the Israeli government. That involvement in supporting the Bashar al-Assad government might also give an idea to establish a permanent military presence in Syria. The objective is also expected that the possibility of Israel-Russia conflict on the ground (forces to forces) can be mitigated and also again, to minimize Russia's ability intention to give Iran a capability to save Assad regime.
- Objective 3: Promote a Weak Assad Regime. This is to give an image that the Assad regime is stuck in a weak position and the possibility to threaten Israel directly or indirectly to be negative. Israel sees that the Assad regime is the key activator to Iran's freedom of action. If Assad wins the game, it will make Iran do whatever they want in the region with impunity. However, as a boomerang factor, Israel also do not want to promote the ruling government into collapse since the separatist group who are busy with their specific intention inside the Syrian territory will later attack Israel.
- Objective 4: Delegitimize Syrian Claims to the Golan Heights. In order to preserve its claim on Golan Heights, Israeli Officials are staying in the Golan to shows Israel presence of expansion by building additional housing, investing in infrastructure, and promote the tourism sector.

- Objective 5: Constrain Sunni Militants but Not Necessarily ISIS. Based on the events that happen and the development of the civil war issue in Syria, the Israeli government does not perceive ISIS as a strategic threat to Israeli security. The only objective of Israel principal toward ISIS is to make sure that the West will not engage Iran in an effort to fight ISIS altogether (Hanauer, 2016).

4.2 Who controls the region?





Understanding and assessing the Syrian Civil war will need much ado with the parameters, actors, causes, histories, political and social of a region that controls by so many states and a non-state actor. The US to leave Syria still leaving a time bomb which has been started for a long time adds with uncertainty. The above is the summary that can give us at least a depiction of how actually happen in the region.

Turkey and Israel are the two states that are being highlighted as it has directly involved in the Syrian soil by occupying a certain part of the region. The North-western part is occupied by Turkey and the rebel forces and the South-western is occupied Israel especially in the claimed Golan Heights. The Syrian government forces occupied most of the part of the region following by Kurdish forces that were armored by the US. The other rebel forces spread in several areas which the bigger one is bordered with Iraq in the East. The ISIL presence shows its presence in four main areas in black (Aljazeera, 2019).

5. Conclusion

The US has made a statement of pulling out forces in their claim of defeated ISIS in Syria. Several aspects also influence the foreign policy; the victim of war to the cost that they spent to carry the war for years. As the two major power directly bordered Syria, Turkey and Israel perceived a different engagement in the region. Turkey has extended several supports from military engagement up to diplomacy engagement however its action against Kurds is also something that should be highlighted in the assessment. So do Israel's threat perception to the Assad government who can enable use by Iran or Russia to control the area which can add a sort of alarm for Israel. After US withdrawal, the conflict is continued to flare up and uncertainty already becomes part of the day-by-day assessment adding that there is external intervention that also involving in this complicated issue.



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