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BAŞKENT UNIVERSITY

**REPORT ON CRISIS IN SYRIA**

**WHERE SYRIA IS HEADING /  
POSSIBLE SCENARIOS**

Ercan ÇİTLİOĞLU  
Başkent University  
Center for Strategic Research





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*The views expressed in this analyses are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Baškent University Center for Strategic Research*

## **A. General Overview**

The Arab civil commotions known as the Arab Spring, Arab Awakening or the Arab Uprisings are often analyzed from three different perspectives. Putting a name to and understanding what has happened in Syria within the international arena leads to differences in defining the issues, hence the presence of these distinct perspectives that have been observed during the events. Along with the direct and indirect actors in the resulting Syrian crisis, many state actors are positioning themselves in different contradictory and conflicting position.

Of the previously mentioned perspectives, the first is that all of the movements against the regime in Syria have been caused by the internal dynamics like the experiences in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, where the people lived under oppressive regimes for many years. These were the source of inspiration for the Syrian public's demands for democratization. This viewpoint's fundamental weakness is the unthinkable denial of justness (aspects) and the misconception that those living in Syria are a singular 'community' and that all have the same view of the regime and the same emotions.

Those who have this perspective, whether sincerely or whether protecting their interests, national design, and consolidation or even a combination of the two who believe in the righteousness of the regime's opponents are taking their places on their sides. This bias, the exit point of this weakness and in addition, the second weak link is the divide among the regime's opponents. Regarding the future of Syria, there are sharp differences that exist in the design and even some radical Islamic groups without aims directly related to Syria's future are assets in Syria.

Those who subscribe to the second perspective consider the things that have happened in Syria as a project with complete foreign support and as a link in the great game in which the imperial powers, particularly the USA, redesign the region according to their own interests.

Although this perspective has consistent aspects and has some merit, its being far from completely understanding and explaining what happened in Syria requires questioning its credibility. However, the developments of overcoming the armed conflict and developing into the dimension of a civil war starting from Tunisia and reaching Syria through Egypt and

Libya brings to minds “The Great Middle East Project” that covers a geography including North Africa, extending to Central Asia over the Middle East. The question why some countries in the region that are ruled with equivalent regimes have a kind of exemption or are put under protection, strengthens the thesis of those who have this perspective. For example, Mursi, who was elected as a result of the free elections in Egypt, was sent away from the government with a military coup under the leadership of General Sisi and sentenced to death. That the main political and financial support ironically came from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait<sup>1</sup> who are ruled by a monarchic and theocratic regime constitutes one of the strong arguments of those who have this perspective.

In the same way, in Cairo in Tahrir Square the support and sympathy given by the western countries to Egyptians who have been struggling to remove the restrictions of individual rights and freedom like the suffering of the masses of people taking to the streets for the same rights in Bahrain in Pearl Square under the corps that belong to the Saudi Arabian army that entered the country upon the invitation from Bahrain regime to smash the revolt is why they fall into silence. This stands out in the open as a separate argument verbalized by those who have this perspective and as an argument that does not have/offer a credible answer.

At this point; the problem, going beyond the Syrian borders, turns into a show of power game and a struggle of gaining some regional and global actors. More importantly, the eternal conflict between Sunni and Shia sects in addition to the desire to acquire/ expand / consolidate space, and the conflict between Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood ideology involved in the game zone makes the problem more complicated.

However, the perspective of ‘foreign supported project’ supported by these and similar arguments seems to be far from explaining the things that happened as a whole although it has some merits. As the foreign supported or designed project and the game put on in the region by the West are possible weaknesses of this second perspective, Syria, ready to buy into this project ignoring the masses and the regime’s repressive aspects of these projects to be staged is to be noted.

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<sup>1</sup> In the recent past, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization and those who continued to support this action parted ways with Qatar. Those giving strong political support to Mursi and among the countries continuing to support him is Turkey...(EÇ)

The third perspective, which attempts to analyze from a combination of the previous two scenarios that ‘taking into account the people’s democratic right and consideration of their demands, individual rights and freedoms, the abolition of restrictions and those that accepting the participation of those that want to come to power in ruling Syria, including other Arab peoples are understandable and justified requests. Those who want to dominate the region/maintain their sovereignty, and be consolidated are either actors that are being directed or those involved.

Witnesses to the presence and attempts to explain each of them with their opposition, the aspects of the two perspectives’ merit that gather in this third combined perspective is the most realistic among the different definitions and perceptions.

However, the actors involved in the Syrian crisis do not act rationally; rather they act according to the principles of functional rationality. This view should not be expected at this current stage of integration.

This and in later sections of this study, the separate and complementary reasons will be explained on the bases of the actors involved; the struggle of those who want freedom and democracy with the regime, as well as the third actors have transformed the competition and conflict in the area of this country and the regional goals facing the future.

Syria, constructed on the multi-ethnic, multi-religious/sectarian and more importantly the ethnicity and sectarian differences of the administrative structure has complex internal dynamics controlled by the collapsing authoritarian structures has resulted in a drift toward chaos and disaster.

This drift of those wanting to direct Syria to their own interests and the states turning Syria into a practice area for their power struggle, along with the strong presence of the outside third actors of the states further increase the chaos and problems in terms of interactions first regionally and then beyond the borders of Syria, eventually transform it into a global crisis...

The separation of Arabs that make up a large part of the Syrian population between the Sunni and Shia (Alawites) sects and the fact that these groups are supported by third states from the same sects and various armed groups that are out of states -sponsored by the states-directed by the states increases the chaos. This also directly affects the fragile and shifting balance in the region and seems to be a candidate to make a strong domino effect.

When compared to the other ethnic groups in Syria, those under greater pressure and the efforts of Kurds without civil rights to benefit from this conjuncture and flanking maneuvers of the neighboring countries concerned are accompanied by new challenges.\*

In this context, the ethnic and sectarian differences and later with a variety of reasons\*\* including dissociating groups searching for external alliances and in the beginning of the problem “the supporters of the regimes/opposition of the regime” by moving away from the two dimensional became a multilateral/assymmetric identity.

When the problem experienced is looked at from a different perspective in isolation of the sides from their armed power, numerical superiority, weakness and division and from a psychological view, another important fact that definitely needs to be considered is encountered. While anti-regime groups (excluding the radical groups like Al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra, ISIS, etc.) struggle for acquiring rights in line with their democratic demands, the problem for the regime is in the identity of “existing or disappearing” or shortly survival. When the dedication shaped by this perception and the reflections of the dedication to behavioral things are taken into consideration, it is possible to conclude that the regime and pro-regime have a superiority from a psychological perspective.

Regime opponents: the division among them, the power struggle, the radical Islamic groups’ democratization of Syria are not relevant in terms of their presence and action, the doubt and those who are external actors to whom, and the understood indecision about to what extent they will be helpful, the collapse of the regime’s state structure and the devices that may cause the collapse is related to what happened in Iraq which experienced radical scenarios when it came to ending the process, and this continues to block its place on the agenda. Both the Syrian government and the spokespeople for the opposing sides, such as the USA and Russia are aware of this situation as the regime broadens their maneuvering area affecting the balance of power against the opposition.

Moreover, the position and differences in decisiveness of those supporting the regime and those supporting the opposition provides a distinct psychological advantage of repercussions of regime politics. For example; the approach and positioning difference between Iran, which raises the loss of Syria to a vital status and is directly involved in the

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\* Developments regarding the Syrian Kurds will be discussed in a separate section.

\*\* Besides the Radical Islamic groups, the opposition groups to the regime are divided amongst themselves, but although it is not due to ideological division, it stems more from competition, power struggles, interests, and tribal differences.

problem and some EU member countries, which approach the things that happened in Syria in a humanistic manner and base their policies on this basis, is such as to support this argument.

When looking at the Syrian crisis from Iran's window, the termination of Assad's regime means that the Shi'a geopolitical strategy for Iran's Baghdad-Damascus-Hezbollah (Lebanon) line collapses and the loss of Tehran's only ally in the Arab world.

With the political support that Iran gave the regime in Syria increasing over time in terms of military, economic, and financial, it became directly involved. In Tehran's Middle East strategy by raising Syria to a key/central position their own regime's survival is linked to Syria.

Another factor in the background of Iran's interest in Syria can be explained as the concern of maintaining the dynamics that it can use against Israel over Syria in addition to the collapse of Shia Crescent project in the case of the loss of Syria under the control of Nusayri (Alawite) minority.

It should not be forgotten that the geographical proximity of Syria to Israel and Palestine gives an opportunity for the use of this country as a logistical support corridor to Hezbollah and Hamas by Iran.

Iran received support from Iraq; in one way, the Syrian crisis is a crisis of its own as the crisis is directly involved in assessing the problem.

The support that the Russian Federation gave to the regime in Syria and against the guidance capacity are the leaders of the opposition with a position of understandable reasons of the USA not being overengaged in the Middle East, as was seen physically in the example of Libya is likely to remain in the background.

Another determination is which direction the problem is going and where it will go. The events in Syria are human drama and the approach of some countries is hypocrisy. There is a reality here, as many did not find the need to give a name to the Syrian crisis; the tragic destruction, loss of life, mass migration, human rights violations, torture, excessive and disproportionate use of force in Syria does not arise from the regime's oppressive character.

On the three points of the Shiite crescent, if a demolition was carried out, Iran which lost Syria would be in a position to pull back the borders of its safety zone and those who



think that the elements of the proxy war would lose power. For Gulf States, if of Arab origin, the loss of life and destruction are of primary of importance.

When considering that France, the dominating mandate government between 1920-1946, created the stones that built socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic structures, like the genetic codes of the crisis today, an example of France and Germany belonging to the same association, the EU cannot be considered to be equivalent to Syria's position being run by threats and interests.

The formations that rely on Arab nationalism to begin a freedom struggle against the mandate government and a religious element or ethnicity can threaten the central authority (numerically, the Sunni Arabs) and in order to prevent it from becoming a separate power alone, France controlled politics over the minority groups in Syria in the past (the Alawites in the Lazkiye region, the Druzes and Syrian Christians in the Suveyde region).<sup>\*</sup> The differences in evaluation of the position/location relating to this country and it's politics are very natural; because of the Muslim population in the country, the radical religious movements and the interactions of organizations make for a concerned especially in Germany and France as well as in Holland and Denmark.

On the subject of the exhibited and continued exhibition of the hypocritical approach the most distinct and another example of strengthening the hand of the regime in Syria are the policies and approaches of the USA and allies in the region. The oil-producing Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia, the monarchic/theocratic that have no interest in democratization, to take interest on one hand with the powerful support of the USA, respecting the position for disseminating the interest in Syria's democratic freedoms and human rights after the experience in Iraq, telling the pro-regimes Syrians to separate is probably psycho-politically impossible.

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<sup>\*</sup> The Druze became the owners of an autonomous state in 1921 called the Emirates of Jebel al-Druze after France's occupation of Syria in 1918. With the end of this state in 1936, one part of the Druze became Syrian citizens and another section migrated to Lebanon. It is assumed that 400,000 Druze live in Syria today. With the decisions of the Beirut High Commissioner on 31 August and 1 September the Latakia region south of the Iskenderun Sanjak and in the north of Great Lebanon began to be known as that Alava Autonomous Region. On 29 September 1923, the Nusayri's declared independence and in 1925, the region became known as the State of Alava. The Region took the name as the Latakia Sanjak in 1930. With the declaration of independence in 1936, it joined Syria and ended it's autonomy. In 1939 separating from Syria, the Nusayri's became the Autonomous Alava Region; they rejoined Syria in June of 1944. (Wikipedia)

When it comes to the Russian Federation, the largest arms purchaser, the only one with a base on the sea, the only ally in the Mediterranean with many military experts and consultants (hundreds if not thousands) and that it is both geopolitics or for geostrategic reasons, and that it wants to open a place for themselves in the world for claims of global power. Yet behind the regime the powerful stance of a radical change despite the human drama is not said to be very possible.

The Russian Federation, just like Iran with Syria as the only ally in the region does not want to lose Syria because of the increasing geopolitical importance affecting national designs and interests in the near future with both new energy resources to the east of the Mediterranean and because there is a direct exit to the sea.

The ideal of the Russian Federation becoming a global power and actor again considering it is synonymous with location and the Panslavic currents have been strengthened under Putin, Syria is the key from the perspective of claims and initiatives of Crimea (Sevastapol) in the Black Sea and Syria in the Mediterranean.

Therefore, some Western countries are timid and vigilant in their approach to the Syrian Crisis and Iran with the Russian Federation are seriously involved for their own reasons; this will strengthen the hand of the Assad regime.

In the region, the Syrian crisis is directly related to national security, although as long as there is no threat perceived and it remains stationary, whether Israel is directly or indirectly involved; it would not be wrong to say that the destruction and humanitarian tragedy in Syria is only seen from the window of national security.

As this country's power is consumed, the ongoing civil war or the "internal war within a war" in Syria, with a Syria focused on its internal problems with a hostile attitude against Israel will not continue to keep their facilities/utilities/opportunities. Even if an agreement is reached, eliminating the devastation and returning to normal life in the country would take many years, and this is a comforting factor for Israel. Israel's main concerns regarding the situation in Syria is the increased influence of Iran in this country, it becoming the focus of Hezbollah's power, the Syrian Army's use of sophisticated weapons systems to Hezbollah, and the presence of radical religious groups that are gaining power. During the Ruhani period the restoration of relations with the West in Iran, (recently the agreement reached for the nuclear program of Iran) Tehran's threat to Israel through Syria; Israel sees this exhibit as a

distant possibility in the near future, and at this stage the imminent threat in Syria are the radical religious groups that are connected to Al Qaeda and ISIS. Therefore, Israel, with these concerns, is trying to be cautious regarding the giving of sophisticated weapons to groups connected to FSA and prevent it with its strong network of relationships. In terms of the stereotyped behavior of genetic codes, it seems as though living with an enemy who has been decoded is easier than living with a friend whose reflexes are unknown. This seems to be the preference of Israel unless a dramatic and unexpected changes / developments did not take place. The U.S. House of Representatives established a research commission regarding the Americans (CIA) providing illegal assistance to the Kurds in Iraq, during Saddam's rule. The PIKE Report contained testimony of an official as saying that Israel's policy is understandable and should be instructive.

‘Neither the United States of America, nor Dr. Kissinger (former Secretary of State) desire victory for the Kurds. They are only rebels, it is hoped that they can continue the conflict to consume Iraq's resources at a sufficient level...’\*

When considering the deadlock and the impossibility of one of the parties to win militarily should be very clear from both sides of the balance of power in the ongoing civil war in Syria, this deadlock, the continuation to the civil war and destruction along with who loses and who gains should be very clear. In this respect, it would not be wrong to say that the cost will be placed on Syrian people as at this stage in Syria's civil war the power struggle on Syria's geography between rival actors has been transformed into a practice area.

## **B. Where, What Mistakes Have Been Made?**

Up to this point in the study, clarifying the essentials, along with the reasoning for why some initiatives of those with a questionable degree of sincerity have not been a success have been examined.

When countries, shaped around the national interests that they have implemented are remembered with the famous words of protection that are still valid from Lord Palmerstone,\* the experiences of Syria's civil war through direct and indirect actors, are perceived although

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\* EIR, The Hot Autumn, August 1983, Frankfurt

\* Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerstone: English statesmen, born 20 October 1784, died 18 October 1865. There are no permanent friends or enemies of the state. There are eternal interests. Our job is to protect these interests.

they must be understood through the reality of ‘real politik’, and only from here can a solution be approached.

Indeed in the most recent period, the intensifying attempt for a solution in Syria,\*\* although it may seem like a failure, the continuation and at the foundation of the hope for achievement of a result and until today those with conflicting interests evolve to a common point. This, particularly for the USA, EU members, Gulf States and the Russian Federation’s threat perceptions are the “radical Islamic groups” in Syria.

This study will try to help to find a solution and before moving on to postpone/deferring the details of the threats of the disputes between the parties, one needs to clarify the sections above about the positioning and perceptions of different actors. In addition, we need to focus on the mistakes made so this does not grow and to avoid this from evolving into a global crisis.

It can be said that the Syrian crisis, by going beyond the borders it was first regional and later with the involvement of third states and non governmental actors caused this to take a global quality rather than a simple civil war. The most important factor, especially the Western countries-including Turkey-took action without knowing enough about Syria’s military and the position of their intelligence organizations, their power, network of relationships, ideologies, place in the system, and the weight of their loyalty to the regime. If they did know, they did not consider it, they merely utilized ‘wishful thinking’.

The second mistake when discussing the Syrian [crisis] stemmed from the fact that the role and interactions of the demographics, the socio-economic, socio-cultural, and socio-politic structure of the system were not analyzed sufficiently.

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\*\* On 30 June 2012 in Geneva, at a meeting with the participation of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, along with the Foreign Ministers of Turkey, Iraq, and Qatar, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security, and the UN General Secretary, a joint statement providing a mutual agreement was issued on the establishment of a fully authorized transitional government. On 22 January 2014, representatives of 30 countries and international organizations were gathered with the Syrian government in accordance with the basic principles of this statement published at the Geneva II Convention. The invitation to Iran for the Syrian National Coalition’s conference made by the UN General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon was withdrawn with the announcement that they would be unable to attend under these conditions. However, 44 members of the 121-member umbrella organization of the opposition in Syria, SNA (Syrian National Council) announced that they were leaving the coalition going to the Assad regime because the conditions were not met. If Ahmet Jarba’s leadership of the SNC, supported by the Gulf states informed the other members that they were attending, from the perspective of showing the division within the opposition was a serious weakness in his ability to represent. The same division, despite the attendance of the Kurdish groups close to Mesud Barzani, that the Democratic Union Party of Syria and the Kurdish parties in their axis were not invited to the conference reflecting on the surface strengthened the hand of the Syrian government. The conference ended without reaching a result with the sharp reaction of Foreign Minister Velid Muallim representing Syria on the subject of Assad leaving his position and a transitional government without Assad.

In the public movements that began in Tunisia and Egypt, the armed forces were relatively inactive. In Libya, besides the militia forces, there was an absence of a classical military structure. During the uprising in Syria, a similar model of behavior or the perception that the military had been divided was encountered. This perception of the Syrian Army along with the assessments from the past and today has gained even more strength.

Across/against Israel, without the power to play a deterrent role, the Syrian army, who [was believed to] be could not succeed in suppressing the movement of the public without a strong command-and-control system in terms of war capabilities based on physical conditions, there are limited operational tanks, armored combat vehicles and war planes, low educational levels, questionable morale and motivation – this was proven true – and by dissolving will change sides in a short time - but the mistake starts here – was the general perception and expected identity in the beginning.

Those with this view when considering a large part of the Syrian Army belongs to the Sunni religious sect, and the rebels are comprised of Sunnis, using force against this group regarding those that will flee and change sides on the face of things is logical, however they adopted expectations that were far from logical. Indeed some of these expectations in the initial stages became a reality, but in both terms of computational and commanding echelon and officers the expectations were not reached. Until today, the percentage of those changing sides has been limited less than 10 percent.

Those with these expectations failed to consider and were mistaken on the point that the Syrian army has a privileged position in the education and training systems and ideology. According to the Soviet military doctrine, it must be considered that the reflexes of those trained – a large percentage of the officers were educated in the Soviet Union or the Russian Federation –are not only for the protectors of the country, but the protectors of the regime. A threat to the regime and a threat of danger to the country will be perceived and the response to these threats in the Soviet doctrine involving the suppression of uprisings were ignored. To suppress an uprising, without imposing any limitation to the required power, and regardless of the target of current weapons, the Soviet military doctrine that strongly stipulates the use of violence. This type of application should be expected from the officer ranks that were educated in with this doctrine, and the Syrian Army should not have been evaluated on these expectations.

In the regions that the rebels held, it is believed that the Syrian Army units were going to engage in a street war to avoid destruction and civilian casualties. But in practice the Army troops surround, supervise and cut the communications of the areas held by the rebels. They have chosen to end the resistance from the air with airplanes and attack helicopters and from land with tanks and heavy artillery fire without having considerable casualties.

The opposition groups do not have land to air and land to land missile systems to withstand against planes, tanks and armored combat vehicles. What was attempted to be described in the previous sections, because of the continued hesitation in giving opposition sophisticated weapons, they cannot have a successful resistance. They cannot protect the places they hold and cannot expand their grasp.

Regarding the manner and attitude of the Syrian army, the most serious mistake was made in evaluation of the Air Force. In Hafiz Assad's past\*, he was the Syrian Air Force Commander and a war hero, who had a significant effect on the morale and motivation of the Air Force's members. They perceived themselves to be the owners and protectors of the regime. Yet, the assessments made did not take this into consideration either.

At the beginning of the conflict, the education that they had and according to the ideology of regime, it will be understood with time by identifying with the ideas and attitudes protecting the Syrian Army becoming more solidified, the initial defections no longer occur.

The torture and violence used by the opposition, especially by radical religious groups that took Syrian soldiers and officers hostage, climbed in parallel to the increase in civilian losses. As images of the street courts and mass executions were spread, the duty of members of the military to protect the regime gradually began to evolve into a reflex to protect themselves. It can be said that in the beginning of the conflict, the members of the military were only acting in the name of protecting the regime, but at this point in the mission, everyone is battling to save themselves. It is believed that the regime will survive by taking their assets and safety to make the regime's survivability believable.

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\* Hafez al-Assad: born 6 October 1930, Qardaha-Latakia, died 10 June 2000. He graduated from Homs Military Academy in 1955 as a pilot officer. In 1961, due to his political activities, he was expelled from the military. By entering the Baath Party, he expelled to key duties. He had a role in the 1963 military coup. He was Commander of the Air Force in 1965 and he became the Minister of Defense in 1966. He was elected President in 1971, and served until his death.

Those identifying with the sense of belonging with the regime and their assets and the perception of that the regime will continue along with the Syrian army feel obligated to behave as if the regime is going to continue. From this point forward, it must be recognized that the expectation that a general solution will be found is unrealistic (and the training they receive). Besides the members of the same organization, among the members of the military, there are separate and more powerful group identity formed (created by the same group ID to be partners in crime), and this needs to be considered as a solution is sought in Syria.

A second mistaken assessment of the Syrian Security apparatus deals with the underestimation of the power of the intelligence service, its extensiveness, the area within the system and the weight it has. If it is possible to have an idea about *El Muhaberat's* operational power -in Syria there are more than 10 separate intelligence services- as each branch of the military has their own intelligence service. At the same time, these services operate with a mechanism with nearly unlimited powers where they each check one another. This point has not been considered enough. The possible role and strength of intelligence agencies during crises and conflict was not calculated properly. The operational capabilities of Syrian intelligence were seriously expanded through experience, especially in Lebanon. Some of the operations were moved to Europe, but the main duty of those inside was to monitor the oppositional movement and when recalled to take control. That they would ruthlessly use these reflexes and their running of a violence-based intimidation campaign should have been envisioned.

As a result, regarding Israel and in the common anecdote with black humor (Israel, not the state of the military, but a military of the state), if the Syrian intelligence service had been recognized as a reality at the beginning of the public movement, perhaps the conflicts would not have become so intense and a solution could have been created.

Here, opening another set of parenthesis, Western countries are worried and fear for themselves about how to change this into a gain regarding the regime in Syria. Because this section will focus on the issues of the conflicting and contrasting interests of the dominant actors when faced with imminent threat mentioned in the previous section. The key to the process in the deferral of the disagreement is identity.

The regime in Syria, along with the spread of conflict and increase in the dose that will be remembered is a continuous terrorist movement. The acts of violence that are generally from radical groups outside of Syria have given their message and have created an effective

sense of fear among the opposition groups. In Syria, demands for democratic rights from the Sunni groups especially, the discourses are ignored and obscured. In the Western world these discourses were not initially given importance and found to be unbelievable. Yet, more recently, with the increase in activities of radical organizations, these messages have begun to gain validation.

Especially in the most recent months, the clashes that erupted between the radical religious (Islamist) groups with the groups connected to the Free Syrian Army and PYD seem to have been set against a common enemy.

Yet in recent months, the radical Islamist organizations conflicts between the Free Syrian Army, PYD (the Kurds) and regime powers, as well as the internal power conflicts, and the concerns on this subject have been strengthened. The actions of radical groups based in Syria seems to have spread all of the way to Iraq's south, El Ambar to the Mousul.

Around 40 radical religious organizations and fractions in Syria are highly effective due to their conflict experiences that they gained in Iraq and Afghanistan despite the numerical scarcity of their armed members, and their dedication. They put serious pressure on the civilian population by applying acts of violence without boundaries.

The groups discussed the power of the influence and areas of the groups in Syria and the parallel increase in the Western countries perspective in the Syrian crisis. The reasons for the crisis have not changed although there is a new pursuit. In the case of the Syrian Army's complete loss of power and liquidation, across from the radical elements of the moderate opposition groups in the period that the view that the holding would not be possible began winning. That the search for a political solution accelerated is remarkable. On the other hand, the state apparatus in Syria made up of Baath Party members\* and when considering the Alawite roots in the case of not giving this people a place in the creating of new systems and its complete liquidation, the case of the difficulties in Iraq as an example would speed up the quest for a smooth transition.

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\* Baath Party: Arab nationalism (Panarabism) preceded by the Baath Party, was established by Michel Aflaq and Salah Bitar in Damascus in 1940. In 1947, the first congress was held by the founders and Zeki Arzusi. The Baath Party supports the ideology of Pan-Arabism, by using accompanying elements such as socialism, and secularism. ([www.ntvmsbnc.com/id/25301312](http://www.ntvmsbnc.com/id/25301312))



The syndrome that developed after the September 11 attacks in the United States whose effects still continue, after the actions in England, Spain, France and Turkey the possibility of actions of radical religious organizations' both in European and Middle Eastern countries became a serious source for concern. The continuation of the activities of the Chechens and the radical religious groups in the Russian Federation as well as considering the People's Republic of China's doubts about Sincan ? , and a completely different perspective regarding Syria and the countries with this view that have come together have a common threat perception and it seems as though they are oriented to having a smooth transition.

It appears at this moment, for the actors that want to eliminate ISIS and Al Queda affiliated radical groups such as Al Nusra, ironically, the only group that has organizational power supply is the Syrian Army and the Syrian intelligence services. There is another irony on this topic, to execute an effective fight, the only groups with the capacity the militias connected to the Shii Hezbollah and the Quds Force from Iran. Their presence in Syria, even if temporary has become necessary. The PKK affiliated PYD (Kurds) should be added to the previous two as a domestic power.

The radical religious organizations in Syria, should not be underestimated in certain European countries. The presence of a number of participators, the termination of the crisis in this country or in the case of the liquidation of the radical religious groups or the actions of these people brings the possibility that it can move into the USA, Europe, the Gulf, North Africa and neighboring countries such as Turkey and Jordan. The problem will gain a global identity with another aspect.

The Syrian regime's watching of the West's concern and close following of these concerns although during the periods when not just following, but agitated by aims for personal gains, the intertwined problem in Syria became even more mixed up. In the initial phase of the current regime change and the issue shaped around democratization, and in the current period of radical religious organizations' presence in the game and in some settlements as a result of supervising the confiscated seems to have shifted to a new era. The possibility of the exhibition in Syria by Assad's regime becoming like examples of Somalia, Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq to some extent, parallel with the threat posed, it can be said that the Syrian crisis has changed size.

Moreover the Syrian regime seek to consolidate the support by feeding the doubts and fears of the Druze, Armenians, other Christian minorities and the Sunni elite.\* Assad turned the presence and actions of the radical religious groups and the concern of only the Western countries about this issue into a gain in terms of the regime. In Syria, a large part of the of the Sunni public joined and supported the attempt, the Christian minorities who saw themselves as safe under Alawite leadership, distanced themselves and if the mostly Sunni regime came to power, they would be unable to ensure safety and property and this united with the other concerns. Sunni elites that maintain their economic power and presence in the system were forced to make a decision in face of pressure againts themselves from the opposition, the regime and foreign actors. They took a position like not openly giving their support to any of the parties. However, with the Sunni elite, especially the radical religious organizations' gaining influence, it started to become distance from the opposition. This helped the regime with the tendency to win.

Due to the in depth analysis of the 'business elite' in Syria published in SWP's 22 report in August 2013, the abovementioned opinions will suffice to avoid repetition.\*

In addition to all of these developments in the north of Syria in the regions adjacent to the Turkish border, the creation of the autonomous regions by the Kurdish population (Kobani, Cizire, Afrin) through the PYD (Democratic Union Party), the initial one way problem has become three-vectored today and there have been variations in the positioning of the actors involved.

The Syrian Kurds under the leadership of PYD appear to be the side that has profited the most from the civil war at this stage, but this will be discussed in a separate analysis.

It is necessary to mark another error that is occuring in the Syrian crisis in this section. This mistake was that all of the leaders of the countries involved stated, "Assad's days are numbered and he must go".

Bashar Assad is undoubtedly a symbol and icon of the current regime. If he is required to leave the regime, psychologically a large wound will be left and repairs and elimination will be difficult. These psychological interactions will be more than the political

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\* Syria's Business Elite, Between Political Alignment and Hedging Their Bets and the SWP report signed by Samer Abboud, gives detailed analysis of Syria's business community and the economic elite. Swp Reports, 22, August 2013.

\*Samer Abboud, SWP Reports 22, August 2013.

ones. However the presence of the system does not depend on Assad's presence wholly, as it sustains more powerful dynamics, focus and staff. It should be taken into consideration that Assad leaving will not accompany a speedy and complete radical change.

For this reason, the expectation concerning a solution that begins with Assad's departure would be rather naive in character, but would not be wrong. In the case that Assad departs from office some positive developments that would be triggered are not completely ignored. While it can be expected that a system that has lost its symbol would lead to positive changes, becoming more docile and compliant, it can become even more hardened with the psychology of loss. This is evaluated as a factor that needs to be considered. Although Bashar al-Assad, the face of Syria's regime, behind are the group could be referred as the 'old guard' that has been in the administration actively since the period of Hafez al-Assad. This potential core staff has a decisive influence on the system and it is an important factor that this should not be ignored in the search for solutions. The guardians of the Baath ideology, and the fact that when these staff compose Syria's real ruling elites and when the owners of the system act, as long as the unsolved lock on Syria's military power continues, when considering the effect that Assad's staying or going would have in the ongoing civil war, instead of in separate ranks, squeezing the ranks with the result a revision of the rhetoric of Assad's leaving, which would be beneficial.

In Syria, if it is believed that all acts of violence and human rights violations of the regime and all of the policies and decisions are blamed on Assad, how effective Assad's government is needs to be the subject of research. Those behind Assad and those who stay in the background aware of the future created a shield for the core staff that will take over post-Assad Syria, which is one of the most critical points in solving this. Concerning Assad's power and position in Syria, the previously made explanation 'Bashar Assad is currently an inmate in his father's (Hafez al-Assad) prison' from Jordan's King Abdullah who knows Bashar Assad, the country and the regime very closely needs to be read very carefully.

This work's author is of the opinion that despite all that has happened at this stage, the continued presence of Assad's government makes the reaching of an agreement more difficult. However, without the imposition of this and the masses that continued to give support to Assad, there is a benefit to shifting to a ground of offending the national dignity in isolation, by giving a message that their fears will not come true, and the benefit of seeing that their will occur with elections. In Sun Tzu's work *The Art of War*, when considering that in

order to not fight to the death with a surrounded enemy, it is suggested that an exit be left open. For a smooth transition an exit should be left open to Assad. The end of Saddam, his family and closely related Baath leaders in Iraq, Kaddafi, his family and close affiliates in Libya, along with those of different scenarios, Husnu Mubarek in Egypt, and Zeynel Abidin bin Ali in Tunisia, Bashar Assad and members of the core staff are psychologically affected. This interaction, the perception that Assad, his family and his close team will be of the same fate that creates the discourse supported. Instead of building consensus, the increasing dose of rigidity and the regimes ongoing struggle accompanies the reflex to exist of the military and the ruling elite.

The main point of this argument is based on the different perceptions for the definition of the Syrian people.

The opposition groups clustered around a final solution and the masses that want Assad to resign provide human resources and directly participate in the hostilities against the Alawites with the current regime; the number of Syrians supporting Assad not to be underestimated includes various ethnic and different religious groups. As a result when considering the current ruling elite, bureaucracy, military, intelligence services which should not be underestimated, it cannot be said that the reflection of Syrian people defined as a whole and the discourses of all of the ranks of the opposition are neutral.

Therefore in a post-Assad Syria, Assad's opponents and supporters will have to live together, even if in the different parts of Syria, the divergence between these two sides will further deepen the avoidance of action and discourse that is considered necessary for consensus/reconciliation. After looking at other examples of experiences it is clear that there will be a damnification/victimization over Assad's supporters and a perception of othering after Assad. When considering the accumulation of the oppositional groups' perception of victimization that resulted in a rebellion, it must be very clear that creating another type of victimization would not be helpful to any lasting solution.

Assad's resignation, the search for consensus and a solution to be practical and find a result, it needs to evolve to a point where one of the sides in the power balance between the opposition and the regime powers goes in someone's favor for a possible change. The contrary to this argument can be developed: in the case that the favor tips to toward the military power, Assad's resignation would not be possible. However, Assad with a worn image and damaged reputation both in world public opinion and in the public arena, by

creating the mechanisms that will lead to the safety of he and his family in this situation, by giving the image of making a sacrifice of stepping down on his own volition and a choosing to create the personal perception of opening a road to peace within the limits of possibility could be considered as an option in order to maintain an internal peace. In the case of the deterioration of the balance of power in favor of the opposition, Assad in an early play could want to play the same role. In the untangling, the key location of radical Islamist organizations, both the regime and the opposition powers have joined in the perception of a common threat. They said they could start a fight with the opposition organizations, and on top of that, focusing and studying the factors as if on a separate stage in Syria.

At this point, in order to end the Syrian crisis and pass to a transition and restoration period, how to overcome the military power lock between the opposition groups and the regime and the priority target needs along with how the opposition groups will be combined to have the same threat perceptions should be brought to the forefront.

Therefore, this section will focus first on the current situation and the reasons for the military power lock, and later on how this balance can be disrupted.

## **C. The Military Balance in Syria**

### **C.1. Armed Opposition**

Before the analysis of the military balance, the religious and ethnic belongings of the groups that are in conflict in Syria need to be identified. It is seen that the sides that are in conflict are united around sect differences, and the ethnic belongings come up as a second factor. When viewed from this perspective, Sunni Arabs in large numbers is on one side with little support from the other ethnic groups; and Alawites (12%) that are a minority compared to the Sunni population in Syria are on the other together with Christian Arabs, Turkmens, Druses and other minority groups.

Kurds that make up approximately four per cent of Syrian population are not in opposition, however they act according to their own goals and interests rather than giving armed support to the supporters of the regime and to the opposition, but they seem to be in a kind of harmony with the regime powers. In recent weeks the Kurds (PYD) began to act against ISIS with the FSA affiliated groups in Tel Abyad and nearby regions as a result of

their pragmatic policies. Syrian Kurds who live in the north of Syria and mostly in the areas near or adjacent to the border of Turkey were enabled to become active in their region and form a security corridor as Syrian army troops withdrew from the border region as a retaliation for the support that Turkey used to give to the groups in opposition.

The main determinant in the coalition formed by the supporters of the regime are the Alawites. In Syria, the main reason of the groups that take part in the coalition of the supporters of regime except for Alawites is the fear and concern that Sunni groups in opposition and radical religious organizations will engage in a mass slaughter in the case of overthrowing the regime. It would not be wrong to say that this is the dominant fear of the Alawites. The increase of activity of the radical religious groups within the opposition groups in Syria, the engagement in conflict with the groups connected to the FSA in order to ensure liberated areas, and the exhibit of action with high doses of brutality show that these concerns are justified. In some Western countries, there are emerging differences among the approaches and views of the Syrian Crisis. By turning this developments into gains in their own perspective, Assad's regime is making an effort to change the balance.

After touching slightly on the ethnic and sectarian positions of those involved, whether or not a solution will be found is evaluated by examining the armed forces in a military sense.

Despite the numerical advantage of Sunni Arabs in Syria, they do not have the the capacity for using these advantages, nor the abilities to use it for a military victory. On one side the division amongst them is assumed to total between 100-150,000 armed groups for the opposition in static positions more defending where they live. Because of this, they are unable to implement a strategic advantage against the regime's forces. Defending where they are separated from the reach of the regime's power, the acting groups have the perception that they jeopardized the families they left behind in the armed resistance as a whole. Conducting it by forming centers of gravity inhibits the integration of numerical strength and mobilization. Besides the areas where they live, the number of resisters in the mobile operational groups that were active was optimistically estimated to be 40,000 and their inability to shift the numerical majority to the military area shows the impossibility of getting effective results against the mobilization abilities, logistical abilities and fire power of the Syrian army.

On the other hand, when evaluating the armed opposition in Syria impartially, the description of the Free Syrian Army did not pass from the verbal plan to practice yet effectively, rather than a reality, it seems to be an imitation. Without a complete command and control system and mechanism, lacking a strong and uninterrupted communication system, limited training possibilities, insufficient logistical support sent by third countries consisting of light/limited weapons, no matter how strong the moral and motivation is over this disorganized groups, from the perspective of the possibility and capabilities against the Syrian Army, a definite result and victory do not seem possible. The opposition groups do not have any equipment to battle the tanks, attack helicopters, and combat aircraft of the Syrian army gives the regime superiority on the battlefield.

When considering the commanding officers of the opposition groups, another weakness stands out. The commanders of the opposition groups from the local areas, were generally of large families or tribal chiefs that did not have any military training. They were also religious leaders. The commanders of the mobile groups were mostly those officers who fled from the Syrian army. When different groups coming from different command-and-control approaches, applications, training and education experiences come together, it is only natural that they would not exhibit a common behavior. These differences lead to disagreement, rivalry, and segregation and in combat; it can create serious disorganization and weakness.

In some areas, the leaders of the resistance groups that collide only secure their own region; do not take a role in the overall resistance. Again, the groups connected to the Free Syrian Army in the same regions, are participating in activities without coordinating with one another; this undermines the confidence of the local population. Regarding psychological warfare and operations, the groups connected to the FSA are extremely ignorant and insufficient, and combat that includes operations partnering with the public are unsuccessful.

But this disorganization and weakness increases another aspect of danger in Syria. Mainly, the radical religious groups that come from Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, Bosnia, Yemen, Somalia and even from some European countries, with experience in conflict and cultures of extreme discipline and dedication are taking advantage of this situation by increasing their operations, thus raising the position of the decisive factors of civil war. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood with the groups like the Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN), Ahrar al-Sham, al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI), ISIS and others with about 20.000 armed militants are fighting

in Syria's civil war, but also for their own purposes in a separate war. Here there is an important example that we should explore: Despite the AQI's and ISIS's stance against the regime, their basic goal is to take a certain part of Syria under their control and make their authority accepted, more so than overturning the regime. Building a democratic, secular, pluralist regime is not among the goals of the some armed groups such as ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra and Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Recently, in the background of the Syria's fundamental conflict are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar; Saudi Arabia and Kuwait support General Sisi in Egypt and despite their position against al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun, Qatar continues to give support to Ikhwan members in Syria.

In this context, regarding the support given to the opposition movement some of the Gulf States both amongst themselves and with the Western countries it appears that there is dissolution and as the Syrian crisis continues deepening the deadlock is evolving and the Assad's regime is getting stronger.

Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait perceived the threat and danger of the Ikhwan and support the Salafist groups, while Turkey and Qatar usually stay near the Ikhwan-supported group. Besides the separation between Turkey and the Arab world, countries like Russia, Iran, and China that are standing beside Syria are attempting to explain their reasons. Those against Assad, and actually considering that European countries are concerned about the radical Islamic groups that are awakening doubts, the actors' positions and attitudes regarding the crisis are more differentiated.

The mentioned differentiation: even if the opposition powers do not win, at least it will help to change the balance in their favor – especially when it comes to giving weapons, like advanced anti-tank, anti-aircraft and guided missiles systems - it is reflected in the practical field. Steps to slowdown the possibility of systems like these from falling into the hands of radical Islamist groups and being used against the countries that fund them.

However in recent months there are some reports indicating that sophisticated weaponry systems such as M220-series TOW anti-tank weapon systems, HOT and MILAN anti-tank guided missiles supplied to the moderate armed opposition groups.

According to the HIS Jane's Defense Weekly (Vol 51, issue 16, p.18) Harakat Hazm insurgent group already has US-made M220-series TOW anti-tank weapon systems. (Three videos were uploaded to YouTube between 1 and 5 April 2014 by members of Harakat Hazm



group. Two of these shows TOW's being fired at targets near the town of Hish in the Idlib Governate.)\*

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and United Arab Emirates widely believed to have supplied weapons to Syrian insurgents, use European anti-tank guided missiles (HOT and MILAN) rather than TOW.

Also some selected members of the moderate opposition groups began to be given military training in Turkey and Jordan by US military experts as well as by Turkish Special Forces.

When considering these differentiations, hesitation and concerns, essentially the contention, conflict and rivalry of the opposition together, there seems to be no authority to cut the Gordian knot and that the horizon line has not yet fallen.

## **C.2. Regime Powers**

The strong sides and weaknesses of the armed opposition are also valid in terms of the regime powers in different formations. The regions where Alawites live densely and the regime and the supporters of the regime that have the big cities, particularly Damascus use these advantages to balance the disadvantage caused by their being minority in the population. The other minorities, Alawites and particularly Christian Arabs think with reasonable view that their life will end in the case that Sunni Arabs win a decisive military victory. Their perception results in their consolidation around the regime.

One of the factors that need to be mentioned and affects the results of the crisis is the geographical advantage that the supporters of the regime have. Alawites and the very significant part of the other minorities live along the borders that the west mountainous region of Syria surrounds. The geography of the region which is convenient for defense and the fact that big settlements like Damascus, Hama, Homs, and Aleppo are clustered around this region influence the resistance capacity and strength of the regime positively; and can withstand the opponents' armed operations through the centers of gravity that they use against the armed operations of the opposition.

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\* Harakat Hazm was established on 25 January 2014 by the merger of 12 small groups. Salim Idris, the then chief of staff of the Syrian Military Council, (SMC) appeared in its formation video to give the group and its objectives a rare endorsement. The group remained loyal to Idris after he was officially dismissed on 16 February. Harakat Hazm known as a moderate insurgent group.

Although in the beginning and expanding phase of the anti-regime demonstrations, the number of officers and soldiers that fled the Syrian Army and joined the groups in opposition shook the regime initially, this tendency dropped to a minimal level after a while and remained in a size that would not affect the operational strength, the command and control capacity and system of the army. The main reason of this can be explained by the small number of Sunni officers and the fact that these officers are not assigned to key and critical spots and promoted to high ranks. Looking at the troops like Republican Guards and the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division that effectively resist the armed opposition, it is seen that almost all of these troops consisted of officers and soldiers belonging to Alawites and other minorities.\*

In the 14<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division that takes part in the regime side and has a high operational power, the 15<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Division and the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division, it is again seen that officers and military staff of these units are mainly made up of Nusayris (Alawites) and minorities. Operational units in the Air and Air Defense Forces and particularly almost all war pilots are made up of Alawites. It should be remembered that the large part of the staff officers in the Syrian Army received their military training in USSR and afterwards in Russian Federation and the doctrines of the Syrian Army of suppressing conventional war and riots are in line with the Red Army as explained in previous sections.

Apart from the incidents in the beginning that did not become general like fleeing the army and joining the opposition, stayed at the minimum level in number, and did not affect the chain of command system; the Syrian Army continues to maintain the discipline, the hierarchical structure, logistics facilities, heavy weapons systems and the chain of command. In opposition to the tanks and armored combat vehicles against the armed groups in opposition that are untrained and lack the skills and capacity of establishing necessary coordination among themselves and tactical applications that are directed by artillery and air support and requires high fire power, the opposition powers lose their attack opportunities and fail to protect the places that they gain.

The Syrian Army uses the air force mostly also against the civilian population rather than supporting the operational units on land against the groups in opposition. As a result, civilian casualties gradually increase and the country is faced with a serious destruction.

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\* Joseph Holliday, 'The Assad Regime: From Counterinsurgency to Civil War' Power Point Presentation, July, 2013, Institute for the Study of War, slide 2.

In fact, it is not very likely that fixed-wing combat aircraft are used in civil wars in a way to get results from a tactical aspect, and the panic that it poses with the psychological effect and destruction is more serious than the physical destruction that it causes.

Thus the defenseless civilian population that remains under the heavy aerial and land bombardment sides against the opposition and separates from the main aim and target of the struggle after a while with reasons like the losses they suffer, tough living conditions, hunger, disease and homelessness.

The management in Syria, right along side the military another armed force called Shabiha, which generally acts under the control of El Muhaberat against the opposition consists of about 100,000 people. In the first period, when the actions of the regime's adversaries began, the armed Shabiha militia responded to the demonstrators, and began to be given military training in the following periods. This group has become one of the main components of the conflict. On the side of the army, the areas that were taken back from the opposition forces for protection and the Shabiha militia, deployed to the areas that are sensitive to the likelihood of conflict, not necessarily the conflict areas, are taking back the front securely so that the regular army units can carry out operations more easily against the opposition troops.

Besides the army and the Shabiha militia, the regime depends on other armed forces that come from outside of Syria. Among these groups are Hezbollah militants, the most effective and disciplined force of about 4-5,000. The Lebanese group, Hezbollah, under the direction of Iran and the Shiite militias that come from Iraq play an important role. No matter how low the numbers are, Hezbollah\* and the Iraqi Shiite militia's discipline, training and conflict experience gives them a significant advantage against the opposition groups, thus relieving the pressure on the regime.

The Syrian Armed Forces, just like all of the other armies, was formed according to the necessities of a conventional war against external enemies in terms of training, doctrine,

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\* Hezbollah was established by Imam Gaffari in Iran. Lebanon's Hezboolah Shiite Amal organization has emerged with the transformation. After the death of its leader, Abbs al Musawi in 1992, it was led by Hassan Nasrallah. Besides having a paramilitary force in Lebanon, Hezbollah is a political party represented in Parliament. It means, the Party of God, or Soldiers of God. Hezbollah militants are trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, and there are about 1500 militias from this country. They form a kind of state in a state in Lebanon. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hezbollah, Ercan Çitlioğlu, Tahrán-Ankara Hattında Hizbullah, Ümit Yayıncılık, Ankara, 2001.).

and weapons systems. In combat during internal conflict and residential localities requires special training, and therefore it is unsuccessful in the street war. (Urban areas combat)

Although because the Hezbollah militia and the Shiite militias that came from Iraq and Lebanon have experience in this type of combat, (urban areas combat) they are more effective against the opposition forces. The army's high fire power and softened targets are often seized by these groups.

Although it is claimed otherwise; considering that these armed groups of regime supporters are given tactics and training by Iran's Revolutionary Guards and particularly military experts who are members of the elite Quds Forces and whose number is expressed in the hundreds -who even directly joined the conflicts- it gradually becomes impossible for the armed groups in opposition to achieve an ultimate victory in military terms.

However, despite the military and economic assistance sent to Syria from Iran, Russia and China, the continuation of the civil war is working to the detriment of the regime's power. Because the aircraft, tanks, armored vehicles maintenance and spare parts needed for various caliber artillery in the Syrian army's inventory are constantly operational they are increasing. In the event that the necessary proportions of logistical materials needed do not arrive from these countries, a decrease in the operational strength of the Syrian forces is inevitable in time. Because the Syrian army's equipment and weaponry systems are Russian, it is of vital importance to continue logistical support from Russia or other countries that use Russian weapons from the perspective of the regime. Therefore, the current numerical disadvantage of the regime is compensated for in terms of high firepower, but this could change in the future if they cannot get the logistical support needed, it seems that their situation could worsen. Recently the Syrian Army's concerns seem reasonable with the increase in air strikes on the opposition controlled areas.

It should also be noted that the Syrian Army also began suffering to recruit new personnel for the compensation of its losses because of the limited human resources and unwillingness of the young people to join to the army as explained by Assad in his speech addressed to the Syrians on July 23rd 2015 in Damascus.

In an attempt to clarify the conditions as long as there are no dramatic changes between the parties in terms of military, changing the deadlock and an ultimately developing their military abilities for a victory seems impossible.

Therefore, it would be smarter to take steps toward turning the existing power balance and locked politics into an instrument for a solution instead of waiting for the inevitable result of many more deaths and more destruction from the conflict. Because whether the regime or the opposition front, they use power for their own interests and when they realize that they will not be able to solve this, whether they want to or not, eventually they will be seeking the opening of dialogues. As the infrastructure is being prepared for the different sides to see this, the regime and the opposition have become tired and lost hope of victory. It is believed that they will be convinced about finding a solution in politics and dialogue in the future.

During the persuasion process, one of the most important points is the hope of the opposition groups, as the fears of the regime increase. The result affects both sides' psychological power to resist and they take a break from the foreign military intervention option.

Moreover, if anti-tank weapons are given to the opposition groups, they have not received enough military training. Despite having these weapons, to what degree will they be able to stop the operations of heavy artillery fire supported by armored unit without a common command and an insufficient communication system is another question. When considering that there are thousands tanks and armored combat vehicles in the inventory of the Syrian Army – although it is known that some are not operational – for the regime, the armored vehicles that they could lose in combat is much less important, the regime can easily afford these losses. Again, it should not be ignored that by toughening the regime, these losses cause a greater and more effective use of airpower and in the final analysis it could trigger the use of the ground surfaces missiles. As mentioned in the previous section, in such a case the perception of “survival” degree of importance (war of necessity/survival) of the regime's conflicts could cause it to behave with an unlimited use of force.

There is another important point that needs to be noted about the conflict in Syria is: if the defense abilities, possibilities, and capabilities of Assad's forces (Syrian Army-Shabiha) drastically weaken, the Sunni Arabs' government seizing power for themselves would be perceived as a life-death issue for the Alawites, Druze, other Christian minorities next to the regime. Maintaining and protecting the existence of some of the Sunni elements' conflicts on the axis will continue.

As the fatalities of civilian population reaches much higher levels, the segregation between the parties will make it impossible to deepen the (dimensions). By continuing the blood feuds, the dose of violence could increase changing of the axis of conflict for the regime.

At this point, the goal of the actors involved in the Syrian crisis and especially the countries that share a border with Syria is not to change the current regime, but more importantly is the acceptance of all groups except for the radical religious groups, and formation of a new administration that is shared amongst a large part, if not all of the parties.

Therefore the effects of the suffering and trauma and thus, naive expectations for ending it such as laying down the weapons or toppling the regime are seen as the biggest obstacle before a permanent solution, and to create social peace, it must be realized that time, patience, care, and fair approaches are needed. As has been seen in Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo recently, peace keeping is much more difficult than peace making operations. Approaches that ignore the social fabric, customs and traditions of Syria, even if they have temporary success, they will not have permanent success.

At this point, as the crisis in Syria deepens and as the conflicts continue, the separation of the parties becomes more permanent, thus creating another danger.

With the continuation of the conflict between the regime and the opposition groups, both sides have suffered losses and have been worn down dissolving their stocks. With an increase in their need for guns, ammunition, spare parts, fuel, those countries providing logistical support on both sides of these issues are losing their neutrality, credibility and their clout in the solution to the crisis. Therefore, in order to strengthen their position in Syria, the involved actors focus on humanitarian activities and assistance. It is very important in term of the peace-building initiatives that will overcome the previous results. At this point, those who provide/are providing logistical support to the parties in the Syrian crisis, (Russian Federation, Iran, USA, Saudi Arabia, Turkey) and the countries that have approached because of humanity, (Ie. Germany, Sweden, Norway, Holland, Hungary) these countries could have a bigger role, and a more active participation from these countries may be required in the upcoming process...

## **D. Military Options**

This section will summarize the military options from the perspective of the ending of the crisis in Syria.

One of the first options that will be focused on and has started to be carried out, is the opposition groups have been given advanced weapons systems and their military training is to accelerate.

Dealing with the giving of advanced weapons systems to the opposition, because the reservations of first Israel, the United States and other Western actors involved were mentioned in the previous section, they will not be repeated here. From the perspective of contention and conflict reaching a solution in Syria, it is a distant possibility because of the rivalry between the opposition groups within the military training given in bordering and regional countries.

Although not used directly, the second option which could be a result of the military is the cutting of foreign logistical resources to the Syrian army and regime forces. Much of the assistance to Syria like spare parts, ammunition, equipment and material assistance comes from the Russian Federation and Iran. Interrupting the assistance to Syria from the Russia Federation and Iran seems difficult because it is believed to be carried out with vehicles over sea and mostly by air. Moreover, because of the inventory stock clashes, it is impossible to know the level that it has dropped to.

On the other hand, to stop this type of support with a naval blockade of Syrian ports and passing a no-fly zone involved decision difficulties and the additional crises this option causes to pose serious barriers.

The third option is a limited air campaign in Syria's infrastructure. The targets of attacks would be the main roads, bridges and areas important for travelling in addition to the military bases of the regime powers, the airfields, power generating stations, communication facilities and fuel depots. This realization of this option would negatively affect the Syrian army and pro-regime groups' means for war and capabilities, which would be useful, but such a campaign's legal infrastructure and legitimacy in terms of participating countries is very important. When considering the UN Security Council's approval is impossible to get, NATO becomes the second option. Yet, such an intervention would require all the members of the political and military wings to adopt the decision unanimously and the procurement of

such seems almost impossible. Recalling the experiences starting with the crises in Panama and Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan and most recently Libya, international public opinion and decision makers have developed new criteria for interpreting the concept of sovereignty and according to the size of the internal conflict, legitimizes measures for crisis intervention.

This new understanding is based on humanitarian grounds and the application of “Crisis Management” in NATO’s 2010 Strategic Concept. In the “Crisis Management” section, wherever the crisis occurs, and the participation of all member states in the intervention before-during and after will have been recorded.\* However, the decision for a NATO military intervention in Syria still does not seem feasible.

In the case of Syria’s air defense systems to counter the losses that may be caused by the changing size of the operation (which is to be expected) and carries the risk of a possible escalation.

The fourth and most powerful but risky option against the Syrian troops is limited tactical air operations. An operation of this type on the Syrian army’s armored units, the air force, artillery would cause significant operational losses to the Syrian regime. If the Syrian army’s war power was completely destroyed in order to seriously weaken it, the option to use the air power and the capacity to use this power that would be needed related to the operations of the past would be extremely difficult and risky. For example 1991, in Operation Desert Storm, the coalition powers issued 38,000 sorties to break the military strength of Iraq, a military without an effective air defense system. It should be noted that in response some of the Iraqi army units exhibited a fierce resistance. In Kosovo, NATO executed a 78 day air campaign against the Serbian army, where 3,400 sorties were used. In 2011, there was a 203 day campaign in Libya, where 9,700 sorties were used.<sup>2</sup> When considering that the Serbian army had 100,000 troops, and the Libyan army and militias consisted of 30,000, a Syrian army with 300,000<sup>3</sup> troops and a militia made up of (100.000) leads to other questions about what type of air power is to be used and the length of such a campaign as well as the retaliation capability of the regime forces.

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\* Evaluation of the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept, BÜSAM, Istanbul, January 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, Breaking the Stalemate, Saban Center, August 2013, p.15,

<sup>3</sup> The number of the Syrian army thought to decreased around 200.000 according to the latest reports.



The military capabilities of the Syrian army and the regime powers to crack down, if not entirely, by limiting the opposition to Assad and forcing to a position of agreement and compromise to help the promotion of a military intervention, which would require power, financing and time. This is without thinking of the political implications which should be considered.

In a report issued by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy on May 2014<sup>4</sup> the variety of military options of U.S. from least to most, described as follows:

- Deny Assad regime access to financial assets
- Pose a credible threat of force to pressure the regime
- Train and equip the opposition.
- Disrupt regime arms supplies.
- Strike / recure residual CW capabilities.
- Strike key tactical military units.
- Conduct drone strike on al-Qeada affiliates
- Strike key military and economic targets.
- Establish no-fly zones / humanitarian safe havens.

The authors of the report explained the aim and methods of “Train and equip the opposition” which has minimal risk for the retaliation of Assad regime as:

“Train and equip the opposition. Intensified efforts to train and equip moderate opposition groups and to provide them with intelligence could strengthen their position vis-à-vis more extreme opposition elements and reverse the regime's battlefield momentum, setting conditions for a credible diplomatic process. Such a step has the potential to alter the trajectory (if not the outcome) of the war, though much will ultimately depend on the opposition's ability to enhance its military effectiveness, act with unity of purpose, and get its political house in order. This last point is key, as a moderate opposition that embodies the principles it claims to fight for could better compete against extremist opposition groups and draw uncommitted Syrians and disaffected regime supporters to the opposition ranks.

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<sup>4</sup> Between Not-In and All-In U.S. Military Options in Syria. Policy Notes, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, No.18. May 2014

Moreover, this option can be scaled up or down, as the opposition's performance, battlefield dynamics, and U.S. interests dictate.”\*

But on the contrary of the possible military options the conclusions of the report should be noted as:

“Although diplomacy and sanctions have not yielded the desired results in Syria, the administration remains concerned that even limited military action could draw the United States into another Middle East war, violating one of its core foreign policy principles. It is also concerned that military action could scuttle its two signal foreign policy achievements: the deal to eliminate Syria's CW and the ongoing nuclear negotiations with Iran. These overarching considerations will continue to constrain U.S. options in Syria. How new reports of Syrian CW use—if verified—will affect this calculus is unclear.

The impulse to refrain from military intervention in Syria, while understandable, is increasingly fraught with risks: an al-Qaeda foothold and expanded Iranian influence in the Levant; a new generation of jihadists who will seek new opportunities elsewhere; social tensions and political instability in neighboring states (including several close U.S. allies); growing sectarian conflict in the region; and doubts about U.S. credibility by friends and adversaries alike that could prompt tests of U.S. resolve elsewhere (see Russia in Ukraine). Moreover, by not acting, Washington risks consigning itself to a spectator role in a conflict with far-reaching implications for its interests.

Should Washington seek to more proactively shape developments in Syria, it has a range of military options entailing varying degrees of commitment and risk that fall far short of full-scale invasion—albeit with no guarantees of achieving what most might 'define as "success." In a conflict where there are no good outcomes (with so many dead and displaced, it is too late to speak of such), acting to avert even worse outcomes—for the peoples of Syria and the region and, more important, for U.S. interests—may be the best that can be hoped for. How Washington mediates the tension between the increasingly evident risks of nonintervention, and the inherently uncertain risks of intervention, may very well determine the future of Syria, the Middle East, and the U.S. role there and beyond for years to come.”\*

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\* Ibid, p.29

\* Ibid, p.29-30

Considering the most recent events in Ukraine and Crimea and the signs of the possible beginning of a postmodern Cold War, among the leadership of the West and the USA and with Syria under the leadership of the Russian Federation and Iran, there is an increased probability of shows of power, and these shows could create a domino effect and if rationality is abandoned there will be high costs.

When the military options are maintained, the use of rhetoric seems as like a distant possibility at this stage.

The Ukrainian-Crimean crisis, and due to the collapse of the alliance of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar with the Muslim Brotherhood, it seems a military option is begin to fade out from the agenda. This is especially the case with all of the developments as Turkey, a leading member of the anti-Assad group has assumed a gradually silent demeanor in the recent months especially after the general election which was held in June 7<sup>th</sup> 2015. It seems likely to conclude that the most optimistic result is displacement.

## **E. Results**

As a result of this analysis and the evaluation of Syria, as long as Israel does not directly initiate a threat or indirectly assist, it looks like the presence of Assad's regime will remain at least in the short term.

Therefore, as mentioned in the previous sections, the countries not directly involved in the Syrian crisis; the search for political solutions using their positions in the context of credibility and on the subject of the countries involved in this process, the need for leadership seems to have increased even more.

In this context, all of the countries, the regional powers and actors are involved in the initiative for a solution, but it is important that this initiative will not allow any type of ideological and strategic approaches.

These types of efforts must begin with humanitarian aid and the protection of human rights on the ground; the 'human' approach is the basis of such a transition rather than views and ideologies represented by opposing groups, which can be addressed at later stages. This will prepare a better basis and help to build confidence which is the key factor in such negotiations to reach an agreement.

The most important parameters in this intervention/initiative of the leader countries to take an active role in this crisis is to show attention and eliminate the concerns of the countries involved. (Examples include eliminating or neutralizing the concerns of countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the Russian Federation, Turkey through channels like diplomatic efforts.)

The potential that it is started on the local level, generalizing the humanitarian activities and creating the perception that a ceasefire would be possible and necessary while moving the process further is very important in terms of success.

Undoubtedly, both the regime and for the previously mentioned reasons, there are serious and practical difficulties to get the opposition groups that do not have a culture of acting together to agree to a ceasefire.

However to say that the difficulties that need to be overcome are impossible are contrary to the rules of diplomacy and human nature. From the perspective of the internal and external actors, the process is both possible and a factor that necessitates the terms and time of transmission if used correctly will help to overcome the difficulties mentioned.

The continued presence of these factors consolidates and increases the potency of radical Islamic groups that control certain areas. By giving preference to the areas where the conflict between the regime and the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SNC) has become more intense, first locally and then more generally and more lasting, -it is believed that the term makes acceptance easier from a psychological perspective- coming to an agreement for cease fire. The radical religious groups such as JAN, ISIS, etc and those not associated with the democratization of Syria should not be expected.

Contrary to it all, during the ceasefire, the aforementioned groups would use the ceasefire and continue the conflict to strengthen their presence in the regions where they are, to obtain new gains.

In the case of this situation in Syria, for both the internal and external actors the purge of radical groups that are cause for concern justified the evolution of the creation of conditions from negativity to positivity

It is evaluated/estimated that first local and then general ceasefire is provided, the segments of society who are tired of conflicts, exhausted their energy, whose future hopes and plans vanished/ were vanished in a Syria cleared of radical armed groups, lean towards a secure transitional period whichever side they become a member of. It is also estimated that messages and pressure that will be conveyed from the lower to the leader staff will be convincing to make a decision in this direction.

The abovementioned proposition for solving the Syrian crisis, the first formula, is not an ultimate solution. The parties and their purposes, positions, interests, concerns and gains are different. Syria is at an intersection point for many different vectors like the conjuncture of regional and global and together with Syria's added meaning and the effects of the general conjunction of crisis orientation. That all parties will voluntarily accept a formula for a solution is obviously not possible.

The creation a perception where rejection from the perspective of the parties will create much more costly results than acceptance and this perception is the basis for this persuasion process.

The most important point to be considered in the search for solutions to the Syrian crisis is that there are major differences between the beginning of the crisis and the conflicts that have filled the four years. In 2011, the peaceful demonstrations for obtaining democratization, human rights, and freedoms became a civil war only after new parties and actors were added and it can be said that the initial purposes were lost even if not completely.

Therefore, it is beneficial to know that based on the data, the proposals and search for solutions and the perception of the crisis in the beginning is not realistic.

When looking at the aims and motivations of the pro-regime and opposing groups, the struggle that initially started for human rights has changed paths and shifted to a different level. That is, for the powers that have taken sides with Assad and defended the regime, the primary goal has been transformed to ensure the sustainability of the regime rather than the protection of its security.

As they previously mentioned, the regime including Jabhat al- Nusra and ISIS and the groups fighting against the FSA does not have aims related to democratization. The ideologies of these groups are in line with a struggle establishing an Islamic state based on sharia law and this represents a third front in Syria.

Regarding the regime, by highlighting the presence of the Islamic groups and the dose of atrocities in action on the one hand, the concerns and fears of the Western countries are being instigated and they are trying to convince them to change their positions. On the other hand, groups like this are escaping by applying military pressure, the groups that mention FSA's power aim at debilitation through mediation.

Assad's regime, which instigates the fears of Western countries by defining the radical groups as terrorists presenting it as a real danger to the West, and embarks on military operations effective against groups like this reveals the clear contradiction that the regime is going in a Machiavellian and opportunist direction. From the perspective of preserving the regime, no matter how much the tactic with this approach is understood, the Syrian crisis will become more complicated and makes finding a solution more difficult.

When it comes to the Kurdish groups, both the conflict between the opposition groups and the differences in the regime's approach to the opposition groups is for their own benefit. Although this constitutes a fourth front.

The ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, while fighting with FSA, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) is in conflict with the ISIS especially for the supervision of the Rojava district. But ultimately, these groups have different purposes/aims, the conflicts between the groups contributes to the continuation of the regime and their gain of power.

At this point the central question in searching for a solution that emerges is: does the Syrian public want to live as a whole or do they want to live separated from one another? From the angle of geopolitics, being named as a return to the pre-Ottoman period, a possible division (Sykes-Picot) should undoubtedly be assessed. The collapse of a state model that is very religious-sectarian and very multi-ethnic and the sample of how this model's future hampers identity.

The division of Syria on a sectarian and ethnic basis, in this region like those countries seemingly unaffected by the movements, appears to create a candidate for domino effect. It has the potential to have serious vibrations in the Middle Eastern and Gulf states including Iraq and even Turkey.

Undoubtedly, whether by their desires or by imposed obligations, the Syrian public needs to make a decision about whether they will cohabitate or live separated along ethnic and sectarian lines.

For this reason, it would be beneficial to re-evaluate how a possible solution could come about; in order to make it, the positions of those countries giving military, political, and logistical support to the regime and the opposition powers must be done in a way where they cease to be parties.

## **F. Various Scenarios**

To end the Syrian crisis, after evaluating what the military options that have been emphasized are and what kind of solutions they can create, this section will summarize scenarios for Syria's future.

This study examines four different scenarios regarding Syria's future. The first of the scenarios is the most optimistic, where all of the parties come to an agreement and a transitional government is formed to end the conflict. For a transitional government that envisions this scenario, there must be very different parameters: Assad will stay out, and for the structure of the Syrian government not to collapse like that in Iraq, including the Baath experienced, non-radical, members that do not have a direct connection to the experienced tragedies, and the leaders of the opposition and minority groups is needed.

The Syrian crisis, in terms of being inclusive of all parties into a transitional government, and along with undoubtedly seeming like the most rational solution, the parties involved are not yet ready to make a sacrifice on this subject.

Both sides retain their hope of winning, as long as they believe that they can reach their goals in a short timeframe. It is extremely optimistic to wait for those to sacrifice to take a seat at the table as the struggles that they continued to this day and the price that they paid will become meaningless by taking a step toward a transitional government.

For this reason, the matters presented in the previous sections, before it is too late and the ongoing conflict evolves into a more primitive conflict, the conditions must be provided for them to sit at the table for the establishment of a transitional government and for an eventual reconciliation.

By sitting at the negotiating table, through a transitional government the parties make a decision together with respect for Syrian democracy, human rights and respect for freedom. It is extremely important that their differences in positions should be kept from their attention.

Not one of the parties, but both should comprehend that a military victory using power is not the way to sit at the negotiating table. The power and support of the involved countries should not be reflected at the negotiating table. For a positive outcome, it is important that one party does not dictate the terms to another.

Among the most important factors that caused the failure at the Second Geneva Conference were, if the disorder between themselves on the opposition front is left on one side, aside from the parties of the actors involved, they were sitting with their own conditions at the table. It should be noted for the success of future initiatives that the conference did not create a place for dialogue; instead it was covered by the preconditions.

In the peace efforts after this, the Syrian Opposition (the Syrian National Council) will not enter into a dialogue with Assad's regime and the fracture of the resistance will not be negotiated. The regime's representatives' meetings and the discussions of sealing off the index of Assad's assets can play an important role in the in allowing progress. Although it should be kept from their attention, creating a negotiation process without preconditions and having them accept it to obtain results should occur so that a negotiation can occur between the parties involved.

The second possible scenario is that the Assad regime is overthrown by the opposition powers or the Syrian Army. Due to the reasons given in the research on the Syrian Army described in the previous sections, this type of action is a very weak possibility. Moreover, even if some elements of the army take part in such action, those loyal to the regime and its continued presence and those who identify with the units are not expected to take part in such a movement. In such a case, because there would be an unpredictable increased risk in Syria's devastation and loss of life, that this scenario is not in Syria's future game plan seems to be a requirement of rationality.

By the opposition elements winning a military victory, the overthrow of the regime may be accompanied by a shift that may be impossible to control the chaotic environment again for the reasons previously mentioned. Both the dissent amongst the opposition groups and power struggles, and following a decisive victory against the regime's followers and embarking on the prevention against possible acts of violence, this scenario requires a step forward from the idea stage.



Gigantic problems that could pave the way toward much more serious and complicated issues and the areas where the actors involved can maneuver will expand. These serious issues include public administration, security institutions and infrastructure that could result with the crash of the state apparatus, collapsed public services and Syria's reconstruction from the beginning, the system to be repaired disarming of the opposition groups, preventing the conflicts between them, restricting the violence toward the supporters of the regime, the presence of radical Islamic groups and the ending of the actions.

The possibility of war for the regime forces, and a limited air campaign aimed at the breaking and weakening of abilities making the regime more open to negotiation and reconciliation could be seen as a consideration. Although for obvious reasons action like this with the Russian Federation's and Iran's lack of support and development of countermeasures that could complicate the problem even further and conflict through proxies and other factors could lead to the spreading to other countries in the region.

The third possible scenario encompasses is if none of the parties involved achieve military superiority and the crisis continues. The situation with disintegration and the actual polarization of Syria may cause a split. In a military sense, when it was known that the solution was not possible, the desire to live together, the will and the lost culture of those belonging to different ethnic and sectarian groups may trigger a split. In such a scenario, the emergence of the following governments would be inevitable: the Kurds in the north, (Rojawa; the regions adjacent to the Turkish border) the Lazkiye in the West, (the Alawite, Christians, Druzes) and in the center the areas with mostly Sunnis. However there could be conflict between the different groups that could transform into a power struggle as the region where the Sunni's would dominate the government. A conflict will be unavoidable between the radical Islamist groups such as ISIS, JAN, etc. and moderate opposition groups represented under the umbrella of FSA as well as another conflict could be arise between Syrian Muslim brotherhood and Salafi elements.

In this case the Kurds (PYD) and radical Islamic groups would be the winner of this power struggle.

The fourth scenario that should not be excluded is the continuation of the Baath regime most probably without Assad. In the case that this scenario becomes real, it is expected that those supporting the opposition, like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates will have a more problematic relationship with Syria.

The continuation of the regime will be a serious win regionally and globally for the Russian Federation and Iran. Winning power, the Shi'a block that emerges with the Baghdad-Tehran-Damascus-Hezbollah (Lebanon) axis will cause greater tension between the Sunni-Shi'a in the region.

## **G. Conclusion**

When scrutinizing the positive/negative returns of the probable scenarios, because of the risks that each possibility has, it is necessary that a solution be found through negotiation and mutual agreement within the both sides.

After evaluating various scenarios concerning with the future of Syria it seems the best but the most difficult solution is succeed to establish a transition government where all the parties including the Baath cadres will have the right of represent themselves in the absence of Assad excluding the radical Islamic groups.

But when considering the present situation and developments in Syria it seems the partition of Syria into the three parts is more likely in the near future.

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