

Phases, lessons and future of the civil war in Syria

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The world is being dragged towards a great war. The possibility of a third world war looms large on the horizon. This possibility of a great war is approaching from Pacific to the Middle East, from Africa to Eastern Europe with a flourish of trumpets. Syria is the prelude of this great war. Almost all the global and regional powers show up on the Syrian platform in one way or another. This article aims to examine the civil war of Syria, its development phases and to put it in a systematic framework. While doing this, unavoidably we had to concentrate more on the internal development of the process in Syria. We had to exclude from the scope of this article, the type of relations the powers, which confronted or allied with each other in Syria, have in other platforms, the developments in such areas. The process experienced in Iraq, which is almost nested within Syria, is also included in this exclusion. We also could not deal with the conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which have the potential of causing a sectarian war in the Middle East at any moment.

This article assesses the intervention of imperialism to Syria mainly with respect to the imperialism of the USA. This is due to the fact that the USA is the power continuing to be the imperialist power which is the most effective one in Syria and

which is the most determinant one in the development of the process. The policy pursued by France, which is the prior colonialist power of Syria, in this area where it is also present militarily is also important. For example, France being the only country supporting Turkey's buffer zone plan from the very start, in order to open an area for itself in Syria, is another issue which is worth examining. The dreams and interventions of Britain in the region, as well as the USA, Germany staying away from Syrian area, meanwhile, playing the leading role in the containment of Russia in the Eastern Europe, analysis of such policies with respect to compliances and conflicts with the USA policy, are all undoubtedly required in order to present the whole picture.

Israeli Zionism, which is another reactionary power directly intervening Syria together with the USA, and its policies should also be examined carefully. The position of Iran, its policies concerning Syria, their reflections in the internal policies of Iran and the developments in Iraq, which are inseparably linked to these, are also very important for making a comprehensive political analysis. Although we do not bring such multi-directional analysis together within the scope of this article, we did this partly in *Gerçek* newspaper, *Gerçek's* website (www.gercekgazetesi.net) and congress documents and declarations of Revolutionary Workers Party (DIP). The ideas presented in this article are based on these previous analyses. Our purpose in this is to focus on the political lessons to be derived with respect to the challenges in the regions, Turkey in the lead, which are under the threat and risk of becoming another Syria. By focusing on Syria, where the pain of the approaching world war is getting denser, we aim to have an easier and definite access to some diagnosis which can be extended to extended to the whole region.

A stillborn revolution in Syria

In order to understand and explain what is happening in Syria today, we have to go back to the beginning of the events. The civil commotion, which started as the continuation and a part of the Arab revolution and a rebellion against the dictatorship of Assad, which identified with the corruption, inequality and pressure of those dispossessed of Syria, is required to be correctly assessed. This movement did not start on a religious/sectarian basis. Religion (and religious sect) was not the basic and distinguishing identity of the rebelling masses.

Before anything else, the power led by Bashar al-Assad does not have a structure which can be labeled basically as Alawi. Although al-Assad family is Alawi, their power was supported by the Sunni bourgeois loyal to the state, due to the privileges then acquired since the Hafez al-Assad era.¹ In Damascus and Aleppo, trade was

¹ *Gerçek* newspaper, "Suriye: Arap Devrimi Kapımızda", 12.05.2011 <http://gercekgazetesi.net/manset/suriye-arap-devrimi-kapimizda>.

mainly controlled by Sunni sections. Since Alawis constituted the section which lacked land and capital in Syria historically, they were more inclined to take positions as officials in the state and in the army. During the era of Hafez al-Assad Alawis acquired more positions in the army, and at least, no discrimination against Alawis was made. Despite Alawis' interests in the army, 75 percent of the soldiers were Sunni and the Alawis were the minority in Syria in general.² Moreover, the Sunni generals dominated the command level.

Tlass family is almost the symbol of the relation of the Sunni bourgeois with the regime. The father Mustafa Tlass, who was of Circassian origin and Sunni, had served as the Minister of Defense during Hafez al-Assad's era. One of his sons, Firas Tlass, is known as the sugar king in Syria and he has monopolized the sugar sector. Firas's brother Manaf Tlass was promoted to brigadier general before the rebellion and was brought to the command of 104th Brigade within Republican Guards which were strategically significant for the regime.

Alawism does not have a dominant position with respect to religion. A structure similar to the Religious Affairs Administration in Turkey, also exists in Syria. Although religion courses are given in compliance with Sunni belief, Alawi children also take these courses and Christians are exempted from such courses. While Sunni holidays and holy nights are official holidays, and allocations were provided from the state budget for the celebrations on such days, Ghadir Khumi which is important in Alawi and Shia belief, is not even officially recognized.³

While the power in Syria cannot be labeled as Alawi, the rebelling masses cannot be simply named as Sunnis. Before anything else, there were also Alawis among the rebels. At this early stage in which the rebellion in Syria had similar characteristics with the Arab revolution which started in Tunisia and Egypt and spread to the whole geography, the protests were not led by any party or organization. Spontaneity was the prominent factor. The role of the social media, which is one of the expression forms of spontaneity, was also generally accepted.

At this stage, Islamists also took a significant position, although not hegemonic, within the mass movement. However, their existence and influence were not yet at a level which would cause a self-defense mood on Alawis. Impoverishing effect of neo-liberal policies implemented by Bashar al-Assad, on the masses and increasing unemployment were the basic factors that activated the laboring masses. Arab revolution was showing the poor masses that an alternative is possible. According to majority of the Syrian people, Bashar al-Assad was not more attractive than the dictator of Tunisia, Ben Ali or the dictator of Egypt, Mubarak.

2 Droz-Vincent, "The Military amidst Uprising and Transitions in the Arab World", *The New Middle East*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p.194. Quoted by Fehim Taştekin, p.51.

3 Ömer Ödemiş, *AKP'nin Suriye Yenilgisi ve Esad*, Ankara, Nota Bene Yayınları, 2014, p.32.

Consequently, the rebellion spread all over the country including Latakia, which is assumed to be Assad's castle. Among the areas where the rebellion intensified, the agricultural centers Daraa and Izraa and industrial zones of Syria, Duma and Moadamyeh came to the fore, this was an important indication of the participation of the working class. Accordingly, the rebellion in Syria also possessed the characteristic of being based on the working class, just like in Tunisia and Egypt during Arab Revolution. However, Syria differed from Tunisia and Egypt significantly and this difference played a key role for the whole country being dragged to a reactionary civil war.

The difference of Syria was that although the working class constituted the majority of the masses during therebellion, unlike Egypt and Tunisia, it could not constitute the backbone of the rebellion by their own organizations and struggle methods. The dictatorship in Syria was more successful in making the union movement an extension of the state and not giving the alternative movements the chance to develop, when compared to its equivalents in Egypt and Tunisia. Contrary to Egypt and Tunisia, neither the activities of unions nor the general strikes were seen in Syria. An organization to play the role played by UGTT, the confederation of unions in Tunisia, did not exist in Syria. Independent unions emerging in Egypt during the process, which quickly became strong, did not emerge in Syria at any stage. Finally, the forms of action specific to the working class, primarily strikes, never left their mark on the rebellion.

The cost of the failure of the rebellion to acquire a working class backbone was very high. The presence of such a backbone in Tunisia and Egypt, even if insufficient, provided the exposure of a power which would overthrow dictatorship, despite the fact that it did not bring a full victory to proletariat. Following the overthrow of the dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt, the revolution leaned on this backbone and struggled against the counter-revolution. Although the revolution could not be prevented from being stolen by Morsi in Egypt and by Al-Nahda in Tunisia, the most important factor that prevented these countries from being dragged into a sectarian war was this class backbone. The backbone formed by the working class also prevented the fate of Egypt and Tunisia being determined by the imperialist centers as a whole. Despite General al-Sisi's coup supported by imperialism and Saudi Arabia and the power being besieged completely by the EU in Tunisia, and the opposition which exceedingly received its share from the same siege, the internal dynamics still preserve their decisiveness relatively in the politics of these countries. If the future of Egypt and Tunisia is not being discussed in the conferences organized under the auspices of imperialism or the regional powers in foreign cities such as Geneva, Brussels, Astana etc., this is neither attributable to General al-Sisi's Bonapartism in Egypt nor to National Unity Government led by Nidaa Party in Tunisia. The only

factor that prevents these countries from being falling apart is the working class.

The working class in Syria neither took the leadership of the rebellion nor provided a class backbone for it. However, the rebellion was spread within a process which gradually got harder. Tie of public rebellion and Assad power was accompanied by a drag towards a process in which weapons were decisive on both fronts. The effects of imperialism, Zionism and regional powers were significantly decisive in this drag. However, the internal dynamics of the public rebellion in Syria also could not have the potential to stop this drag.

The existence of a channel that opposed the armed struggle in Syria for a long time proves that public rebellion started as a part of the Arab revolution. Local Coordination Committees (LCC), which emerged at the first stage as a result of the spontaneous public movement, intensely accommodated leftist and secular opposition factors. These committees stood up for continuing the rebellion with peaceful methods for a long time. Despite suppressing a series of protests by weapons and despite deaths, they insisted on this attitude. In the beginning, this attitude meant that the form of struggle which emerged in Arab revolution was also accepted in Syria. After some time, LCC's attitude for counter-proliferation policy was converted to an argument that discriminated it from the Islamist and sectarian structures which were directed to armed struggle. However, two determinant factors were required to be present so that these peaceful and mass protests could accomplish results. A class backbone, class organizations and activities were required so that the protests could achieve a power which had the ability to apply sanctions. Another factor was the progress of Arab revolution outside Syria. Under conditions in which a class backbone was not present and formed, the hesitations in Arab revolution and its downward acceleration cancelled out the unarmed protests from being a realistic alternative for the masses.

Protesting armament turned by time into a tool for some leftist groups emerging from the rebellion, for introducing themselves to the West as a democratic and secular alternative. However, being unarmed was not a positive reference for the Western imperialists anymore. The leading name of the opponents who protested armed struggle, Parisian doctor Haytham Manna disclosed that a Syrian businessman with Western passport offered him to arm the opponents. Again, the ambassador of the USA, Robert Ford was going to say him "we would support you, if you had two battalions of soldiers behind you".⁴ Haytham Manna who is against armed struggle was finally going to be the Co-President of the Syrian Democratic Council and was going to work in cooperation with the PYD and YPG, which are the most important armed powers of Syria, until his resignation due to declaration of autonomy by the

4 Fehim Taştekin, *Suriye Yıkıl Git Diren Kal*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015, p.83.

PYD.

The groups with socialist tendency, which are only a few in Syria, also opposed armament and declared that they pursue a third front policy between Assad and takfiri sectarian armed groups. Unfortunately, these groups also point out that as the process progressed and armed clashes completely replaced peaceful mass struggle, many members and supporters of them either “individually” joined the armed struggle or migrated abroad.⁵

When examined from this point of view, as a civil war made an appearance in which armed struggle dominated and sectarian grouping become more decisive, the rebellion which started as a part of the Arab revolution in Syria disappeared without being able to turn into a revolution. It was replaced by a bloody and reactionary civil war.

The first phase of the civil war in Syria: The rise of the FSA

The rise of Free Syrian Army (FSA) left its mark on the first phase of civil war in Syria. Suppression of mass protests by weapons in some places caused the rise of the tension (and deepening of the cracks) within the army.

The opposition groups coming together in the meeting organized in Istanbul on April 26th, 2011, which was named as Istanbul Meeting for Syria, and in the conference organized in Antalya one month later on May 31st, were still talking about the overturn of the regime by peaceful methods or about supporting the democratic struggle of the Syrian people. There were no calls for a diplomatic or military intervention from outside in the final declarations of the meetings.⁶ However, following months of summer witnessed intensification of the armed clashes. As the groups escaping from the army came together, FSA was established on July 29th, 2011 by the ex-general of the Syrian army, Riyadh al-Assad.

However, FSA emerged in the beginning as a reaction movement. Since it lacked a political program it also did not have a military strategy. This political gap was again filled in Istanbul. So-called members of the Syrian National Council (SNC), which was established on August 23rd, were far from representing the mass movements in Syria or the military powers constituting FSA. The chairman was an academic living in France. The main factor building up, collecting and shaping the elements of the council facing western imperialism was Qatar and Saudi Arabia together with Turkey. This way, the political backbone required for the opposition

5 Revolutionary Left Current's declaration of establishment of “People's Liberation Fraction” <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/2014/03/17/revolutionary-left-current-in-syria-establishment-of-the-peoples-liberation-faction-to-commemorate-the-third-anniversary-of-the-syrian-revolution/>.

6 Taştekin, *ibid*, p.84.

in Syria was externally created. Following the establishment of the SNC, the Friday protests called by the opposition were declared as “Friday for International Protection” on September 09th. On September 27th, the FSA officially declared that it started an armed struggle. Afterwards SNC recognized FSA as its official armed wing by the beginning of 2012. Accordingly, the process which started as a part of Arab revolution on March 15th was gradually extinguishing and Syria was being dragged towards a civil war in which it shall pay for the heavy cost of the failure of the revolution.

Year 2012 was FSA’s year of rise. FSA united the armed struggle under its umbrella with the money of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the protection of Turkey and the support of imperialism. FSA caused Assad to recoil at a series of fronts. It created some liberated areas. During this process, Assad’s reform words, dialogue calls and even amnesty announcements were rebounding. FSA, which found the external support in imperialism and in the cooperative states within the region and acquired a considerable military power in Syria, saw these calls as a sign of weakness and preferred to escalate the war. For the careerist officers in FSA and the refugee politicians of SNC who already fled to imperialism, the positions offered to them in the cost of the blood of Syrian people were more important than the future of Syrian people.

By the August of 2012, the panorama was getting clearer. And the future was getting darker. At this stage we analyzed the conditions in Syria as follows:

On March 15th, 2011, the rebellion which started from Daraa city in Syria and spread over the country, was a real part of the Arab revolution wave, in other words, it was a revolution of the dispossessed. Imperialism and reactionary regional allies first tried to force the Assad regime to make reforms as a first method of extinguishing this revolution. However, when the regime proved that it is unwilling or incapable with respect to this issue, imperialist allies tried to build a bourgeois opposition. Turkey had undertaken the main role during this “production” process. Syrian National Council was caused to be established as a dependent opposition. Free Syrian Army was created in Hatay with the money received from Saudi Arabia and Qatar. In addition to this bourgeois opposition which was an international creation, each element of the coalition provided support to the powers which were close to them. Accordingly, these powers gradually became the dominant powers within the country.

The revolution could not beat the regime. Neither the regime could stop the revolution nor the revolution could overturn the regime. It was this state of stalemate, in which the bourgeois opposition and its various factors seemed to be realistic as a third option. There was no revolutionary leadership whom the people could trust. The revolution could progress over wide, spontaneous organizations called “Local Coordination Committees”. People, killed as thousands, ten thousands,

started to approach “realistic” solutions step by step. The strategy applied today by imperialism and Arab reaction with the active support of Tayyip Erdoğan, seems to have produced its fruits: Syrian revolution is leaving the stage, and is being replaced by bourgeois opposition. Or maybe by the lords of war.⁷

The second phase: The era of the warlords and the rise of salafism, takfirism, and sectarianism

In the first phase, US imperialism pursued a policy in which the aid provided to the forces in Syria, named as “opposition”, by humanitarian aid, excluding weapons. However, the possibility of having a solution without weapons in Syria soon completely died out. On June 30th, 2012, the first meeting in Geneva, in which UN Security Council (standing members the USA, Britain, France, Russia and China) and the foreign ministers of Iraq, Turkey, Qatar, and the representatives of the EU and UN participated, ended without taking any concrete decisions, beyond expressions of goodwill and without any significant effect on the area.

Those who desired to overthrow Assad did not have the chance to intervene the process in Syria, except to arm the opposition. However, this option brought forward the risk, which the USA tried to avoid from the very beginning, of the weapon aid being seized by al-Qaeda and similar radical organizations in Syria.

The USA, which insistently refused to get involved with its military forces, had no other way but to arm the opposition through its regional allies. At this point, although Qatar and Saudi Arabia were also allies of the USA, Turkey, as a NATO member ally, came to the fore as a more reliable and stable alternative. However, as the USA avoided soiling its hands, it had to provide its regional allies an area in which they can move more autonomously. Even the benefits of Turkey and the USA in Syria seemed to overlap in general, there were significant differences in the political approaches and priorities of both countries since the start of the process. While the USA preferred for Syria – realistic or not – a more extensive power alternative facing West, AKP in Turkey invested all in strengthening of Ikhwan and Ikhwan being the dominant force in the structure to be formed post-Assad.

The USA saw Syria dominated by Ikhwan or more radical Sunni Islamist groups, as risky with respect to its own and Israel’s interests. At this point, the difference of orientation between Turkey and the USA caused the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, to announce that they had withdrawn their support from SNC. SNC was gradually protected more by Turkey and was converted into an instrument of Ikhwan. The USA was not pleased with this, and Clinton expressed this by proper

⁷ *Gerçek* newspaper, “Suriye: Rejim Çöküyor Yerine Ne Gelecek?”, 18.08.2012, <https://gercek-gazetesi.net/akdeniz-dunya-devriminin-yeni-havzasi/suriye-rejim-cokuyor-yerine-ne-gelecek>.

language, by questioning SNC's capacity for representation.⁸ Afterwards, a new meeting was held in Doha, again with the initiative of the USA, and The National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (NCSROP) was established.

Although it was claimed to establish a more extensive roof, the real meaning of Doha was the USA efforts to avoid placing all its eggs in Turkey's basket. While SNC's center is Hatay, NCSROP's center is in Cairo. Even if the transfer of the center to Egypt, where Ikhwan is in power through Morsi, seems to conflict with the USA's distant attitude for Ikhwan, actually it is just vice versa. While SNC is a direct production of Turkey/Erdoğan, there is a "Made in USA" sign on NCSROP. With NCSROP, the USA is able to intervene Ikhwan, which is seen as dangerous by the USA, directly, not through intermediation of Turkey. While the USA was making this move, Israel had pressed the button for a bloody attack to Gaza. Hamas, which was at the target of the attack, was in the position of Palestine branch of Ikhwan. However, Morsi took a position against this Zionist attack which tied up Hamas's hands, instead of taking a position beside it. Morsi and Erdoğan together attempted to mediate in favor of Zionism and prevented Hamas from giving a response.⁹

The USA headed for aligning Ikhwan with diplomatic and political instruments and Israel, with military methods, especially by smoothing its anti-Zionist aspects. In this respect, killing of Ahmed al-Jabari, military wing leader of Hamas, by an Israeli rocket on November 14th, 2012 is very typical. Since Hamas fought directly with Israel within Ikhwan movement, the military wing within Hamas which has military solidarity with Iran constituted the most distant structures to the sectarian war in Syria. The political headquarter of Hamas was in Syria and Assad had evacuated this headquarter by the beginning of the year and expelled the Hamas leaders from Syria including the General Secretary Khaled Mashal. Hamas's relations with Hezbollah, which was one of the most important allies against Israel, were also getting worse. When these developments were viewed from Gaza or the West Bank, they were not as it was seen from Cairo, Hatay or Doha. At this stage, the rise of resistance against the common enemy Israel could form another center of attraction against the sectarian war in Syria. Killing of al-Jabari was a heavy blow struck on this policy and was a clear message. As a result, the resistance bond between Hamas and Hezbollah gradually weakened during the following period. Hamas published announcements that Hezbollah is required to withdraw from Syria; afterwards, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the religious leader of Ikhwan, named Hezbollah, which meant the

⁸ Bipartisan Policy Center, *US-Turkish Cooperation, Toward a Post Assad Syria*, <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/default/files/BPC%20US-Turkey-Syria.pdf>.

⁹ *Gerçek* newspaper, "Suriye: ABD Erdoğan'a 'sen yapamadın kenara çekil dedi'" 07.12.2012 <http://gercekgazetesi.net/uluslararasi/suriye-abd-erdogana-sen-yapamadın-kenara-cekil-dedi>.

God's party, as Hezb al-Shaytan, which meant the devil's party, which would bring the bonds to a breaking point.¹⁰

While the USA tried to save the opposition in Syria from Islamic radicalism and especially Ikhwan's hegemony with its NCSROP move, it also had played the sectarian card, so that the development process of the civil war does not result in conditions that are against itself and Israel. A Western and secular bourgeois opposition becoming dominant in Syria remained uncovered on the field. On the other hand, the lords of war order created over the defeat of the revolution in Syria constituted a great basis for the sectarianism to grow and flourish.

On the other hand, the USA's for the inclusion of al-Nusra Front, which is bonded to al-Qaeda, in the terrorist organizations list received reactions both from the Ikhwan side and SNC. The Chairman of SNC, "democrat intellectual" George Sabra defended that al-Nusra was a part of Syrian Revolution, and explained that Riyadh al-Shaqfeh, the leader of Ikhwan in Syria living in Turkey, saw al-Nusra as a group fighting against Assad and protecting the people. Objections were being raised on the NCSROP side, for inclusion of al-Nusra in the terrorists list. Erdoğan joined this chorus on behalf of Turkey, claiming that the West exaggerated al-Qaeda's presence in Syria: "al-Qaeda would fall of the map in Syria. When the opposition achieves results there, there would be nothing left there as al-Qaeda."¹¹

This way, although included in the terrorists list by the USA, al-Nusra gradually increased its power on the ground by using the atmosphere created by sectarianism embittered by imperialism and Zionism. CIA and MIT (National Intelligence Agency of Turkey) organized the armament of the groups tied to FSA in Syria, jointly in Gaziantep. Even a special interview system was established so that the weapons sent do not go to Nusra or its derivatives. However, it is known that this structure did not make any discrimination among the armed groups until al-Nusra was included in the terrorists list and that the weapons acquired by many groups marketing themselves as moderate opponents were sold in the Syrian civil war market. Consequently, it was disclosed by an authority of FSA to *Daily Star* newspaper that FSA shared ammunitions in the joint operations made together with al-Nusra and that anti-aircraft guns received from Saudi Arabia worth 5 thousand dollars were sold to al-Nusra which paid 15 thousand dollars.¹²

Under these conditions, takfiri and sectarian organizations with salafi belief rapidly came to the fore and started to become the dominant color of this multi-colored fan named as "opponents". Al-Nusra which made a name for itself by a series of

10 <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/06/hamas-hezbollah-syria-iran-lebanon-palestinians.html>.

11 Taştekin, *ibid.*, p.219-220.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

suicide bombers in Aleppo, Hama and Damascus started to rise rapidly. Islamic State of Iraq which got stronger as Iraq branch of al-Qaeda changed its name afterwards as Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIL) and shall start to appear on the stage more powerful by forcing all the salafi groups including al-Nusra for submission. Among these organizations, Ahrar al-Sham, another salafi and sectarian organization appearing on Syrian stage previously, had risen to the level of “moderate opponent” being parallel to the rise of al-Nusra and ISIL. Many founders and directors of Ahrar al-Sham, which was the most significant ally of al-Nusra, were also of al-Qaeda origin. After ISIL broke its ties with al-Nusra, the latter weakened considerably and received significant support from Ahrar-al Sham

As the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda, al-Nusra was a part of bloody “global jihad with the USA”. ISIL was on the other hand on its way to becoming a state in the regions it dominated. It controlled several important oil-producing regions of Iraq and Syria. By time, Ahrar al-Sham became the main representative of Turkey and Qatar in the region and had undertaken the role of conveyor belt for the support given to al-Nusra.¹³

As a result, salafi, takfiri and sectarian organizations had risen step by step being contrary to Erdoğan’s words “al-Qaeda would fall of the map in Syria if opposition is successful.” and the “moderate opponent” groups, especially Ikhwan, which Turkey invested in, had fallen off the map.

Two important milestones ending the second phase: Hezbollah’s appearance on the stage and Ghouda massacre

As the Syrian civil war acquired a more sectarian character, and as the weight of salafi, takfiri and sectarian organizations increased, this state had created a consolidating effect for the other party. Lebanon’s Hezbollah providing political support to Assad power until that time, started to take place in the armed resistance step by step as of the first months of 2013. During the first phase in which the public rebellion broke out in Syria, Hezbollah’s leader Hasan Nasrallah was criticizing the opposition for not having a Palestine policy, but was not explicitly nurturing enmity. However, takfiri and sectarian offensiveness that had risen in time opened the way for Hezbollah’s Alawi and Sunni Arabs to appear on Syrian stage as based on the legal defense grounds. Hezbollah was participating in the clashes during the first phase of the civil war only at the borders of Lebanon and mainly in the issues of defense. The first clashes in Syria between Hezbollah and FSA was realized in February 2013. While the involvement of Hezbollah in Syrian civil war was being discussed for some time, Hasan Nasrallah gave a speech on April 30th, and said that

¹³ Fehim Taştekin, *Karanlık Çöktüğünde*, İstanbul, Doğan Kitap, 2016, p.164.

“they will not allow Syria to fall into the hands of the USA, Israel and takfiris”. An experienced and well-armed guerilla power, Hezbollah, which kicked Israel out of Lebanon in 2000, brought Israel down to its knees in 2006, showed its power as a game spoiler in Syrian civil war when it cleared off takfiri, sectarian powers in Qusair town on Lebanon border. Hezbollah were striking against takfiris with teams of 15-50 members, and was leaving such acquired regions to Syrian army. Hezbollah prevented the war from entering into Lebanon by controlling the border of Lebanon and by doing this, it also interrupted a significant supply source of the sectarian organizations in Syria.

The main reason for Hezbollah’s appearance being a milestone is that it demolished the policy which apparently replaced FSA’s failure at the first phase by organizations acting on sectarian motivations. Although these organizations appear to have attracted the most alive factors of the opposition during the first phase and have acquired acceleration, they enabled the power in Syria to acquire a strong support, both military and political, by forcing the counter front to pull themselves together, and by pushing onto the stage a power such as Hezbollah, which accommodates many features lacked by the Syrian army. Hezbollah took the stage not only with its guerillas but also with its prestige due to bringing Israel down to its knees, which cannot be forgotten in the Arab world for a long time.

While the organizations on the stage backed against Hezbollah and Syrian army advanced in Humus and Damascus, Israel entered the scene. Israel started to claim that Syria used chemical weapons and these weapons were being seized by Hezbollah. With this attack, Israel was trying to increase the pressure on Syria and Hezbollah and was planning to form the grounds for its military intervention in the worst scenario. Based on this, Israel started to increase the frequency of its air attacks at certain targets in Syria, which were made from time to time.

However, chemical attack claims did not result in the required effect for an external intervention which would also involve the USA. On the contrary, the chemical weapon attack and massacre in August in East Ghouda moved Syria to the edge of an imperialist intervention. The USA interpreted this attack as crossing over the red lines. The chorus of Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia were keeping the rhythm for the intervention. The information related to Ghouda massacre was far from being definite from the start. Rather than reflecting the reality, the death toll given was like the measure of the authority making the announcement, reflecting its extent of sympathy for external intervention. The death toll declared for the chemical massacre by France was 281, by Britain was 350, by doctors without borders was 355, by Observatory for Human Rights was 502, by Revolution General Commission was 635, by National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces

was 1300, by the USA was 1429, by FSA was 1729.¹⁴

The options of intervening in Syria was on the table for the USA. For the USA to have its soldiers on the stage, as famously expressed “boots to touch the ground” was not on the agenda yet. However, the options between a punishing attack and an extensive attack to overturn the regime were being assessed. As the dose of the attack decreased, risk also decreased, but also the expectation to fix the balances that changed in favor of Assad in Syria was also weakening. As the dimension of the attack increased, the regionalization of the war, direction of Assad towards the benefits of Israel and the USA, unforeseeable reactions of Iran and to some extent, Russia, were in question. Even if a solution which would not trigger such reactions was found, the winner of the intervention in Syria was going to be al-Nusra in each case and salafi, takfiri and sectarian groups, mainly ISIL, which made a fast entry to the stage. To fight on the same front with al-Qaeda was something which was not easy for the USA to explain to its people. Moreover, the military results of such organizations acquiring an uncontrolled power could not be anticipated.

Under these conditions, Obama preferred to have a decision adopted by the congress in order to provide political legality the domestic public opinion with respect to the attack to be made. But he had difficulties in convincing the congress of the USA. Other Western imperialist powers including Britain started to show reluctance for a possible intervention. Actually, what lied underneath was that although the USA imperialism explicitly accused Assad in front of the world public opinion, it was not sure about who had performed the chemical attack. Accordingly, the inspections of the UN inspectors increased the suspicions. The basic thesis of Syria and the powers that support Syria was that it was not logical for the Syrian army to make such an attack. Of course this defense could not be effective, alone. However, these theses suddenly were based on a strong support when UN inspectors disclosed that the chemical missiles launched over Ghouda were fired at most from a distance of 2 km and it was impossible to have these missiles to be fired from an area controlled by the Syrian army. Afterwards, the information that the “opposition” groups, especially al-Nusra had access to chemical weapons turned the attentions to the takfiri and sectarian groups which had benefits in triggering the external intervention.

However, the USA was never in full trust with respect to such groups. The doubt of the USA that Turkey and Saudi Arabia, its close allies in Syrian civil war, are involved in the chemical attack in Ghouda massacre, was going to require the USA to seriously review its policy pursued in Syria. The region of the attack was dominated by the salafi takfiri sectarian group, namely Liwa al-Islam, which was protected by

¹⁴ Taştekin, *Suriye Yıkıl Git, Diren Kal*, p. 262.

Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, a few months ago, a group of “opponents” were caught with 2 kilograms of sarin gas in Adana, Turkey in May.

An article published by Pulitzer awarded journalist Seymour Hersh 8 months after the massacre showed that Obama administration faced very serious claims. According to Hersh, the attack was not only realized by al-Nusra and its allies, but also was realized within the knowledge of Tayyip Erdoğan and support of MİT and gendarme. Hersh also claimed that during a meeting between Obama and Erdoğan, when Erdoğan said that the USA’s red line was exceeded, Obama, referring to Hakan Fidan, Undersecretary of MİT, replied “we know what you did with the radicals in Syria”. In the same article, it was written that the USA intelligence warned Obama government that Turkey wanted to trigger an external intervention and that there are elements trying to reach the chemicals used in the production of sarin gas both in Turkey and Saudi Arabia.¹⁵

The USA government never verified the claims of Hersh. However, when we look at the political moves the USA made following Ghouda attack, the USA’s attitude in the management of the chemical crisis and the changes in its attitude concerning the Syria policy seem to be consistent with Hersh’s claims.

Although the USA spoke clearly in front of public that Assad used chemical weapons, it made a sudden move when Kerry laid down the condition that Syria should discharge the chemical weapons within two weeks. Russia promptly responded to this move, intervened and started the process for Syria to discharge its chemical weapon stocks under the supervision of the United Nations. Obama avoided entering an indefinite process, with the provocations of its allies and their extensions on the stage and also apparently protected the USA’s red lines by saying that a political conclusion to be achieved by a potential attack was achieved through diplomatic methods.

The main lines of the new policy acquired by imperialism at this stage can be summarized as below: Distrust in the salafi, takfiri and sectarian groups, avoidance of a Syria new policy implemented on regional allies such as Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, moving away from a line prioritizing the overthrow of Assad, accepting a transition process with Assad and preparation of more dialogue grounds with Russia with which more predictable diplomatic relations can be established, even if strategic benefits conflict... Following the Ghouda attack, the USA’s Syria policy was being shaped with these approaches.

The symbolic event declaring the end of the second phase of Syrian civil war was the Geneva II Conference on Syria. Geneva II Conference on Syria did not bring any concrete result for the solution in Syria. It was as unsuccessful as the first

¹⁵ Seymour Hersh, “The Red Line the Rat Line”, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n08/seymour-hersh/the-red-line-and-the-rat-line>.

one. However, the transitional government, which anticipated the change of Assad regime in the first conference was replaced in Geneva II by a new approach anticipating the presence of Assad during the transitional period. It is apparent that this was an achievement for Assad. As a result, the voices against Geneva II were being raised by the front against Assad. Geneva II also involved Russia in the process more effectively from the political and diplomatic point of view.

The third phase: War with ISIL, transition with Assad, divided Syria

ISIL's getting on the stage in Syria and gradually getting stronger constituted a milestone in the course of the civil war. ISIL, being different from the other takfiri and sectarian organizations, had determined its field of activity as Iraq (in a manner to include Lebanon) and greater Syria. The target of the organization was to establish an Islamic State on this land. ISIL's state formation perspective and caliphate claim is a military and political strategy enveloped in an ideological package.¹⁶

With this strategy, ISIL overtook the oil areas and decreased the dependency on the Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia or the imperialist aid, transferred to tax collection level from racketeering, and acquired tax revenue of about 8 million dollars per month. Beside the weapon aid received externally and the weapons acquired as spoils on the field, it added the weapons produced by itself by using the industrial capacities of the regions occupied; the most important of all was that it gathered considerable number of militants from the salafi, takfiri and sectarian organizations by its state structure and caliphate claim, created the legal grounds in its own way on the regions dominated by it, in its war against these organizations, and also had the chance to direct the international militant flow to its own region in a denser manner. It increased its influence in Libya, Afghanistan and Boko Haram, which controls a wide area on the north of Nigeria, obeyed the control of ISIL. With the effect it had on the salafi circles worldwide, it acquired the capacity to carry out attacks in many imperialist metropolitans such as France, England, Belgium, and stepped ahead of al-Qaeda not only in Syria but also with this capacity. This strategy enabled ISIL to develop pragmatic alliance relations with the local tribes and former Baath elements, despite the harshness of the religious and political ideology it represented. This salafi pragmatism maybe played the key role in ISIL's progress and the locations it occupied in Iraq, especially the occupation of Mosul. The violence ISIL used on the field and the propaganda of such violence with sophisticated and professional methods are frequently emphasized. The significance of this pro-

¹⁶ *Gerçek* newspaper, "Irak ve Şam İslam Devleti Nedir?", <http://gercekgazetesi.net/uluslararasi/irak-ve-sam-islam-devleti-isid-nedir>.

paganda war cannot be denied. However, it is not the propaganda that makes ISIL step ahead of the other organizations, but it is the political and military strategy that we mentioned.

ISIL started its move by establishing its own dominance in the regions which were occupied by al-Nusra and its allied salafis during the second phase of the civil war. First of all, it acquired dominance over Deir ez-Zor, which is the oil area of Syria, then it advanced to Raqqa. Step by step, it eliminated the rival organizations in these areas or bonded them to itself. Afterwards, it provided dominance in the same manner, over Jarabulus, al-Rai and Tell Abyad on Turkish border. After taking over the control of Deir ez-Zor oil, ISIL was finding political center, a capital for itself by Raqqa, and was having the chance to open to the world by reaching Turkish border. Up to this stage, ISIL did not receive any serious opposition from the imperialists. Not until ISIL re-directed to Iraq and attacked Mosul. Although ISIL started its adventure as Islamic State of Iraq, it actually acquired its positions within the boundaries of Syria until 2014. By the beginning of 2014, Fallujah, which was the castle of Iraq Sunnis and had a strategic significance on the road leading to Baghdad, was occupied by ISIL. On June 10th, it acquired Mosul. Then, the control of Baiji and were also easily taken by ISIL.

This way, despite being very dangerous and out of control for imperialism ISIL, which is in the position of “the enemy of my enemy” suddenly had risen as a structure shaking the status of Iraq from its roots, which the USA tried to protect. Accordingly, the USA decided to struggle militarily with ISIL after this stage, by establishing a coalition against ISIL. A coalition was established under the hegemony of the USA against ISIL which started with about 40 countries as members and increased to 60 members by time and in August 2014, the air attacks started against ISIL. Russia, Iran and Syria did not take part in this coalition against ISIL. Despite this, the President of France, Hollande, was making calls for the moderate opponents in Syria in the first meeting of the coalition held in Paris and Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which provided the grounds for the growth of ISIL and which offered direct or indirect political and financial support, took part in the coalition. In other words, there was no coalition against ISIL in a real sense. The main military power of this structure established was the USA. The political purpose was primarily to interrupt the support provided to ISIL by the regional allies of the USA which are the countries on Sunni axis. After all, the war against ISIL was becoming one of the main agenda for the Syria and Iraq policy of the imperialist powers, but not for Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

The air attacks of the coalition led by the USA never had the desired effect. However, it was a very significant milestone for starting the process, in which the original players took the stage at a step where a war fought through representatives

was blocked. Now Syria was turning into a stage on which the first rehearsals of a world war emerging on the horizon were practiced:

What is done is done, following the USA, France and Russia also militarily involved in Syrian civil war almost simultaneously. Now, if we are to express somehow in a sarcastic manner, about 65 countries out of 200 countries in the world are fighting on 185 thousand square kilometer land of Syria! 62 members of the coalition established by the USA (in which Turkey is also included now), Syria itself, Iran providing support to Syria behind the scenes, and now Russia in fact. Now add warlords to this: the barbarian political unit of ISIL's leader Abu Baqr al-Baghdadi, calling himself the "Caliph". Also consider an organization with its own army: Lebanon's Hezbollah. Almost the whole world swarming in a country which had population of 23 million just before the war!¹⁷

The milestones of the third phase: Kobani war

Strategic absence of a land force fighting on the field continued to be the weak link of the USA's Syria policy. The USA reactivated the train-equip project which was tried in the previous phases of the civil war but which was not successful. Obama had found a fund of 500 million dollars from the congress for this project. However, the main issue was that who were going to be trained and equipped with this fund. FSA had already disappeared, and even the most moderate of the remaining ones were the organizations which could be trained and equipped but could not be sent alone to Syria. Those trained and equipped were either being destroyed as soon as they enter Syria or being taken as captives or were directly going and joining al-Nusra.

Turkey was never willing to play an active role in the struggle against ISIL. Even the occupation of Mosul by ISIL and sudden attack at Turkish consulate and taking hostages inside did not result in any motivation in AKP power against ISIL. When those in the consulate were taken as hostages by ISIL, Davutoğlu was still identifying ISIL as a "terrorized" (not terrorist) group composed of angry young men. Erdoğan's disclosure for Kobani as "it fell, it is about to fall", which caused public indignation, was an indication that this organization was seen by Turkish government as a tactical ally against PYD dominance in Rojava; war against ISIL was far from being a priority. Following the occupation of Tell Abyad by YPG, ISIL promptly attacked Kobani and there were significant claims that Turkish borders were also used during this attack.

¹⁷ Sungur Savran, "Putin'in Hamlesi Erdoğan'ın önünü kesmek için", <http://gercekgazetesi.net/gundemdekiler/putinin-hamlesi-erdoganin-onunu-kesmek-icin>.

PYD and YPG were conducting a defensive war in the area. Rojava people saw this war as self-defense against the massacres of ISIL, and supported and joined it. It was not any external motivation, monetary support, political expectation etc., but this motivation enabled the formation of an effective and strong military power. One of the most important strategic powers of YPG was YPJ, which was formed of women warriors. Rojava was the center of a major awakening for women in Syria which turned into a hell in the hands of takfiri and sectarian structures. It is doubtless that the women's struggle practice of the Kurdish movement that spread over the years was determinant in this awakening. The role of women was one of the most important factors that increased the prestige of PYD and YPG in the whole world. The mobilization of women was also an advantage from the military aspect, which no other power possessed on the stage of Syria.

All the developments channelized the USA to cooperate with YPG, the armed branch of PYD, which carried out the most effective fight against ISIL on the field. However, the channelization also accommodated many risks for the USA. Although the tradition from which PYD emerged did not have any hostility for the USA since many long years, it was not the USA-lover formation like Barzani. Moreover, PYD had close relations with PKK which was fighting with Turkey, the major NATO power in the region. Even if PYD was to be pulled towards the line of the USA, the tensions to be lived with Turkey could always cause problems.

The milestone for the USA for acting together with PYD and YPG was of course ISIL's siege of Kobani. The USA waited until Kobani was on the brink of falling. Pro-American Barzani's peshmerga also waited the weakening of its rival PYD in Rojava. Kurdish people started a major rebellion on Turkish side of the border between October 06th-12th, in order to prevent the fall of Kobani. This rebellion caused Turkey to soften its policy. The USA also took this chance to be the rescuer of Kurdish people. Kobani was rescued. Kurdish people won a victory. However the price of this victory was going to be paid by Kurdish people. PYD leadership, instead of being cautious against the USA, started to perceive the relation established with the coalition at a strategic level and even used this as a political propaganda material. Rather than gaining independence from the USA, it pursued a policy which got more under the USA's wings.

Following the rescue of Kobani, the USA gradually developed its relations with PYD and YPG. It made Kurdish people pay the price for Kobani by taking PYD under its political dominance. All the gains in Rojava were won as a result of PYD's policy of pursuing a third way against Assad and opposition. As PYD entered the political influence of the USA, it also lost the political maneuver area, which had provided major gains for it.

We saw a striking example of this condition after the USA struck the air space of

Syria with Tomahawk missiles. Following the attack, PYD's leader Salih Muslim gave an interview to *Voice of America* and said: "I hope that this will not be limited only to Syrian regime and the other parties, which targeted the civilians and used chemical weapons, are also called to account. I believe that this attack shall have positive results, because those who do not believe in the political solutions shall find the correct path and shall understand that continuing the war shall not provide any results. America directly takes part in this and cannot remain silent." This blank check given to the USA by Salih Muslim has no logical explanation with respect to PYD. When a close cooperation was established between the Russian soldiers and Syrian army in Manbij and Afrin, when Afrin and Kobani cantons united over the area in which Syrian army had gained the control, if PYD leader applauds the USA's attack to Syria, this seriously damages the relations between Russia and Syria. Salih Muslim and PYD are neither that stupid nor an admirer of the USA so that they don't understand this. However, the alliance established with the USA in Rojava caused the USA to strategically settle in the area which prevented PYD from pursuing an independent politics. Salih Muslim had to make this illogical statement due to this fact.

When PYD leadership and Kurdish movement in general thought that walking side by side with the USA would protect and develop its gains in Rojava, the issue for the USA was to convert Rojava into a stable headquarter in the third phase in which overturning Syrian regime was not the priority anymore.

The milestones of the third phase: Russia's move and the battle of Aleppo

The third phase in which the war against ISIL became more determinant, created the conditions appropriate for Russia's military appearance on Syrian stage. Russia used the advantages of being in Syria all the way, based on the legal call of Syrian government. It fortified its military power by opening new headquarters in addition to Tartus headquarter from Soviet times. After reaching its fortification to a certain level, Russia appeared on the stage on October 7th, 2015, by sending 26 guided missiles to 11 targets at a distance of 1500 km. over the Caspian. Afterwards, Syrian army continued to advance owing to the air support provided by Russia. Majority of the air operations of Russia were intensified on the areas on which Syrian army had advanced and ISIL was not effective in these areas in general. This state caused Russia to be criticized seriously for hitting FSA and the moderate opposition. However, Russia easily avoided these critics. Russia had declared through Lavrov that it does not see FSA as a terrorist organization, before staging its missile show. Afterwards, it went further and said that it can provide air support to FSA, which is

supported by the USA, against ISIL.¹⁸

After all, Russia never accepted that it hit FSA. In fact, Russia's attacks were targeting primarily al-Nusra and various salafi, takfiri and sectarian groups which were its allies. Although these groups showed themselves as FSA, those criticizing Russia could not insist on their "FSA is being hit" claims when the circumstances were apparent. By referring legality to an organization which is not on the stage, Russia achieved to keep itself within the borders of the political solution desk and also to use an intense firing force against the powers against Syrian army.

The only serious reply to this move of Russia was downing of Russian SU-24 warplane on Hatay border by Turkey. Although these days, this event is completely pinned on the officers who are the members of Gülen's community, everything was clearly perceived during those days in which such event had occurred:

Turkish government ties the dawning of the warplane to border violation. However, since they do not know how to apply "d" of diplomacy, right after that, they confess that this is not the case.

Tayyip Erdoğan says: "...the area is not the area in which there is ISIL terror istorganization. Don't let anyone fool anyone. There are only Bayırbucak Turkmens, our cognates, our relatives there and by saying that they are hitting ISIL terrorist organization, they are hitting Bayırbucak Turkmens there." Davutoğlu goes further and says "Whoever shoots Bayırbucak Turkmens, Aleppo Arabs, or Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens in Azaz, whether Syrian regime or terror organizations or external intervening factors, our message for them is clear." Why does it go further? "We will down them again"!

Accordingly, the problem is not border violation, it is the protection of Turkmens. Okay, then does Syrian army bomb our "cognates" with the support of Russian bombing for no reason? For example, as in Nusebin, is it there to kill a mother who goes out for dumping the ashes of her stove? No, there is a military target there, because Turkey armed Turkmens and established a war force bonded to it. Civil war continues. That is what is happening. You first create an armed force on the land of others, then name it with Ottoman wannabe names as Yavuz Sultan Selim Brigade or Sultan Murat Brigade, then say that you cannot bomb this military power!¹⁹

These lines published in *Gerçek* newspaper's website clearly reveal the case. Downing of Russian warplane was the reaction of Turkey to the risk of closing of the final door, through which it intervened Syria through its representatives. Mo-

18 BBC, Syria War: Russia is ready to assist FSA rebels, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34627441>.

19 *Gerçek* gazetesi, "Dünya Savaşı mı İstiyorsunuz?", 25.11.2015, <http://gercekgazetesi.net/gundemdekiler/dunya-savasi-mi-istiyorsunuz>.

reover, there was also an initiation, which was made to include NATO in order to balance Russia's gradually increasing weight. Politicians of AKP and so-called security specialists created a new concept and started to defend rapid "Natofication" of the event. However, since the nature of the structures active in the area under the code name Bayırbucak Turkmens was known by the whole world, the event could not be Natoficated and Syrian airspace became the prohibited zone for flights for Turkey due to Russian air defense missiles and planes.

Downing of Russian warplane, this way indirectly led the way to the fall of Aleppo. Syrian army sieging Aleppo with the support of Russia took over the control of the city, at the cost of an extensive destruction in the city and massacre reactions by the world public opinion. It was not only the organizations which were not among the losers in battle of Aleppo. The protector of these wars, Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia of Sunni axis also got a heavy defeat.

With the fall of Aleppo, salafi, takfiri and sectarian organizations were stuck in Idlib. The initiative in this area is completely in the hands of Russia and Syrian army. However, it cannot be expected that Idlib would fall rapidly and without any cost. Due to this reason, Russia and Syria aim to raise the conflicts between the organizations in the area to the level of clashes by increasing their military pressure on Idlib.

As a result, Assad, who acquired a certain level of safety and stability as Hezbollah entered the stage by the end of the second phase of the civil war, had acquired a new initiative at least on the west of Syria and at significant portion of strategic centers as Russia appeared on the field.

The milestones of the third phase: Euphrates shield

After downing of the Russian warplane, Turkey had to face the reality of closing down of all the Syrian doors in the military area. The Syrian policy applied by Davutoğlu had completely collapsed. Davutoğlu's grave was dug by Erdoğan due to this unsuccessful foreign policy in addition to a series of other factors and Turkey tried to overcome the problem by a new political move which consented the transition with Assad and supporting Russia.

The coup attempt on July 15th, and the fact that this coup was supported by the USA and NATO created a new situation. Turkey was trying to normalize its relations with Russia. It was Russia which converted the unsuccessful coup attempt of July 15th into an opportunity. Russia achieved minimizing Turkey's reaction for the siege of Aleppo, by keeping the initiative at each step. Turkish government did not raise concrete and effective objections for what happened in Aleppo, except a few protests of low volume.

Turkey now had to adapt itself to the reality of the third phase. It was impossible

to have any influence on Syria without taking part in the war against ISIL. Under these conditions, Euphrates Shield operation was on the agenda. The officially declared target of Euphrates Shield operation was the presence of ISIL on Jarabulus-Azaz line. The reason for the operation was given as the suicide bombing massacre performed by ISIL during a wedding ceremony in Gaziantep. In order to justify this operation in the domestic policy and provide war motivation for TAF (Turkish Armed Forces), first it was unofficially, then afterwards, more explicitly emphasized that the operation was made against the presence of PYD in the area and the uniting of cantons in Rojava, which were created by PYD.

The official target of Euphrates Shield was in harmony with the third phase of the civil war. ISIL was on the target. Although all the salafi, sectarian, takfiri formations had participated in the operation under the cover of FSA or Turkmen power, the USA was not trusting these powers, but was trusting NATO army TAF which accompanied them. Russia assessed Euphrates Shield as an opportunity for dragging Turkey into a trap. Russia was in a state in which it could close Syrian airspace to Turkish planes at any time it desires. After downing of SU-24, Russia kept Turkish Air Forces away from Syria this way. Turkey did not have the chance to perform Euphrates Shield operation without obtaining the consent of Russia. After taking this consent, it would not have the chance to remain in the area as contrary to the consent of Russia. While the price to be paid by not letting Turkey in the airspace of Syria was limited, if Russia dragged Turkey into the trap, then Russia was going to have Turkey pay greater prices. And that was exactly what happened. Turkey did not exceed even by a millimeter, the borders drawn by Russia. When the final stage of the operation al-Bab was occupied by TAF and FSA flagged forces, Russia's official authorities said "The borders agreed with Turkey are reached". Our anticipation from the very first date that Euphrates Shield would turn into Euphrates trap was going to realize this way.

TAF and FSA tried to force the borders drawn by Russia at two points. The first one was during al-Bab siege. When TAF and FSA tried to perform the siege a little wider, Russia hit TAF "by mistake" and caused the death of 3 soldiers. Of course it was not a coincidence that the president of CIA was in Turkey at the moment when Russia hit TAF by mistake. Russia was not expecting Turkey to exit from NATO in consideration of the consent given to Turkey, but it was also clear that it wanted to prevent Turkey from playing the USA's game in full.

The second event happened when TAF and FSA headed for Manbij. While al-Bab was being sieged, Syrian army supported by Russia was having operations in order to block the whole road on the south going down to Euphrates river. Manbij was the only way where Erdoğan and AKP could realize the fantasy of going to Raqqa without coming across Russia and Syria. However, this fantasy was not

within the boundaries of Russia's consent. Russia intervened the process in order to keep Turkey within the boundaries of the consent, not because it was in alliance with PYD and YPG, but because it did not want Euphrates Shield to be broken at any point. The Russian soldiers were directly sent to Manbij, the eastern wing, and Afrin, the western wing of the trap. When Turkey did not comply with the borders orally agreed, Russia was surrounding these borders with its armored vehicles and soldiers. With regards to Manbij, Turkey had in hand, the promise "YPG forces shall withdraw to the east of Euphrates" given by the USA. However, it could say nothing to Russia. Russia's buffer zone between TAF and FSA, and Manbij meant being released from the pressure of sending YPG to the east of Euphrates for the USA and as a result of this they did not say anything for the presence of Russia. Also they did not have the ability to prevent this militarily.

As a result, the trap was closed, and moreover, was locked by the soldiers and armored forces of Russia. The closing ceremony was performed with the folk dance of the Russians with YPG members. At this stage, MGK (The National Security Council) had no other option but to declare the end of Euphrates Shield. On the other hand, Erdoğan stated that there will be other stages of the operation. To flesh out these statements, which make one think that Rojava shall be targeted with respect to Syria, it is evident that the civil war in Syria is required to enter a new phase.²⁰ Together with this, the indications that the civil war is progressing towards a new phase are increasing.

The characteristic features of the third phase

The most important element of the third phase of Syrian civil war is ISIL's appearance on the stage. Increasing power of ISIL and unwillingness of the USA's allies Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia in fighting with ISIL, cancelled out the priority of overthrowing Assad. The priority of the USA was now on acquiring zones of influence in Syria and providing the security of Israel, instead of the target of overthrowing Assad.

Accordingly, the USA reached a political agreement with Russia which can be named as "Transition with Assad, solution without Assad". In the military area, it ignored the bombing of the opposition by Russian and Syrian armies as long as it does not intervene its potential zones of influence targeted. In this period, the USA gave the priority on making Rojava its own zone of influence and military headquarter. Although it did not directly made any military attacks against Assad, it acquired as an invisible red line that Syrian army should not be present on Israel

²⁰ Turkey's probable military intervention scenarios for Syria and Iraq are explained in *Gerçek* newspaper's 91. Issue in the article titled "Suriye ve Irak'ta kanlı sürprizlere hayır!". <http://gercek-gazetesi.net/uluslararası/suriye-ve-irakta-kanli-surprizlere-hayir>.

and Jordan border and Iraq border. Within this frame, whenever Syrian army approached Golan heights, it was hit by Israel warplanes and rockets. During Syrian army's advancement in Deir ez-Zor, the warplanes of the USA hit Syrian soldiers "by mistake".²¹

On both fronts, we see that takfiri, sectarian groups and ISIL reacquired the sites they lost following the attacks of the USA and Israel. In other words, the USA's war with ISIL plays a key role at this phase. However, it is also possible to see that this war is also determined politically according to the priorities of the third phase.

In the third phase, the USA's withdrawal from the priority of overthrowing Assad, the control of Aleppo being taken by Syrian army and the following ceasefire caused disappointment for the Sunni Troika of Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia. Sunni Troika had arranged a joint military drill, namely "North Thunder" in order to show the USA that it may appear on the stage in case the USA gives up hope for the representative organizations on Syrian field.²² However, the power show of Sunni Troika although showed the presence of a loyal military power for the USA which can be used against Iran and Russia, it was also an indication of a risk which would pull it into an unwanted sectarian Middle East war for which it is not ready yet. For the USA taking such a risk would not be logical at a stage in which it was positioning strategically in Pacific against China and in Eastern Europe against Russia.²³

In the third phase of Syrian war, although Assad had acquired many gains as Hezbollah and Russia appeared on the stage, it cannot be stated that the absolute loser is the USA and Sunni Troika when the whole picture is examined. Although Assad was not overthrown in Syria and was able to survive, the USA and its allies, thanks to the civil war, were able to establish zones of influence in Syria, where they could not influence directly before 2011. Rojava mainly became the zone of influence and military headquarter of the USA imperialism. Turkey, also with its title as NATO army, is on Syrian land. For Israel, rise of sectarian war caused Hezbollah and Hamas face off each other and wear away on Syrian field. Again, the potential of Syria to make a military attack against Israel or effective retaliations against Israel's military attacks were considerably eliminated. Obama administration in the USA saw that they are still on the plus side of the balance sheet and changed the strategy it applied on the second phase at the cost of Russia's appearance on the field and Assad's protection of its power and acquisition of force.

21 *Gerçek* newspaper, "ABD Suriye'yi Sehven Değil Kasten Vuruyor", <http://gercekgazetesi.net/karsi-manset/abd-suriyeyi-sehven-degil-kasten-vuruyor>.

22 *Gerçek* newspaper, "Suriye'de Ateşkes, Suudi Arabistan'da Savaş Provası", <http://gercekgazetesi.net/uluslararasi/suriyede-ateskes-suudi-arabistanda-savas-provasi>.

23 Armağan Tulun, "Üçüncü Dünya Savaşı Davul Zurna ile Geliyor", *Gerçek* gazetesi, Issue 88 <http://gercekgazetesi.net/uluslararasi/ucuncu-dunya-savasi-davul-zurnayla-geliyor>.

However, the USA had seen that as it slowed down Sunni Troika, the costs of its policy increased. Turkey started to develop autonomous relations, which found its basis during the Astana discussions with Russia and in Euphrates Shield operation.²⁴ If these relations was to make NATO member Turkey more influential on the field, the USA would even expect specific benefits from such autonomous relations. However, Turkey had to accept whatever Russia demanded during the Astana process which followed the assassination of the Russian ambassador. Moreover, the USA, happy to have a NATO army in Syria with Euphrates Shield, lost its taste as Euphrates Shield turned into a trap and Russian soldiers deployed on Manbij and Afrin wings of this trap.

Accordingly, the third phase of the Syrian civil war is identified by distrust by the USA imperialism in the representative powers on the field. The USA, which had TAF enter the Syrian field as NATO inspector on these factors with Euphrates Shield, started to build up a new representative power in Rojava under its own supervision and coordination. An inevitable result of this political approach was to withdraw from the priority of overthrowing Assad and to focus on acquiring zones of influence in Syria.

Sign of the Fourth Phase: Trump, the Second Ghouda and Tomahawks

Following the ending of the battle of Aleppo in favor of Assad and Russia, we anticipated (at a relatively early stage) that the course of the civil war may not continue on the same line, that significant changes were to be expected as Trump took over presidency in the USA. The following excerpt is taken from the evaluation which *Gerçek* newspaper made following the battle of Aleppo:

Current policy of the USA may undergo a significant change very soon, in fact, it is very possible that it will. On January 20th, which is only one month later, the new president of the USA, Donald Trump shall take over the presidency from the current president, Obama. Trump's policy for the Middle East and more extensively, for Eurasia, no doubt, shall have significant effects in the future of the Middle East and Syria.

Trump's international policy has conflicts. As it is understood for the time-being, isolating China and forcing it both economically and politically lies in the center of this policy. The intention to get closer to Russia, which is speculated much, is more understandable within this context. However, the conflict also starts at this point. Trump is hostile towards Iran. If, this way or another, he succeeds

²⁴ *Gerçek* newspaper, "Fırat Kapanı: Halklarla barışmadan ve emperyalizme vurmadan çıkış zor", <http://gercekgazetesi.net/gundemdekiler/firat-kapani-halklarla-barismadan-ve-emperyalizme-vurmadan-cikis-zor>

driving a wedge between Iran and the West, then, no doubt, this will influence his own government's relations with Russia inevitably. His policy concerning Turkey and in general Sunni camp also seems to have conflicts. On one hand, these countries are his natural allies against Iran. On the other hand, he desires to start a major struggle against Sunni Islamic radical movements, especially takfiri organizations such as ISIL. It is very difficult to deal with both Iran and Sunni radical organization simultaneously with harsh measures. A living evidence of this is that the USA, trying to get Mosul back, is required to cooperate with Iran and Shia militants.

Then, balances shall change in Syria. The USA, governed by Trump shall apply a policy which is more hostile than Obama's policy, against Assad. And this may change all the balances.²⁵

Accordingly, on April 07th, 2017, Trump using as an excuse, a chemical weapon attack, which is claimed to be made by Syrian army in Idlib (Khan Shaykhun town), struck al-Shayrat Air Base with guided missiles, from where the warplanes bombing the area took off. When compared with Ghouda, it is very clear that we are facing a more active hostility policy.

Trump, prior to taking over the presidency, had very warm relations with Russia. It was also claimed that Russia intervened the elections in the USA, in favor of Trump. It is also known that Trump is softer than Obama with respect to Assad and the regime in Syria. However, following Khan Shaykhun massacre, Trump stated that his opinion for Syria and Assad had changed, that they cannot reach an agreement with Russia currently and that the USA-Russia relations are being reduced to a minimum level. These expressions are clear indications that the USA targets to put a tighter leash on Russia and Assad, who made rapid gains during the third phase of the civil war.

Okay, how is the USA going to achieve this? When the matter is Syria, there is no power which acquired any political/diplomatic gain until now, in which military power is not used in one way or another. Accordingly, it is evident that we are entering a phase in which the USA shall use its military power more intensely.

However, this does not mean that the USA shall immediately invade Syria with marine troops. A rapid military confrontation with Russia is also not possible. It is understood that Tomahawk attack was notified to Russia in advance. This prevented Russian and the USA from a hot conflict, but it also increased the temperature quite a lot. In the new period, we saw that the USA special forces were taking more part on the field during the airborne operation in Tabqa which was a part of Raqqa siege. The USA is seeing the east of Euphrates as its zone of influence and Russia

²⁵ *Gerçek* newspaper, "Halep Muharebesi Zafer mi İnsanlık Dramı mı?" <http://gercekgazetesi.net/uluslararasi/halep-muharebesi-zafer-mi-insanlik-drami-mi>.

did not oppose this, yet. However, the USA not only crossed to the west of Euphrates (Tabqa operation), but also was not willing to leave Idlib to Russia alone. The USA, watching all the military operations of Russia in this region from a distance during the third phase of the civil war, started to perform military power shows in this region in the new period. US air forces made an air attack, in which it stated that it targeted al-Qaeda in Aleppo area. The USA showed that it did not leave fighting with al-Qaeda and similar organizations in Aleppo and west of Aleppo to Russia's scope of authority. Moreover, it showed that it will not be sufficient for those, who want the support of the USA in the field, to fight only with those with which the USA fights, and the USA did not neglect to strike a mosque "by mistake" in order to show that they have to go down on their knees in front of the USA.

Finally, creation of de-conflict zones with the initiative of Russia and Iran in Astana, became a factor that increased the tension despite the expression "de-conflict". Russia and Iran took Turkey also beside them, and declared "de-conflict" zones at the areas dominated by anti-Assad powers, except ISIL. However, de-conflict did not cover terrorist groups. Terrorist groups are dominating almost the whole area due to the extensive identification by Russia and Iran. Accordingly, Assad, together with Russia and Iran, kept the initiative to attack these areas based on the presence of such groups. And it is forcing Turkey to separate the groups supported by it and those identified as terrorist by Russia and even fight with them.

It was not hard to convince Turkey in this agreement which is made during a period in which Erdoğan was getting prepared to go to the USA in order to meet Trump. When Erdoğan was going to the USA, he did not want to appear as losing initiative in Syria. When Erdoğan went to the USA focused on signing of the agreement, not on the content, in order to say "I have alternative, I am carrying out an alternative process with Russia and Iran."²⁶

The USA, which participated in Astana by sending a representative only, did not hide that it was disturbed by the results. However, the actual reply of the USA was not diplomatic, but military. The USA responded to Syrian army's advancement towards Jordan-Iraq border where there are groups trained and equipped by it, by an air attack. This time, there was no mistake. In the news made as based on the declarations of an authority from the USA, Ministry of Defense, the reason of this attack was given as the violation of the de-conflict zone by Syrian army (with the support of Hezbollah and Iraqi Shia militants). Although this air attack was at a lower size and tactical level, it should be interpreted as an important development marking the Syria policy of the USA, which started to change together with Trump.

The USA has not yet prioritized overthrowing Assad, but had shown that it will

²⁶ With respect to the agreement concluded in Astana and its potential reflections in Syria, see *Gerçek* newspaper, "Astana'da ne oldu?", <http://gercekgazetesi.net/uluslararasi/astanada-ne-oldu>.

not accept the evolution of the formula of “transition with Assad, solution without Assad” agreed with Russia in the third phase of Syrian civil war, into “solution with Assad”. No doubt that this orientation increases the risk of a hot conflict between Russia and the USA on the skies of Syria where the missile and warplane traffic has increased, even if the parties try to avoid it. It is known, especially by these states, that the potential of hot conflict between Russia and the USA could suddenly trigger a process which might end up in a nuclear war. Due to this, the steps are being taken more attentively. However, the scenarios in which the USA and Russia compete without having a hot conflict, also start to become harsher and more destructive alternatives. In other words, the probability increases that the USA and Russia may enter a battle of wills through the states which are their direct allies, not through representative organizations on the field in the period to come. Accordingly this will influence Turkey’s relations with the USA, its position together with Sunni Troika, its position against Rojava, Syria policy and its positioning against Russia and Iran in the fourth phase.

The impact of the fourth phase on Turkey and Rojava

The aggression of the USA shall mark the fourth phase of the civil war in Syria. It will be very optimistic that the results of this aggression will be limited to Syria. The new orientation applied by Trump shall have global and regional results. It is seen that the first important development for Turkey is to be realized within the context of Raqqa operation and the USA’s relations with the PYD. In fact, the parties of this issue had already started taking their positions before Trump took office. It is known that Erdoğan, AKP government and TAF in Turkey have an expectation from Trump. This expectation is that the USA shall stop supporting the PYD and YPG in the field of Syria and shall take action together with Turkey and the groups called FSA protected by Turkey.

After Trump took office, the telephone call made with Erdoğan in February was announced as the USA being ready to take action with Turkey in al-Bab and Raqqa. However, the only thing that was agreed on was that the first abroad visit of CIA Director, Mike Pompeo was going to be to Turkey. When Mike Pompeo made this visit, it was going to be understood that Russia was not going to watch this development with tied hands and feet, when it hit TAF soldiers “by mistake” in al-Bab.²⁷ However, the real important visit was made by the Republican senator, John McCain. McCain is among those names in the USA who defend taking action together with Turkey. McCain’s visit raised hopes of Erdoğan and ranks of AKP power in this sense. However, when McCain came, he did not neglect to make the first secret

²⁷ *Gerçek* newspaper, “Amerikan Memuru Türkiye’yi Suriye’yle Savaşa mı Sokuyor?”, <http://gercekgazetesi.net/karsi-manset/abdnin-memuru-turkiyeyi-suriyeyile-savasa-mi-sokuyor-0>.

visit to Rojava. In this visit, he discussed whether a joint solution could be found with PYD so that TAF and FSA powers used in al-Bab could be used in Raqqa. It was understood that McCain's plan was to open a corridor by American soldiers from Tell Abyad up to Raqqa and to provide TAF-FSA powers to proceed to Raqqa from this corridor. The realism of this plan was arguable, but this was also the only alternative for Turkey to go down to Raqqa without getting into a hot conflict with Syria after the Euphrates Trap is closed. Of course it was clear that this alternative finally required a certain level of normalization between Turkey and PYD, although not as the revival of Eshme spirit.²⁸

The discussions made on all these possibilities were considerably finalized before Erdoğan's visit to the USA. When Turkish delegation composed of the Chief of General Staff, Undersecretary of MİT and spokesman of the Presidency went to the USA before Erdoğan in order to establish the preliminary contacts, Trump signed the government order for providing heavy weapons to YPG. Before Erdoğan went to the USA, the weapons were already started to be distributed to YPG. Of course, Turkey was not happy with this. Turkey first gave mixed signals from its own side. Erdoğan was expressing determination when saying our meeting shall be "a full stop, not a comma" but also making very low profile sentences such as "using a terrorist organization against another terrorist organization is not an ideal way of thinking." Prime Minister Yıldırım was saying "we are not going to fight with the USA" and was confessing that Turkey was required to accept fait accompli. When Erdoğan returned from the USA, the only thing at like a "full stop" was that the operation in Raqqa was going to be carried out with YPG. Further, the full stop was put to this issue before Erdoğan went to the USA. Now it was not possible anymore for Turkey to go down to Raqqa.

Following air attacks of Turkey to Qarachok and Sinjar, show up of the USA flagged armored vehicles on Syrian-Turkish border had shown that conflicts with YPG may mean confronting the USA. However, TAF and the USA soldiers coming up against each other is a possibility that not only Turkey but also the USA shall desire to avoid. Accordingly, by giving heavy weapons including anti-tank weapons to YPG, the USA made an attempt to deter Turkey from entering Rojava without its own intervention, and expanded its maneuver area politically. This way, the USA acquired the alternative to intervene the process in order to first fade from the scene and stop such violent clashes afterwards (of course in a manner to increase its own

28 When the so-called "peace/solution process" was not over yet, although it is not officially accepted, TAF, PYD and YPG coordinated during the operation of the transfer of Suleiman Shah's tomb under ISIL siege. Afterwards, Öcalan gave this as an exemplary event for the progress of the initiative process and named it as "Eshme Spirit" in his Newrouz message. For this issue, see *Gerçek* newspaper, "Süleyman Şah Algi Operasyonu", <http://gercekgazetesi.net/karsi-manset/suleyman-sah-almi-operasyonu>.

influence) in addition to the option to intervene and stop the attack in case TAF made any unilateral intervention (this, even low, has the risk of having a military conflict with TAF).

It was disclosed by the military authorities of the USA that the heavy weapons given by the USA to PYD in Rojava were given permanently. On the other hand, the USA is guaranteeing that these weapons shall not be used and YPG in general shall not make any operations against Turkey. It is evident that this guarantee can be realized by increase of the USA military presence on the field, not by the USA's political influence on PYD. On the other hand, preventing the intervention of Turkey on the region will also be a means for increasing the USA's military presence. In any case, when considered from the fourth phase of the civil war in Syria, Rojava was stepping ahead as a region where the USA soldiers will have "their boots touch the ground" and build-up.

Increasing American political influence and military presence in Rojava would strengthen the tendency of "normalization" of Turkey-PYD relations. Domestic political balances of Turkey may extend the process or a tenser tone may be used in speech, but the tendency is within this direction. For example, after the use of YPG in Raqqa operation following the meeting with Trump and PYD dominance in Rojava became clearer "at the level of a full stop", Erdoğan stated that they will not be in Raqqa (as if it was possible after this stage), and then defined the new position of Turkey as "if there is an attack from YPG, we apply the engagement rules without asking anyone." The meaning of these words expressed in a harsh manner, can be read just the opposite way. Mentioning "engagement rules" which are only applied to the dominant states in an environment in which Turkey identified PYD and YPG as "terrorist", can be interpreted as an adaptation to the new status being formed, more than just a simple slip of the tongue.

However this state cannot be interpreted as the USA entering into a relation of strategic alliance with the Kurdish movement as a whole. Although it seems that PYD had acquired a significant political power, especially by implementing the third front policy for some time in Syria, and obligated the USA to cooperate with it on the field, now it is clear that it is PYD which needs the USA as an inevitable result of dancing with the imperialism. This is so clear that after Trump won the elections in the USA, Cemil Bayik felt the need to say "We hope that Kurds are also considered in the Middle East policies of the USA" during a statement he gave to Sterk TV. Following the strike of Syrian headquarter by the USA by Tomahawk missiles, PYD's leader Salih Muslim supported the attack.

The only thing the USA considered in its relations with anyone and any region is its own imperialist interests. These imperialist interests require the USA to hold Turkey within NATO and use NATO's army TAF in its own line. The effect of YPG

concerning the USA's imperialism is limited even on the field of Syria. The role to be played by YPG following the provision of order after Raqqa is saved from ISIL, is also questionable. When this was the case, build-up of the whole strategy of the USA on YPG cannot be rational under any condition. In fact, Deputy Secretary of State of the USA, Jonathan Cohen clearly defines the relations with YPG as "temporary and tactical."

Accordingly, when defining the USA's relation with YPG as tactical and temporary, is evaluated together with identifying PKK as a terrorist organization and promising more intelligence support against PKK following Trump-Erdogan meeting, it is apparent that the USA considers Kurds in the Middle East but will not be behind them until the end. The strategy pursued here by the USA is to support Turkey's operations against PKK within the boundaries of Turkey, to approve Turkey's pressure on PKK together with Barzani in Iraq and this way, to provide Kurds to focus only on the interests of the USA. The USA's benefits are on the side of a new initiation process in Turkey. This "solution process" aims to weaken the PKK's military influence on the north within the boundaries of Turkey, and replacement of its political influence by Barzanism. It is clear that an environment in which Demirtaş is in prison and spokesman position of HDP is undertaken by Baydemir is beneficial for the USA in this sense. However, it is very hard to make a Barzanist PKK without breaking its military power. In this context, it is clear that the USA shall continue to support TAF's operations against PKK. This support becoming an approval for a military pressure even intervention on Sinjar is a possibility which should be carefully assessed. Thus, Cohen, who identified the USA's relation with YPG as "tactical and temporary", said that efforts shall be intensified to have PKK leave Shengal/Sinjar, voluntarily or otherwise, following the taking over of Mosul from ISIL.

Due to this reason, it shall be more correct to expect heating up, rather than cooling down in the relations of Turkey, which could not receive what it wanted with respect to Raqqa and YPG titles during Erdogan-Trump meeting (Gülen's return was not expected anyway and it remained only as an argument used in domestic policy), with the USA. Mentioning of the problems Trump faced in the USA, Erdogan's continuous complaints about the Obama period should be seen as an effort to prepare Turkish public for this heat-up.

In this sense, the USA and Turkey's increasing cooperation not against PYD and YPG but against PKK in the coming period shall have Turkey enter under the USA's scope of influence more. Turkey's NATO membership, and the US activity at the Incirlik base, will not be weakened but strengthened. As a probable result of all these, it can be expected that Turkey's approach to Russia and Iran over processes similar to Astana will slow down, and even Turkey's position can be against Russia

and Iran step by step.

One more time, no matter how rhetorically expressed, whether as anti-imperialist, or anti-American, a foreign policy based on hostility against Kurdish movement results in increase of imperialism in general and influence of the USA on Turkey in particular. With respect to Kurdish movement, as the alliance with the USA deepens, the probability of clearance instead of freedom increases.

What should be the correct policy in Syria?

It is evident that the good will declarations longing for peace and comfort in Syria and in the Middle East in general do not have any applicability. Peace and comfort can come to the people of Syria and the Middle East only by the **correct** war. Brotherhood of people can rise over a joint hostility that is directed towards the correct target.

In the days when Erdoğan and AKP were saying “my brother Assad”, the purpose of this policy was to break off Syria from Iran and to make harmonize it with the interests of the USA and Israel. The target of “Eshme Spirit” which was spoken out during the process in which TAF and YPG cooperated implicitly in moving Suleiman Shah’s Tomb was to make cooperation on the basis of Sunni Islamism against Kurdish movement and Assad and again in harmony with the interests of the USA and Israel. The results of both policies were the massacre of people not the brotherhood.

It was not difficult to see the longing of the masses for Arab unity, anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism at the heart of Arab revolution which started with Tunisia and Egypt. Overthrown dictators Ben Ali and Mubarak were the leaders of the regimes who became the slaves of imperialism and a friend of Zionism. Downfall of these dictators gave hope for the millions for the overturn of Israel and expelling of imperialism, the only condition for Arab unity. Imperialism and Zionism on the other hand, directed and choked the anger of the masses in the sectarian channels. While doing this, they received the main support from the sectarian cooperative Arab regimes and AKP’s Turkey. They did not have any difficulty in finding the actors for their dirty games.

However, the Middle East does not only have corrupt gangs, collaborationists, and murderers. There is a strong tradition of struggle with anti-imperialism, anti-Zionism in the Arab world and Turkey. There is a strong Kurdish revolutionist tradition which fought feudal structure in Kurdistan and walked arm in arm with socialism. Iran is a country which also started the 20th century with a revolution and entered the last quarter with revolution. In these countries, no matter how many times such reformist movements are defeated, there is deep-seated fire of revolution which does not die out. However, there is also this reality that flaming of this fire

is not possible over identities, passivism, nationalism, search of democracy and human rights in the imperialist centers.

In the Middle East and Syria, it is not possible to expose the reformist dynamics and build up the brotherhood of people without centering on the struggle against imperialism and Zionism. When the problem is perceived with this clarity, it is possible to find the solution. There is no way to defend Assad's bourgeois dictatorship. The same applies for the sectarian, takfiri gangs also. However, at this stage reached, a reformist military-political attitude, which does not target the defeat of imperialism, Zionism and their cooperators in Syria is not feasible at the current stage in which the public rebellion rising as a part of Arab revolution against Assad's bourgeois dictatorship, died out and corrupted and the imperialism and Zionism clearly intervened the process.

In Turkey, the brotherhood of people cannot be defended without defending Turkey's exit from NATO and the closure of İncirlik. A consistent anti-imperialist line cannot be followed without defending the brotherhood of people and the rights of Kurds. Otherwise, as we had seen many times, the end of begging for democracy from the USA and EU is to be contented with the democracy alms of imperialism. It is evident that US imperialism easily chokes any activity against it in the waters of Kurdish hostility. Kurds are people which had encountered bloody experiences to see and know that liberation cannot be achieved by cooperating with the US imperialism. However, the nationalist colonialist attacks always push them toward the imperialism of the USA. Kurdish movement, which opened its ranks and positions to the USA, increases the influence of nationalism that poisons Arab, Turkish and Iranian workers, rather than reducing it.

Accordingly, anti-imperialist united front, which is the only solution in Syria, appears as the only way out in Rojava and Turkey. Within this context, the USA soldiers should get out of both İncirlik and Rojava. Turkey should exit NATO, Kurdish movement should end its policy for cooperation with the USA.

Let's not forget that, ISIL and similar takfiri, sectarian formations do not have any chance to live in an environment where Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran do not take hostile actions against each other and against the Kurds. If Turkey supported the resistance of Kurdish people against ISIL in Kobani, ISIL would be defeated and also the imperialists would not open a space for themselves.

Nationalism and colonialism shall be deprived of their basic basis in Syria and Middle East from where imperialism and Zionism are kicked out. The way for Socialist Federation of the Middle East to lead to the joint liberation to bring the equality, brotherhood and freedom of the Turkish, Arab, Kurdish and Iranian people shall be cleared this way.