

## **THE ROLE OF NATO IN MEDIATING BOUNDARY DISPUTE BETWEEN TURKEY AND SYRIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The subject matter of this research is on the role of NATO in mediating boundary dispute between Turkey and Syria. The problem of this research is anchored on the boundary dispute between Turkey and Syria and also the way NATO has handled the matter so far. There are complicating issues bordering on the dispute between the two belligerent countries because the two countries were hitherto close neighbours and friends engaging in treaty making and also having good diplomatic relations. The major objective of this study is to unveil the role of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in mediating the boundary dispute between Syria and Turkey; other objectives include tracing the origin of NATO, to unveil the relationship between Turkey and Syria. The Theoretical frame work is intractable conflict theory. The researcher in the findings discovered that Turkey is also backing plans for a buffer zone on the border with Syria. The researcher recommends that the boundary between Syria and Turkey be properly demarcated, sanctions should be placed on any of the parties who encroach into another country's land, the diplomatic relations between Turkey and Syria should be sustained. The researcher therefore further recommends that United Nations Organisation should send a high powered delegation to visit Turkey and Syria, get their views to enable UN assist NATO in mediating on the crisis. Both Turkey and Syria should suspend hostilities and adopt solutions proffered by NATO to end the crisis.*

**Key words:** Annexation, Boundary, conflict, defense, mediation, Military cooperation, war.

### **Introduction**

Considering Syrian–Turkish relations Dunyasi (1986) stated that Turkey shares its longest common border with Syria; various geographic and historical links also tie the two neighboring states together. The traditional tenseness in relations had been due to disputes including the self-annexation of the Hatay Province to Turkey in 1939, water disputes resulting from the Southeastern Anatolia Project, and Syria's support for the Kurdistan Workers Party (abbreviated as PKK) and the now-dissolved Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (abbreviated as ASALA) which has been recognised as a terrorist organisation by NATO, EU, and many other countries. Relations improved greatly after October 1998, when PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was expelled by Syrian authorities. However, the Syrian civil war has once again strained relations between the two countries, leading to the suspension of diplomatic contact. A serious incident occurred with the Syrian downing of a Turkish military training flight in June 2012, resulting in Turkey calling an emergency meeting of NATO.

Syria had maintained an embassy in Ankara and two consulates–general in Istanbul and Gaziantep. Turkey had an embassy in Damascus and a consulate–general in Aleppo. Diplomatic relations between the countries were severed in March 2012, due to the Syrian civil war. Both countries are full members of the Union for the Mediterranean and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The current Syro-Turkish border was established in the Partitioning of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, based on the Sykes–Picot Agreement between United Kingdom and France in 1916. It was the northern border of the State of Aleppo and later the State of Syria during the 1920s, and the Syrian Republic followed by the short-lived United Arab Republic during the 1930s to 1950s and since 1961 has been the border between the modern states of Syria and Turkey.

The approximate line of most of the border was set by the Treaty of Ankara in 1921. It was delimited more precisely between MeidanEkbis and Nusaybin in 1926, and between Nusaybin and the tripoint with Iraq in 1929. A special case is the Turkish Hatay Province, which remained autonomous until 1923, then became part of Syria as the Sanjak of Alexandretta (Franco-Syrian Treaty of Independence (1936)), briefly became independent as the Hatay State in 1938 before being annexed by Turkey as the Hatay Province in 1939. The new international border was demarcated by a Franco-Turkish commission in 1938/9, with a protocol of 3 May 1939 mentioning 448 boundary markers placed in numerical order, and an additional protocol signed in Antioch on 19 May 1939 mentioning some additional markers. Some further changes were made in an agreement signed in Ankara on 23 June 1939.

Because of Turkey's membership in NATO (1952) and OSCE (1973), its border to Syria also forms an outer border of these organisations. Since the Syrian Civil War broke out in 2011, tensions across the border have increased, and there have been a number of clashes; there has also been a substantial influx of refugees across the border to Turkey.

### **Statement of problem**

The problem of this research is anchored on the boundary dispute between Turkey and Syria and also the way NATO has handled the matter so far. There are complicating issues bordering on the dispute between the two belligerent countries because the two countries were hitherto close neighbours and friends engaging in treaty making and also having good diplomatic relations.

### **Objectives of the study**

The broad objective of this study is to unveil the role of North Atlantic Treaty Organization in mediating boundary dispute between Syria and Turkey; other objectives include tracing the origin of NATO and to unveil the relationship between Turkey and Syria to trace the geography of Turkey and Syria and x-ray Turkey-Syria relations.

### **History of NATO**

The **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** French: *Organisation du Traité de l'Atlantique Nord*; *OTAN*), also called the **North Atlantic Alliance**, is an intergovernmentalmilitary alliance based on the North Atlantic Treaty which was signed on 4 April 1949. The organization constitutes a system of collective defence whereby its member states agree to mutual defense in response to an attack by any external party. NATO's headquarters are located in Haren, Brussels, Belgium, where the Supreme Allied Commander also resides. Belgium is one of the 28 member states across North America and Europe, the newest of which, Albania and Croatia, joined in April 2009. An additional 22 countries

participate in NATO's Partnership for Peace program, with 15 other countries involved in institutionalized dialogue programmes. The combined military spending of all NATO members constitutes over 70 percent of the global total. Members' defense spending is supposed to amount to 2 percent of GDP.

NATO was little more than a political association until the Korean War galvanized the organization's member states, and an integrated military structure was built up under the direction of two US supreme commanders. The course of the Cold War led to a rivalry with nations of the Warsaw Pact, which formed in 1955. Doubts over the strength of the relationship between the European states and the United States ebbed and flowed, along with doubts over the credibility of the NATO defence against a prospective Soviet invasion—doubts that led to the development of the independent French nuclear deterrent and the withdrawal of France from NATO's military structure in 1966 for 30 years. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the organization was drawn into the breakup of Yugoslavia, and conducted its first military interventions in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995 and later Yugoslavia in 1999. Politically, the organization sought better relations with former Warsaw Pact countries, several of which joined the alliance in 1999 and 2004.

Article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty, requiring member states to come to the aid of any member state subject to an armed attack, was invoked for the first and only time after the September 11 attacks, after which troops were deployed to Afghanistan under the NATO-led ISAF. The organization has operated a range of additional roles since then, including sending trainers to Iraq, assisting in counter-piracy operations and in 2011 enforcing a no-fly zone over Libya in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973. The less potent Article 4, which merely invokes consultation among NATO members, has been invoked five times: by Turkey in 2003 over the Iraq War; twice in 2012 by Turkey over the Syrian Civil War, after the downing of an unarmed Turkish F-4 reconnaissance jet, and after a mortar was fired at Turkey from Syria; in 2014 by Poland, following the Russian intervention in Crimea; and again by Turkey in 2015 after threats by the Islamic State to its territorial integrity

The North Atlantic Treaty was signed in Washington, D.C., on 4 April 1949 and was ratified by the United States that August. The Treaty of Brussels, signed on 17 March 1948 by Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, and the United Kingdom, is considered the precursor to the NATO agreement. The treaty and the Soviet Berlin Blockade led to the creation of the Western European Union's Defence Organization in September 1948. However, participation of the United States was thought necessary both to counter the military power of the USSR and to prevent the revival of nationalist militarism, so talks for a new military alliance began almost immediately resulting in the North Atlantic Treaty, which was signed in Washington, D.C. on 4 April 1949. It included the five Treaty of Brussels states plus the United States, Canada, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. The first NATO Secretary General, Lord Ismay, stated in 1949 that the organization's goal was "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down. Popular support for the Treaty was not unanimous, and some Icelanders participated in a pro-neutrality, anti-membership riot in March 1949. The creation of NATO can be seen as the primary institutional consequence of a school of thought called Atlanticism which stressed the importance of trans-Atlantic cooperation.

The members agreed that an armed attack against any one of them in Europe or North America would be considered an attack against them all. Consequently, they agreed that, if an armed attack occurred, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence, would assist the member being attacked, taking such action as it deemed necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. The treaty does not require members to respond with military action against an aggressor. Although obliged to respond, they maintain the freedom to choose the method by which they do so. This differs from Article IV of the Treaty of Brussels, which clearly states that the response will be military in nature. It is nonetheless assumed that NATO members will aid the attacked member militarily. The treaty was later clarified to include both the member's territory and their "vessels, forces or aircraft" above the Tropic of Cancer, including some overseas departments of France.

The creation of NATO brought about some standardization of allied military terminology, procedures, and technology, which in many cases meant European countries adopting US practices. The roughly 1300 Standardization Agreements (STANAG) codified many of the common practices that NATO has achieved. Hence, the 7.62×51mm NATO rifle cartridge was introduced in the 1950s as a standard firearm cartridge among many NATO countries. Fabrique Nationale de Herstal's FAL, which used 7.62 NATO cartridge, was adopted by 75 countries, including many outside of NATO. Also, aircraft marshalling signals were standardized, so that any NATO aircraft could land at any NATO base. Other standards such as the NATO phonetic alphabet have made their way beyond NATO into civilian use.

### **The Role of NATO in Mediating Boundary Dispute between Turkey and Syria**

NATO has done its best in mediating in the boundary dispute between Turkey and Syria. The organisation waded into the matter to proffer solution to the problem. NATO in its wisdom asked the two belligerent factions in the crisis to cease on forms of hostility against one another; the organization had also set a boundary committee that was charged with the responsibility of demarcating the boundary appropriately. NATO went further to bring the leaders of Syria and Turkey together, talked sense into them and the boundary dispute was brought under control. Under principles of International law, the Syria and Turkey were persuaded by NATO to maintain her long time outstanding relation and quail the boundary dispute.

This research forms part of an eight-part of the series exploring the regional responses, dynamics and ramifications of the Syrian uprising and civil war. The Arab spring caught Turkey off guard, challenging the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government's emerging foreign policy. This policy, dubbed Zero Problem with Neighbors (ZPWN) by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, codified Ankara's growing independence from the Western tutelage under which most of Turkey's post-Second World War foreign policy had operated. The new policy aimed to position Turkey as a hub of regional integration. It boosted trade and investment ties across geopolitical boundaries, and gave Turkey an activist mediation role in addressing such problems as the Iranian nuclear program, the Syria-Israel conflict, the Fatah-Hamas power struggle, and Iraq's fractious post-Saddam politics. The goal was a new, post-Pax Americana system of regional stability that favoured Turkish interests. Before the onset of the rebellion in Syria, the AKP government had managed to shift its relations with Damascus from the brink of war to a close partnership. Syria's expulsion of the leader of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, in 1998, cleared the most significant cause of friction between the two.

Thereafter the relationship grew stronger, especially after Bashar al-Assad's first visit to Turkey in January 2004. Turkey saw Syria as a gateway to the Arab world, and Ankara and Damascus cooperated through joint cabinet meetings, combined military drills, and a free trade agreement. The Syrian rebellion presented a profound challenge to Ankara's new orientation towards Damascus, forcing it to adapt to changing conditions on the ground that confounded the expectations of Turkish policy makers. In response, Turkey's Syria policy has been driven by a domestic political need to merge the values of the AKP government with Turkish national interests, regarding stability, preventing a regional war with sectarian spillover, and (crucially) limiting the impact of the weakening of Syria's central state on Turkey's domestic Kurdish conflict.

Turkey's Syria policy has evolved through three distinct phases. In the early days of the Syrian uprising, Turkey had hoped to maintain its growing ties with Damascus, while promoting reform and dialogue between the opposition and the Assad regime, rather than clearly taking sides. From March until late September of 2011, Turkey tried to convince Assad to undertake reforms and outreach measures that might help to resolve the crisis. As it became clear that Assad had no intention of making meaningful reforms, and was instead determined to resolve the conflict through a harsh security crackdown, Turkey shifted to a policy of regime-change. It empowered Syrian opposition elements, allowing them to organise and convene in Turkey, as well as hosting defectors from the Syrian military and reportedly allowing the Free Syrian Army to set up their headquarters in the south east of the country. Turkey hoped that these measures might bring the regime to the negotiating table, although Ankara by now believed that the ouster of Assad was essential to resolving the conflict. The emphasis upon regime-change, however, did not rule out a transition deal with elements of the old regime deemed to have "clean hands" (such as Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa).

In early 2012, Turkey tried to forge an international "Friends of Syria" coalition to secure regime change. However, it failed to gain the agreement of key players to any form of intervention, including the no-fly zone idea at one stage floated by Ankara. Key NATO partners, most importantly the United States, remained strongly opposed to any form of military intervention. Turkey's more forward-leaning posture at this early stage including providing headquarters for the leadership of the Free Syrian Army, combined with the failure of the opposition groups it had backed to make much headway on the ground left it somewhat isolated. This picture somewhat changed as the US and others took a more active interest in the FSA. At the same time, refugees continued to stream across the border, deepening Turkey's stake in the outcome next door. As a result, Ankara looked to diplomatic efforts, such as Egypt's September 2012 offer of a Regional Quartet (Turkey, Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia), or a Russian plan to orchestrate a political settlement, neither of which gained any traction. Turkey had also assumed – incorrectly - that U.S. reluctance to intervene in the Syrian conflict would give way to a more activist position following President Barack Obama's re-election. Instead, Ankara was surprised by harsh US public criticism of the Turkey-backed, Muslim Brotherhood-leaning Syrian National Council (SNC), and its efforts to forge a new political body (the Syrian National Coalition (NC). Turkey was also angered by the American decision to add the most effective rebel fighting force, the Nusra Front (JAN), to its list of international terror organisations (the group subsequently declared its fealty to the leadership of al-Qaeda).

Frustrated with both its erstwhile ally Assad, and with its Western partners, Turkey began to operate more independently on the ground in support of the rebellion, notably in concert with Qatar. Despite its now active backing for the armed overthrow of the regime in Damascus, Turkey's policy elites insisted that this was consistent with its "Zero Problems" policy, on the grounds that no stability was possible in Syria while Assad remained in power. Turkey's role, however, has been criticised as being sectarian, based on its support for the Brotherhood-dominated SNC, and its tolerance of some (predominantly Sunni) armed rebel groups. The Syria crisis is requiring a response from Ankara not easily articulated within the Zero-Problems rubric. It is having to deal with around 250,000 refugees on Turkish soil; the control of territory between Aleppo and the Syrian border by forces seeking direct support from Turkey; and the fact that PKK-aligned groups have taken control of some key Kurdish towns within Syria. Ankara's growing involvement in the effort to overthrow Assad has also become a growing source of political discord within Turkey itself. Although Turkey has tried to encourage opposition groups to be more inclusive and representative of the full diversity of Syria's communities, it has been unable to prevent the conflict from assuming a more factionalist character. As a result, Ankara's support for the rebellion is perceived by many in Turkey as a sectarian choice, backing Syria's Sunni majority against the minorities closest to the regime. Many among Turkey's Alevi community - the country's single largest minority religious group have been antagonised by Ankara's support for the rebellion, instead choosing to back the Assad regime. Turkey's main opposition party, the Republic People's Party (CHP), has used this sentiment to raise pressure on the AKP government, while a number of smaller, more radical Islamist and leftist groups have also criticised Ankara's Syria policy. CHP leaders have visited Damascus on a couple of occasions (most recently in March 2013) to declare support for Assad, although it more typically couches its opposition to the government's Syria policy on the basis of non-intervention, and keeping Turkey out of the regional schemes of the US and Gulf states. The recent Gezi Park protests, sparked by a police crackdown on environmentalist groups who wanted to protect a park from gentrification, spread out very quickly across the country partly because of tensions caused by the government's Syria policy. Despite this opposition, the AKP government can count on the support of more than half of the electorate for its stance on Syria (even if it chooses to intervene more directly), not only from among its own political base, but also among a majority of conservatives, Sunni voters and Islamists, liberal interventionists, and Turkey's Arab minority. The greatest challenge the Syrian rebellion has posed to Turkey's long-term national interests so far, however, came when Assad ceded control of key towns in northern Syria, such as Afrin, Kobani, and Rasulayn (Serekaniye), to the PKK-aligned Democratic Union Party (PYD), threatening the potential emergence of a territorial base from which PKK fighters could launch attacks into Turkey. The significance of this development may be muted by Ankara's negotiations with the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, over a political solution to Turkey's own Kurdish conflict (some media reports have suggested that these talks prompted the PYD to agree to a ceasefire with the Arab-Islamist rebel forces). If the negotiations between PKK and the government fail, however, the PYD challenge is likely to be inflamed to the point of presenting a game-changing risk for Turkey's Syria policy. Turkey's military has historically wielded a powerful influence over both domestic and foreign policy, although that influence has been increasingly muted (particularly after the 2010 referendum that reaffirmed popular support for the AKP's constitutional vision). The leadership of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) has remained silent on the government's responses to the Syrian rebellion, and ongoing court cases over alleged coup plots would create a further restraint on any public dissent

over Ankara's Syria policy. The precedent of Libya, where Turkish forces were involved in training rebel fighters, suggests that the military will follow the orders of the civilian government. While the TAF may be reluctant to become embroiled in Syria, it would do so if ordered – although then only on a multilateral basis whose legality had been established, presumably via the United Nations Security Council. Turkey's Syria policy has also raised new tensions in relations that had been steadily improving, with neighbors such as Iran, Iraq, and Russia (although relations with Moscow have proven more resilient, with both governments willing to maintain ties despite their differences over Syria). Conversely, relations with the Gulf states, which had been clouded by Turkey's attempts to forge a compromise agreement with Western powers over Iran's nuclear program, have steadily improved as a result of Ankara distancing itself from Assad. Despite their common hostility to Assad, Turkey and Saudi Arabia differ over which opposition forces in Syria should be supported. By way of contrast, Turkey and Qatar concur on Syria in their support for the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and Syrian National Council (SNC), just as they do over support for the Muslim Brotherhood-led transition in Egypt. Again this sets them apart from Riyadh, whose hostility to the Brotherhood led it instead to support the old establishment in Cairo. For practical purposes, these differences are reflected in the Saudis' willingness to arm a wider array of rebel forces in Syria, including hard-line Salafi groups, while Turkey prefers to support groups vetted by the FSA, for fear of empowering "unruly" elements that could threaten regional security.

Ankara has also been frustrated by Washington's hesitant approach, including reluctance to impose a no-fly zone inside Syria or to arm rebel groups. US concerns over empowering anti-American forces have not been shared by Turkey, where officials take the view that the potential perils are exaggerated. Turkish officials were irked when, last November, the US moved without Ankara's consent to sideline the Turkish-backed SNC, replacing it with what America considered to be a more inclusive political leadership. Similarly, Ankara was antagonised by the inclusion of Jabhat al-Nusra on the US list of international terrorist organizations: Turkish officials saw this as weakening the opposition and reinforcing the narrative of the Assad regime. Further tensions between Ankara and Washington may lie ahead over the Syrian end-game. The US appears more inclined to accept a role for Assad in negotiations and for his regime in a political transition, whereas Turkey strongly opposes any solution that does not see Assad immediately removed from power. However, towards Geneva II, the two countries share a common position that elements from within the Assad regime can join the transitional government to carry Syria through to presidential elections in 2014.

Despite the unmistakable tensions over Syria, the deployment of Patriot missile batteries in Turkey, providing protection from potential Syrian missile attacks, underscores the fact that US-Turkish relations have not been fundamentally damaged by differences in position. Within the EU, the support of France and UK for lifting the arms embargo has been welcomed in Ankara. The complex Turkish-Israeli relationship, which has seen a long-term decline under AKP rule, has not been significantly altered by the Syria crisis. Both sides may share hostility to the Assad regime, a concern over its chemical-weapons capability, and a desire to avoid a power vacuum emerging in Damascus, but they take very different views over the solution to these problems. Unlike Turkey, Israel is more ambiguous over the question of whether Assad should be brought down, and fearful of the rebellion being "hijacked by Islamists." The US-brokered rapprochement between Erdoğan and Netanyahu should not be over-played. Elsewhere in the

Middle East, Turkey's Syria policy has strengthened its ties with Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, and Egypt, as well as with civil society activists pressing for democratic changes in other Arab countries (in particular with the Muslim Brotherhood forces that have been the greatest beneficiary of the opening up of democratic political space across the region over the past two years). The evolution of Turkey's Syria policy, from pressing Assad to undertake democratic reforms to aggressively seeking his ouster, was a gradual and pragmatic one, although then it may also have contained moments of strategic miscalculation. Turkey, like a number of other foreign stakeholders, assessed that Assad would fall within a year of the outbreak of open rebellion. It was the assumption that Assad's fall was imminent that persuaded Ankara, after seven months of pressing Assad to undertake reforms, to throw its weight behind the armed rebellion. Turkey did not want to end up "on the wrong side of history", after its previous attempts to mediate between Libya's Muammar Gaddafi and his opponents had drawn scorn and derision among Arab publics. But not only had Turkey overestimated the extent of its own leverage over Assad in the early period of the rebellion; it may have underestimated the strength and resilience of his regime when choosing to back the armed opposition.

The Syria crisis has highlighted the limits of the AKP government's ZPWN policy, prompting Ankara to turn once more to hard-power elements alongside soft power and diplomacy. It has underscored the limits on Turkey's ability to remain aloof from, or simply to act as mediator in, escalating regional power struggles. But the experience has also hardened Turkey's decision-makers, boosting their confidence to mount more muscular cross-border interventions, and laying to rest any naivety over the prospects for resolving all regional conflicts through dialogue. Turkey's frustration with American restraint has prompted it to act independently of Washington, further boosting its confidence as a regional hard- and soft-power centre of influence. Meanwhile, Ankara's Syria policy has jeopardised substantial economic ties, and has run the risk of Turkey being too closely identified with factionalist regional power games to an extent that undermines its ability to mediate in other conflicts. But by accepting those risks, Turkey has matured as a regional strategic actor, forging new alliances and even taking a proactive approach to solving its biggest national security challenge: the PKK and Kurdish aspirations. Carefully managed, the new turn towards dialogue with the PKK enhances the prospects for long-term stabilisation of Turkey's Kurdish problem. Conversely, a breakdown in that dialogue runs the greater risk of regional conflict given Kurdish gains as a result of the Syrian rebellion. Turkey hopes to see an inclusive democratic Syria emerge from the conflict, which would naturally be an ally of Ankara given Turkey's role in supporting the rebellion. But if Syria collapses into a failed state, Turkey's security interests will be further endangered. Even if this happens, Turkey's leadership has grown more confident in its ability to manage regional crises, and in its central role as a stakeholder in a new Middle East political and security order. Indeed, the Syria crisis may herald an important evolution of thinking within the AKP government, forcing it to embrace the idea that the progressive regional stability it has sought will occasionally require the projection of Turkey's hard-power capabilities alongside its burgeoning soft-power.

### **Geography of Turkey and Syria**

Map of the Tigris–Euphrates river system across the eastern part of the Syro-Turkish border. Due to the annexation of the Hatay Province, the post-1939 Syrian-Turkish border touches the Mediterranean coast at Ras al-Bassit, south of Mount Aqra (35.9288°N 35.9178°E). The Hatay



province borders the Syrian Latakia and Idlib governorates. The westernmost (and southernmost) border crossing is at 35.905°N 36.010°E, some 3 km west of Yayladağı. The border reaches its southernmost point at 35.808°N 36.152°E, 2 km west of Bidama, to include the now-abandoned village of Topraktutan (Beysun) in Hatay. The border now runs north and east, following the Orontes River for a part of its course, where in 2011 construction of a Syria–Turkey Friendship Dam began (but has since been delayed due to the Syrian civil war), and east to the Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing on the İskenderun–Aleppo road, then further north to the border between Hatay and Gaziantep Province, where it turns sharply east outside of MeidanEkbis (Afrin District), at 36.830°N 36.665°E. With the exception of the Hatay province, the Turkish side of the border is entirely within the Southeastern Anatolia Region. East of MeidanEkbis, the border stretches eastward for some 400 km, roughly following the 37th parallel north and passing the 37th to 42nd meridians, to the Turkish-Syrian-Iraqitripoint on the Tigris River. On the Turkish side, the European route E90 runs alongside the length the border, crossing the Euphrates at Birecik and the Tigris at Cizre.

The Syrian Aleppo Governorate has a 221 kilometres (137 mi) long northern boundary with the Turkish Kilis, Gaziantep, and Şanlıurfa provinces. For a significant distance, from Çobanbey to Nusaybin the border follows the tracks of the Konya-Baghdad Railway. It crosses the Euphrates River at Jarabulus/Karkamış and passes north of the border town of Ayn al Arab (Kobane) (built in 1912 as part of the Baghdad Railway construction project). The Ar-Raqqa Governorate's Tell Abyad District borders the Turkish Şanlıurfa Province, including the divided border town of Tell Abyad/Akçakale. The Al-Hasakah Governorate, still bordering Şanlıurfa Province, has a border crossing at Ras al-Ayn, connecting to Ceylanpınar. Some 100 km east of Ceylanpınar, the border passes the border town of Nusaybin in the Turkish Mardin Province (ancient *Nisibis*, the birthplace of Ephraim the Syrian), next to Syrian Qamishli. After another 100 km it finally reaches the Tigris River south of Cizre. For the final 30 km, the border now follows the course of the Tigris, turning towards the south-east, until it reaches the Syrian-Turkish-Iraqi triple-point at 37.106°N 42.355°E.

### **Syria–Turkey relations**

Turkey shares its longest common border with Syria; various geographic and historical links also tie the two neighboring states together. The traditional tenseness in relations had been due to disputes including the self-annexation of the Hatay Province to Turkey in 1939, water disputes resulting from the Southeastern Anatolia Project, and Syria's support for the Kurdistan Worker's Party (abbreviated as PKK) and the now-dissolved Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (abbreviated as ASALA) which has been recognised as a terrorist organisation by NATO, EU, and many other countries. Relations improved greatly after October 1998, when PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was expelled by Syrian authorities. However, the Syrian civil war has once again strained relations between the two countries, leading to the suspension of diplomatic contact.<sup>[1]</sup> A serious incident occurred with the Syrian downing of a Turkish military training flight in June 2012, resulting in Turkey calling an emergency meeting of NATO.

Syria had maintained an embassy in Ankara and two consulates–general in Istanbul and Gaziantep. Turkey had an embassy in Damascus and a consulate–general in Aleppo. Diplomatic relations between the countries were severed in March 2012, due to the Syrian civil war. Both

countries are full members of the Union for the Mediterranean and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

### **Hatay annexation**

Protests in Damascus by women demonstrators against the secession of the Sanjak of Alexandretta in 1938 to become the Hatay Republic (and its joining of Turkey as the Hatay Province in 1939). One of the signs reads: "Our blood is sacrificed for the Syrian Arab Sanjak." In 1938, the Sanjak of Alexandretta became independent from the French mandate of Syria as the Republic of Hatay, and following a referendum, 8 months later in 1939, it decided to join Turkey as the Hatay Province. This self-annexation was never recognized by Syria, which continues to show the Hatay Province of Turkey as part of Syria's territory on maps.

At present, Syrians hold the view that this land is historically Syrian and was illegally ceded in the late 1930s to Turkey by France – the mandatory occupying power of Syria (between 1920 and 1946). The Turks remember Syria as a former Ottoman vilayet. In 1938, the Turkish Army went into the former Syrian Mediterranean province with French approval and expelled most of its Alawite Arab and Armenian inhabitants. Before this, Alawi Arabs and Armenians were the majority of the provincial population. For the referendum, Turkey crossed tens of thousands of Turks into Alexandretta to vote.

In 1938, the province declared its independence from France and the following 29 June, the parliament of the newly declared Hatay Republic voted to join Turkey. This referendum has been labeled both "phoney" and "rigged", and that it was a way for the French to let Turks take over the area, hoping that they would turn on Hitler. The Syrian government recognized this decision in 2004 and gave up on territorial claims. Syrians still consider this land as integral Syrian territory. Syrians call this land *Liwaaaaliskenderuna* rather than the Turkish name of Hatay.

### **Water politics**

Water disputes have been a major source of conflict as Turkey has constructed several dams on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers as part of the Southeastern Anatolia Project- GAP to develop the region. The project GAP was aimed at reducing the harsh living conditions of the Southeastern provinces of Turkey by building 19 dams on the rivers of Euphrates and Tigris. This project, however, would seriously reduce Syrian water resources.

In addition to this, Euphrates and Tigris are not the only rivers that tangles Turkish-Syrian relations, the water distribution of Orantes River which pours into Mediterranean from the province of disputed Hatay also rises problems between two states.

### **Support to the PKK**

Turkey has condemned Syria for supporting the PKK, which is listed as a terrorist organization internationally by a number of states and organizations, including the USA, NATO, and the EU and has claimed that Syria employed Alois Brunner to train Kurdish militants for attacks against Turkey.

The two countries came to the brink of war when Turkey threatened military action if Syria continued to shelter Abdullah Öcalan in Damascus, his long-time safe haven. Relations have

improved since October 1998, when Öcalan was expelled by Damascus and Syria pledged to stop harbouring the PKK militants and the 1999 signing of the Adana agreement, following his subsequent capture in Kenya, envisaged security cooperation between the two countries.

#### **Military cooperation**

On 26 April 2009, the two states announced an "unprecedented" three-day military manoeuvre involving ground forces along their mutual border in what was described as "a step farther in their ever expanding cooperation." According to Turkish military sources, "The aim of the exercise is to boost friendship, cooperation, and confidence between the two countries land forces, and to increase the ability of border troops to train and work together." The exercise which commenced on 27 April involved teams from each country crossing the border to visit outposts.

Visiting Syrian Defense Minister Hasan Turkmani and Turkish Defense Minister VecdiGönül also signed a letter of intent giving the green light for cooperation in the defence industry, on the sidelines of the 9th International Defence Industry Fair (IDEF'09) that commenced in Istanbul the same day, as a sign of the level of political relations reached between the two states, although a Turkish defence industry source emphasised that, "it does not mean that the two countries will immediately enter into cooperation in arms production."

#### ***2009 Turkish Presidential visit to Syria***

Turkish President Gül's 15–17 May official visit to Syria was made at the invitation of Damascus in reciprocation of Syrian President Assad's 2007 official visit to Turkey. A senior Turkish diplomat confirmed that, "The main topic on the agenda and the goal of the visit is the maintenance of momentum that has built up in bilateral relations within the last decade." The Turkish delegation included Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, Foreign Trade Minister ZaferÇağlayan, Agriculture Minister and Culture and Tourism Minister ErtuğrulGünay.

Shortly before the visit new Syrian Ambassador to Turkey, NidalQablan confirmed that Syria was ready to restart the Turkish mediated peace negotiations with Israel and Gül supported the call, following his meeting with Assad, stating that, "We have heard Syria say it is ready to resume the peace talks from the point where they stopped with the previous [Israeli] government. We in Turkey are also ready." Assad confirmed, "Turkey's role is important because we have trust in Turkey." Israeli President Shimon Peres dismissed these calls stating, "The Syrians should be ready to talk. If President al-Assad wants peace, why is he shy? We suggested direct talks many times. He thinks direct talks are a prize for Israel. It's not a prize. It's normal."

#### ***Friction due to Syrian civil war***

Since the start of Syrian Civil War, relations between Syria and Turkey greatly deteriorated. The Syrian conflict began to impact Turkey when at least 3,000 Syrian refugees fled Syria as a consequence of such incidents as Syrian army operation in Jisr ash-Shugur in June 2011. In June 2011, Turkish prime minister Erdogan described to Anatolian Agency his feeling that "They [Syria] are not acting in a humane manner. This is savagery."<sup>[26]</sup> However, at the beginning, the Turkish government refrained from describing the Syrians who fled to Turkey as "refugees" or "asylum-seekers", instead referring to them as guests,<sup>[27]</sup> and Erdogan, while demanding for implementation of promised reforms by the Syrian government, is currently refraining from calling for Bashar al-Assad's departure.

On 9 August 2011, BBC and numerous other news sites reported that Turkey is sending its foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, to Syria to give the government a "tough" message. Erdogan has said that he is becoming impatient with the "savagery" of Bashar al-Assad's government. Ahmet Davutoğlu also announced that "We are completely suspending all of these trade relations, all agreements between Turkey and Syria have been suspended."

The Turkish pilgrim bus attack occurred on 21 November 2011 when two buses carrying Turkish pilgrims returning from Saudi Arabia came under fire from Syrian soldiers. The attack occurred at a checkpoint near Homs, as a convoy of eight or nine Turkish buses was making its way towards Turkey via the Bab Hawa border crossing.<sup>[29]</sup> The gunfire left two people injured. According to a driver, when told that the passengers were Turks, "Syrian soldiers emerged from behind sandbags and cursed RecepTayyipErdogan... Then they suddenly opened fire at the bus."

On 9 April 2012, the Syrian envoy to Turkey was summoned after Syrian forces fired across the Syria–Turkey border. At least two were killed and many others injured in the incident. On 22 June 2012, Syria shot down a Turkish Air Force RF-4E reconnaissance jet near the Turkish-Syrian border. The Syrian military alleges the jet had violated Syrian airspace. However, Turkish president Abdullah Gül and other spokesmen have not confirmed this and emphasized that brief incursions into neighboring airspace by high-speed jets are routine occurrences. Gül stated that "it is not possible to cover over a thing like this. Whatever is necessary will no doubt be done." The Turkish and Syrian navies conducted a search for Turkish airmen downed by the incident. In August 2012, Turkey began to hold high level meetings with the USA on plans to replace the Syrian government. On 3 October 2012, Turkey attacked troops in Syria, after a Syrian mortar shell killed five people. Turkish parliament approved cross border operations.<sup>[36]</sup> Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan announced 5 October "We are not interested in war, but we're not far from it either,"

On 10 October 2012, Turkish Air Force F-16s intercepted a Syrian Air Airbus A320, flight RB442 from Moscow to Damascus, in Turkish airspace and forced it to land at Esenboğa International Airport, suspecting it was carrying Russian-made weapons. Inspectors confiscated military communications equipment and items "thought to be missile parts". Syria accused Turkey of "air piracy". On the same day the airline chief said in an interview that Turkey violated the Convention on International Civil Aviation Syria subsequently banned Turkish civilian flights from its airspace. On 23 October 2012, an anti-aircraft shell from Syria hit a health center in Turkey's Hatay province. On 11 May 2013, Turkish security forces found a 2 kg cylinder with sarin gas after searching the homes of Syrian militants from the Al-Qaeda linked Al-Nusra Front who were previously detained, Turkish media reports. The gas was reportedly going to be used in a bomb. Russia asked Turkey for information about this. On 11 May 2013, two car bombs exploded in the town of Reyhanlı, Hatay Province, Turkey. At least 43 people were killed and 140 more were injured in the attack. The car bombs were left outside Reyhanlı's town hall and post office. The first exploded at around 13:45 local time (10:45 GMT) and the second exploded about 15 minutes later. People attempting to help those injured in the first explosion were caught in the second blast. This attack was the deadliest single act of terrorism to occur on Turkish soil.

On 23 March 2014, Turkey shot down a Syrian combat jet Turkish-Syrian border. The initial announcement was made by Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a speech during the Turkish local elections, 2014 campaign. Turkey claimed that two Turkish Air Force F-16s downed the plane that was heading Turkish territory and ignored warnings, as a result of the infringement of the new engagement rules declared by the Republic of Turkey, after Syria shot down a Turkish reconnaissance plane on 22 June 2012. The pilot jumped off the plane according to witness reports. Syria condemned the aggression and argued that the plane was following rebels and it did not violate Turkish airspace. However, according to the new engagement rules, two countries could defend themselves if the other come close to their borders, perceiving the action as a threat.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Intractable Conflict Theory**

This theory was propounded by Heidi Burgess and Guy M. Burgess. They defined thus, "Intractability" is a controversial concept, which means different things to different people. Some people on the initial dislike the term, as they saw it as too negative. Intractable conflicts are impossible to resolve, they say, so people think they are not worth dealing with. The major issue here is that it is very difficult to resolve conflict bordering on land and boundary. It is on this note that the researcher adopted the intractable conflict theory. The conflict can always be managed but very difficult to stop.

Syria and Turkey have had her share of good relationship from time immemorial and now boundary dispute that destroyed that relationship. It is imperative to assert here that NATO came in to manage the conflict and has made land mark in bringing relative peace to among the two countries.

### **Conclusion /Recommendation**

The theme for introducing Turkish, and then Saudi troops on the territory of Syria appeared as soon as when on the 3rd to the 4th of February negotiations in Geneva were suddenly suspended. That led some observers to suggest that the whole scenario of the negotiations was only a formality to justify the subsequent course of escalation. However, it is far more likely that the troops will remain in the barracks. This does not mean a peaceful future. There is evidence that Saudi Arabia may seek its own solution to the Syrian problem through Ukraine. The biggest threat, of course, stems from Turkey. The situation in Syria for Erdogan is not just sad, it's disastrous. His clients are kicked out of North Latakia and give way to government troops in Aleppo. Moreover, Moscow and Damascus find a common language with the Syrian Kurds (which Turkey and the United States have repelled even more, the Turks strongly protest against Kurdish participation in the Geneva negotiations, the Americans agreed).

In view of the current status of the Russian-Turkish relations, in which Putin does not answer the insistent calls of Erdogan, it's simply unrealistic for Turkey to negotiate with Moscow about the termination of the government offensive, or about the isolation of the Kurds. Which means that Turkey has two options. The first: to "sit tight" and watch as on it's borders appears a hostile state with a Kurdish autonomy in its composition. A country that will hold Ankara responsible for all the "good" done by the Turks during the Syrian civil war. The second outcome for Turkey is to take action to prevent the described scenario. Such an action could be a Turkish invasion of

northern Syria, the destruction of Kurdish troops and the deployment there of Turkish garrisons “to protect civilians from the Russian-Syrian warmongers.” As a result of such actions Turkey may not only postpone the solution to the Kurdish problem, but create a buffer zone along the border with Syria. The reasons for such a decision are the Turkish warnings to the Russian military space forces in Syria that supposedly regularly cross the Turkish border. “We once again warn Russia. The damage that Moscow causes to the representatives of the Syrian opposition and the threats to Turkish airspace will not bring Russia any good,” said Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, adding that Turkey” has taken all necessary security measures along the border with Syria.”

However, the Turks are reluctant to make this decision because they are not sure of the main criterion of success guarantees for Russian non-interference. Only on condition that Moscow looks the other way to this intervention, does Turkey have any chance of success. Otherwise, the intervention will end with Turkey’s military, political and economic catastrophe that can not only lead to regime change in the country but also to its disintegration. If Turkish troops enter the territory of Syria and start fighting against Russian aircraft, then Moscow has every reason to turn all Turkish armor over the Syrian border, in a pile of scrap metal. There’s no hope for help from NATO. This will not automatically activate the corresponding Article of the Washington Treaty, because there will be no attack on Turkish territory. The question is how will NATO react. The alliance may still enter the war on the side of Turkey. But such a reaction is unlikely or simply unrealistic. A number of NATO countries will benefit from the optional nature of such a decision (in terms of the statutes of the Alliance) and even under the pressure from the US, they would be unwilling to start a military conflict with Russia over Turkish nonsense. On the other hand, if NATO remains aside, it would be politically incorrect; it would bring a schism in the alliance and would undermine the credibility of its political guarantees. It looks like those options are bad. The conflict between Turkey and Russia is advantageous for the Americans, but only to the extent that it does not develop into full-scale war. It is logical to assume that NATO will select a third, preventive option: to prevent the emergence of such a development and to force Turkey to abandon all plans for intervention. The above arguments against a Turkish invasion draw on logic, but the personality of the Turkish president should not be overlooked. It is entirely possible for Erdogan to take an illogical decision to put troops simply because he wants to. And if his own generals don’t stop him, much will depend on Moscow. If Russian troops begin to smash Turkish armor, Erdogan’s allies will get him out of Syria, and possibly out of Ankara. However, if Moscow shows weakness, the Turkish president will be a hero, and the Kremlin will have to withdraw early from Syria, and then the post-Soviet space.

The researcher recommends that the boundary between Syria and Turkey be properly demarcated, sanctions should be placed on any of the parties who encroach into another country’s land, the diplomatic relations between Turkey and Syria should be sustained.

Recommendations: United Nations Organisation should send a high powered delegation to visit Turkey and Syria, get their views to able UN assist NATO in mediating on the crisis. Both Turkey and Syria should suspend hostilities and adopt solutions proffered by NATO to end the crisis.

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