The Limitations and Consequences of Remote Warfare in Syria

https://www.e-ir.info/2021/02/18/the-limitations-and-consequences-of-remote-warfare-in-syria/

SINAN HATAHET, FEB 18 2021

This is an excerpt from *Remote Warfare: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Get your free download from E-International Relations.

Remote warfare aims to reduce the risks and costs of traditional military intervention and externalise the burdens of warfare to local partners and non-state actors. However, in reality, this practice comes with high risks. Non-state actors often pursue their own agenda and sometimes act against the wishes and advice of their backers. Delegating the strategic, operational and tactical burden of a foreign policy to local partners often comes at the expense of control and could easily escalate to new levels of violence. In the past nine years, Syria has been transformed into a theatre of complex remote warfare, waged by regional actors against neighbouring rivals, international powers against both rogue states and armed groups, and transnational terrorist organisations against incumbent states and local populations. These conflictual and unreconcilable foreign agendas have not only fuelled the ongoing war between Assad regime and the rebels, but they have also further destabilised the region, creating more animosity and mistrust among the different involved actors.

The chapter begins by providing a background to the conflict. The chapter then recounts the primary states engaged in remote warfare in Syria, their objectives and models of intervention. After this, it delves into the different types of interactions these states had with their respective Syrian partners or proxies. Following this overview, the chapter investigates how Syrian armed groups exercised their agencies, established their governance structures, and how these choices impacted the support they received from their backers and vice-versa. Finally, the chapter concludes with a sketch of the possible outcomes of the Syrian conflict on the armed groups' roles in Syria and beyond with the eventual withdrawal of their backers.

Background to the conflict in Syria

Following Assad's violent crackdown on civilians in 2011, some defected military officers and militants staged an armed insurgency against the Syrian Army, which is still ongoing. Encouraged by their constituencies and the flow of financial and material foreign assistance, these armed groups developed governance structures and claimed political and security roles (Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2018). Meanwhile, the Syrian state security and military apparatus suffered from significant human and material losses and had to give up control over large swaths of land to ensure the regime's survival in the capital and coastal regions. Despite the opposition's best efforts to fill the void left by the state withdrawal from northern and eastern Syria, transnational extremist actors such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant emerged and seized the opportunity to compete with grassroots movements (Rich and Conduit 2015).

In reaction to the growing instability in Syria, some regional and global state actors were concerned with the threats emanating from the country and decided to partner with local armed groups to collectively face these threats with a minimum military engagement on their behalf. However, what started as a security concern for some powerful states evolved to an objective to play a leading role in shaping the future of Syria. Another host of countries found an opportunity in the civil conflict either to re-enforce their influence over Damascus or to challenge Assad's authority

The Limitations and Consequences of Remote Warfare in Syria
Written by Sinan Hatahet

and eventually induce a regime change. This group, too, chose to support non-state actors.

Directly impacted by the ongoing events of the Syrian conflict, regional powers such as Iran and Turkey not only backed local actors, but also deployed their own soldiers to the battlefield. Both were impelled to increase their footprint in the war when the geopolitical implications of their absence grew too costly to sustain. In both cases, their direct intervention was deemed unavoidable, justifiable and legitimate in the eyes of their domestic public opinion or their political elite. This same logic did not apply in the case of international powers, such as the US, France and Britain. There are important reasons for this. First, Syria is too distant to create a sense of urgency or emanating threat on the domestic level. Second, the West's military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq resulted in war fatigue; there was simply no domestic appetite or support for waging new wars. Consequently, withdrawing forces from the Middle East became an essential part of their political discourse, finding justifications for further engagement even for moral imperatives seemed too challenging to achieve.

Eventually, the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the increase of terrorist attacks perpetrated by the group across Europe and the US established motives for the West's involvement in Syria (Kagan 2016). However, even then, any direct military intervention in Syria was still perceived domestically as financially, materially and politically too costly. Alternatively, the US along with 81 other countries founded the Global Coalition Against Daesh in 2014. To defeat the terrorist organisation, the Coalition adopted a dual strategy of counterterrorist military air strikes, and advising, training, and equipping local partners to plan and execute ground operations against Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. The US response to the threat posed by Islamic State demonstrates the will to achieve two objectives: first, burden-sharing with other states; second, maintaining a light footprint in the region through maximum use of technologically advanced weapons and minimum deployment of boots on the ground.

Russia, on the other hand, was not subject to the same imperatives or logic. The collective trauma of the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan was a distant memory, and, under Putin's leadership, Moscow was eager to reclaim a more assertive role on the international scene. Nonetheless, Russia, too, used the emergence of Islamic State to justify its intervention in Syria, and similarly it imprinted its military footprint through remote warfare, supporting Assad loyalist forces and mostly engaging its air forces only. The Russian approach was pragmatic and mostly motivated by financial constraints.

At the peak of the Syrian conflict in 2015, a myriad of regional and international powers were actively or indirectly engaged on the battlefield. Their different agenda and objectives further escalated tensions between them, disrupting traditional alliances and creating room for the establishment of new opportunistic arrangements between unlikely partners. An expected outcome of these dynamics was the emergence of different alliances and hence, competing projects, paving the way for remote warfare led by foreign powers, and fought by local forces to overcome their adversaries. Meanwhile, Syrian armed groups benefited from these growing hostilities to expand their agencies and to forcibly claim authority over larger populations with a devastating impact on civilian lives.

Foreign actors

The influence of foreign intervention in the Syrian conflict is neither unique nor peculiar. With 71 percent of civil wars recording at least one intervention, foreign intervention in civil wars is the rule rather than the exception (Achen and Snidel 1989). In the Syria case, foreign intervention has involved the transfer of money, arms and foreign militants (Hinnebusch 2017). From the outset of the conflict, both loyalist and opposition forces demonstrated a strong desire to rely on foreign assistance to overcome their adversaries. The Syrian opposition mainly sought financial support and weapons to wage their military operations against the Syrian army and has welcomed foreign volunteers, especially at the beginning of the conflict (Krieg 2016). Similarly, Assad pursued military and intelligence assistance to compensate for his losses on the ground, and eventually allowed the formation of foreign battalions to fight alongside his forces (Fulton 2013). What is unique about the Syrian case is not the phenomena of foreign intervention per se, but rather the extent to which international backers controlled the course and actions of local clients in waging remote warfare with minimum human and financial cost on their part.

The ability of foreign powers to play such a role could be partially explained by geopolitics and the strategic value of

The Limitations and Consequences of Remote Warfare in Syria

Written by Sinan Hatahet

Syria in a polarised region festering with rivalries. However, such an impact would not have been possible if it was not for the complex Syrian demography and the social rifts between religious and 'secular,' Sunnis and Alawites, Arabs and Kurds (Phillips 2015). These divisions were often craftily manipulated by emerging and traditional regional powers and between the West and Russia.

The conflict in Syria started with two main camps: one in support of the opposition consisted of the US, EU, France, UK, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and the other in support of the regime, mainly Russia, Iran and to a lesser degree China. For the US and Europe, their initial pro-opposition stance is derived from a broader support policy towards the Arab Spring revolutions. This position changed later as Islamic State emerged in eastern Syria and western Iraq and they adopted a counterterrorism policy to deal with the Jihadist threat in the region and elsewhere (Krieg 2016). In contrast, Russia's initial diplomatic support to Assad was motivated by the need to preserve its international status after NATO's perceived 'betrayal' in Libya (Katz 2011). Previously engaged in preventing the fall of Assad, Putin escalated his investment in the Syrian regime only in 2015 when he identified the conflict as an opportunity to upgrade his role in the Middle East. As for the Arab oil-rich monarchies led by Saudi Arabia, their intervention in the conflict aimed to prevent Syria from being open to the Iranian power projection in the Mediterranean region. Inversely, Tehran viewed the Syrian uprising as a direct threat to its regional presence and identified the opposition as the tools of regional rivals and as agents of the US and other Western powers (Rabinovich 2017). For Turkey and Qatar, the Syrian uprising represented an opportunity to create a new political structure in the Middle East, a post-Arab Spring populist order led by both as supporters of revolutionary forces (Pala 2015).

However, as the military operations intensified, new local and regional dynamics emerged, creating new alliances and alignments among these foreign actors and changing the nature of their interventions as well as their objectives. The first significant event was Obama's failure to respond to Assad's use of chemical weapons in Eastern Ghouta in 2013. The US' lack of assertive response despite its threats to act if this red line was crossed, has had enormous ramifications for the role of external actors within Syria for the duration of the war. Indeed, Obama's decision was perceived as a strong signal that even in the face of chemical weapons, the UK and US would not intervene against Assad.

The second event was the rise of Islamic State and the declaration of a new Caliphate on 29 June 2014. The organisation not only threatened the US' interests in Iraq, but it also carried out murderous attacks in European cities and on American soil (Hashim 2014). In response, Washington, under Obama's administration established an international coalition to combat the group, signalling a shift from the previous policy in support of regime change in Damascus and focusing solely on this new objective to push back Islamic State (Kumar 2015). This recalibration of priorities led to the development of two US policies. First, a tolerance towards a proliferation of Iranian-backed Shia armed groups in conflict with Islamic State, thus angering the Arab Gulf monarchies (Mansour 2017). Second, a train-and-equip programme to Free Syrian Army (FSA) forces and the People Protection Units (YPG), the armed wing of the Syrian Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) affiliate the Democratic Union Party (PYD) (Parlar Dal 2016). This alienated Turkey who lists both groups as terrorist organisations (Ertem 2018).

The third significant event that changed the course of the Syrian conflict was the Egyptian coup-d'état on 3 July 2013. Even though not directly related to Syria, this event signalled the start of a Saudi-Emirati-led counter-revolution in the Middle East (Steinberg 2014). The Arab Gulf monarchies exploited the Syrian conflict to counter Iran, but they were also very wary of the Arab Spring and the wave of democratisation it promised for the region. These fears increased as Turkey and Qatar seemed more in tune with the revolutionary movements, thus threatening Riyadh's leadership of the Arab Sunni states. In Syria, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates anticipated a possible opposition victory and directed their support to amenable groups polarising the opposition and weakening its unified stance against Assad.

These shifts coincided with Washington's efforts to negotiate the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Tehran, which further exacerbated the feelings of betrayal within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), who perceived the agreement as a green light for Iran's expansion in Syria and the Middle East (Bahi 2017). Moreover, feeling the US reluctance to support the opposition against Assad or Iran in Syria, Russia officially announced its direct military

The Limitations and Consequences of Remote Warfare in Syria
Written by Sinan Hatahet

intervention in the Syrian conflict in September 2015, effectively ending all prospects of Western-led efforts to oust Assad. The US-GCC relations were rectified later on when Trump announced the US withdrawal from the JCPOA. This resolved perceived grievances between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. But it fell short of recalibrating the balance of power between the opposition and the Syrian regime, which now felt stronger because of the air superiority the Russian forces brought to the battlefield.

The US foreign policy changes in the Middles East under the new administration did not have a similar impact on Turkey. The latter fear of YPG expansion in Northern Syria has led its leadership to seek a security arrangement with Russia. This unusual cooperation allowed the Turkish Army with the help and assistance of opposition armed groups to chase the YPG out of northern Aleppo but has also further strained Ankara's relationship with the rest of the NATO nations (Kasapoğlu 2018).

Model of collaboration and cooperation

The US, Russia, Iran, Turkey, France and the UK all have boots on the ground, but they are present in small numbers, rarely fight on the frontline and mostly provide technical and logistic support to their Syrian allies. The models of their interaction and collaboration with the latter differ from one case to another. The Russians, for instance, adopt a top to bottom approach in dealing with loyalist forces, enforcing direct oversight of the regime's military operations, and even intervening in nominating and promoting their commanders (Al-Modon 2019). Others, like the US, adopt a bottom-up approach, assisting grass-root movements without significant interference in their clients' organisation or modus operandi beyond vetting eligible members for training or receiving funds and equipment.

Generally, differences among these models can be observed over three main spectrums. First, the degree of ideological alignment and extent to which the foreign power requires a certain level of affinity with the local ally. Second, the level of professionalism expected from the armed group or army brigade. Third, the modalities of support provided to the partner and to how it is put to his disposal.

Naturally, global and extra-regional powers score low on the ideological alignment spectrum. The lack of religious, sectarian and cultural similarities with the local communities and groups does not allow them to impose high standards in picking their allies. Alternatively, they choose to affiliate groups depending on their differences with their adversaries. Russia, for instance, initially supported hardcore loyalists but also accommodated former reconciled opposition fighters (al-Khateb 2019). Similarly, the US first assisted radical Sunni Arab opposition groups but then turned to the leftist/communist YPG when the former refused to put on hold their battles against Assad forces to concentrate on the emerging threat posed by Islamic State (Blanchard 2014; Kanat 2015). In contrast, regional actors relied on groups with higher sectarian or ideological affinity. For instance, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar sought Sunni-dominated groups, whereas Iran mostly supported Shia or Alawites. For example, when the Turkish army launched the Olive Branch operation against the YPG in Afrin, it relied on Turkmen and Arabs with grievances against the Kurds (Etgu 2018). However, it is worth noting that Iran displayed an advanced capacity to recruit beyond the traditional sectarian rifts and was able to ideologically indoctrinate local leaders, including Sunnis, to compensate for the relatively small Shia community in Syria.

As for the level of professionalism, the US and Russia stand on opposing ends of the spectrum. The US, on the one hand, has shown little interest in how their allies are organised, and this trait has been witnessed during their interaction with the Arab Sunni opposition as well as the Kurds. Only a few attempts to form standard military operations rooms were observed throughout the American intervention in Syria (Lister 2016). Russia, on the other hand, has early on demonstrated a strong desire to reform the Syrian state military and security apparatus. This determination could be explained by the Russian intent to instate a disciplined satellite state in the Levant, an objective the US never had. Like Russia, Turkey also has adopted a similar aim of professionalising the opposition groups in northern Syria. This is motivated by Ankara's plans to endure a continued presence in Syria, but it is also due to the Turkish army's lack of experience working with non-state actors.

In contrast, Iran and the GCC states both have histories of operating with grassroots movements and militias. Iran

The Limitations and Consequences of Remote Warfare in Syria

Written by Sinan Hatahet

has not only shipped Lebanese, Iraqi, Afghani, and Pakistani militants to Syria but has encouraged the formation of Syrian loyalist groups (Mohseni 2017). Likewise, the Arab Gulf states also facilitated the flow of hundreds of volunteers to join the opposition and poured in money and equipment to a myriad of Sunni Arab armed groups in the early stages of the conflict (Hokayem, 2014).

In regard to the support modalities provided to their allies, the regime backers have proven more generous and direct. Reports suggest that Assad requested Iranian technical assistance as soon as 2011, mainly in an advisory capacity to train the regime forces in containing protests. But this assistance has also involved financial aid to the Syrian government (Fulton 2013). In 2013, the concerted Iranian efforts to preserve Bashar al-Assad in power significantly increased following the rapid advance of the Syrian opposition in northern and central Syria, and hundreds of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps experts and equipment were put forward to prevent the opposition's victory. This level of support was only matched by the Russians in September 2015, when their aviation and military experts stepped in to compensate for the losses the Syrian Army and Iranian-backed militias endured, and to reverse the opposition's military gains. In comparison, the opposition allies did not invest nearly as much. The US mainly provided small arms ammunition, short-ranged artilleries, limited amounts of anti-tank guided missiles, and coordinated air-strikes against Islamic State militants only (Krieg 2016). Moreover, the Arab Gulf states and Turkey took a similar approach by not offering more than limited financial and logistical support to their affiliated groups.

Seeking autonomy

Foreign powers have undoubtedly influenced the course of the conflict and have guaranteed a say for themselves in its final resolution. However, local groups and actors have still managed to preserve a certain level of agency and have, on multiple occasions, impacted their backers' policies. Engaged in remote warfare, foreign backers can only exercise a limited degree of control and restraint over their local allies. Hence, it is only natural that the latter pursue their policies, especially in their domestic sphere of influence and mainly in security, economy and political engagement with their constituencies. Moreover, as the conflict persists, these actors embrace an increasing level of autonomy, and heterogeneous governance structures emerge, adding complexity to future peace resolution as local communities become more protective of their new acquisitions and rights.

From a practical point of view, Syrian armed groups are key actors in security provision, they are de-facto governments within the territories under their control, they are military entities active in combat, and they behave as authorities responsible for the protection of their constituencies. To some extent, all foreign backers seek stabilisation in their respective sphere of influence, but their level of engagement differs from one another. On the one hand, the US encourage their allies to embrace inclusive policies and to recruit from other ethnic and religious communities to lessen grievances among minorities. Turkey and Russia, on the other hand, pursue a more direct approach and often discipline rogue actors if proven guilty or a threat to their stabilisation efforts. Nonetheless, Syrian groups still assume a significant autonomous role in security provision. For instance, the PYD created a sperate unit for law reinforcement in their areas of control called the Asayish (Federici 2015). Whereas the Coalition collaborates with and coordinates the YPG on the battlefield, the Asayish remains autonomous as they pursue their policies independently from any foreign intervention. Similarly, the opposition armed groups are only partially involved in the day-to-day disputes, and they often resort to local mediation and arbitration in maintaining societal peace. This approach prevents unwelcomed interference in domestic politics (Hatahet 2017).

Economically speaking, the principle that combatants should be separated from civilians often makes little sense to the armed groups. On the contrary, they rely heavily on their proximity to civilian populations to sustain themselves and to consolidate their control over a territory and its resources. Moreover, combatants often engage in parallel financial activities, trade, trafficking, smuggling, extortion, and various quick on cash activities. It is true that the majority of Syrian armed groups heavily rely on their backers' financial aid and assistance, but they also grew accustomed to developing their own sources of income. For instance, the YPG weapons and equipment is mostly provided by the US (Ergun 2018). Nonetheless, they also control a large section of the oil production in Syria, offering them alternative revenue streams and consequently more autonomy. Indeed, multiple reports confirm active oil trade between the regime and YPG despite the US sanctions placed over Damascus (Benoit Faucon 2019). Likewise, the opposition and loyalist groups also engage in bilateral trade and cooperate in illegal smuggling activities.

The Limitations and Consequences of Remote Warfare in Syria

Written by Sinan Hatahet

Lastly, Syrian armed groups are sophisticated entities that seek political legitimacy within their constituency. To enhance their political stance, the majority of non-state actors sought to provide humanitarian and social services for their people. Both the YPG and Syrian opposition established local councils to provide basic governance structures and to represent their constituencies. The regime, on the other, has tolerated the emergence of the popular informal committee to manage the daily governance aspect of loyalist communities (Agha 2019). Here again, foreign backers mostly dealt with these grass root institutions as a reality and were not able to command and control them beyond their capacity to fund their activities and with little success when this occurred.

Conclusion

Three main broad camps currently exist in Syria. The first is led and funded by the US and is composed of the YPG, local Arab tribes and Assyrian armed groups. The second is backed by Russia and Iran and consists of regime forces, local militias, and foreign Shia militant groups. The third is endorsed by Turkey and incorporates a myriad of opposition groups from various ideological stances, including mainstream Islamist factions and national patriotic parties. Even though all foreign backers are engaged in different shapes and forms of negotiations to end the stalemate and establish a peaceful resolution as soon as possible, each camp is fundamentally at odds with the other.

The Russian intervention in September 2015 marked a turning point in the Syrian conflict and has theoretically ended all possibilities of foreign involvement that achieves a regime change. Moscow's commitment to Assad has placed him in a stronger position vis-à-vis his opponents. The Syrian regime's current objective is to regain control over all the Syrian territory and to reconsolidate its authority over all armed groups, including loyalists and Iranian-backed local allies. The YPG thus far has restrained from any confrontation with the regime but is nowhere ready to abandon its autonomy, which puts it on a collision course with Damascus. The Peace Spring military operation launched by Turkey on north-eastern Syria, however, inadvertently unlocked the deadlock on SDF-Assad negotiations. Unable to obtain the level of protection it required from Washington, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (commonly known as AANES) sought Moscow and Damascus to deter Ankara and has concluded a hasty security arrangement with the regime that allows the latter to redeploy its forces along the Syrian borders with Turkey. In a sense, such an arrangement also plays in favour of Turkey, who believes it could obtain a stronger commitment from Russia to contain the PYD than the US, but most importantly it also sets the environment for the second round of political negotiations between the SDF and Assad.

It is still too early to draw the potential outcome of such negotiations, especially when taking into consideration the US decision to remain in the area. However, in contrast to its approach to dealing with Turkey-backed Arab armed opposition groups, the regime has not dismissed the possibility of a political arrangement with the PYD. The latter's dependence on Russia's protecting it has considerably weakened its stance towards Damascus. The remaining question is whether Assad would conclude such an accord 'domestically' or would allow it to become an internationally led process.

Russia has been relatively more successful in its remote warfare in Syria than other actors, including the US, for several reasons. First, Moscow's stance has been consistent throughout the conflict; it has demonstrated unmatched willingness in supporting Assad. In comparison, both Washington and regional backers of the opposition have considerably changed their position. The US' initial backing of the Syrian rebels was done to control the flow of weapons and funds to them rather than actively seeking the regime change. The US has since abandoned all resolve to support them as Islamic State emerged. Similarly, actively engaged in assisting and equipping Assad opponents, Turkey eventually shifted all attention to countering the US empowered PYD as their influence grew at its southern borders, and the oil-rich Arab monarchies actively withdrew from Syria following the Houthis' 2015 take-over of Sana'a in Yemen.

Second, Moscow has also shown more strategic agility than Washington. Putin took advantage of the domestic turmoil that shook Turkey to neutralise its stance towards Assad. Moreover, when given the opportunity, he has exhibited more sensitivity to Ankara's security concern in Syria and has successfully avoided raising any significant contention with other regional powers. In comparison, the US has shown less resolve to address its Turkish ally's

The Limitations and Consequences of Remote Warfare in Syria

Written by Sinan Hatahet

fears, and the Coalition's support to the PYD increased its anxieties and has indirectly pushed it into Russia's arms.

Third, protected by its veto in the Security Council and facing less domestic scrutiny over its use of military force abroad, Russia has shown no constraint in defeating its opponents. Implementing scorched-earth tactics, the Russian air forces relentlessly destroyed all opposition capacity to resist and have also seized the opportunity to test new weapons. The US, on the other hand, has demonstrated this willingness only against Islamic State, and even then, it has refrained from using excessive force. The Russian inclination to use all necessary means to claim victory has instilled more fear in its adversaries, and its threats were thus taken more seriously than the less assertive US in Syria.

Overall, the conflict in Syria presents an interesting example of modern conflicts, with global and regional powers waging remote warfare against their adversaries. In comparison with other contemporary wars, foreign backers have pursued their objectives with minimum human and capital costs. However, the Syrian case is also an excellent illustration of the limits of remote warfare. Local armed and political groups are gaining maturity and are increasingly imposing their footprint on the regional scene. Meanwhile, the centralised nation-state model of governance is eroding, and no credible structures are emerging to fill the void left by the collapse of authoritarian regimes. Hence, it is crucial to recognise the need for establishing a new political framework to build sustainable peace in the Middle East. Such a structure should place community participation and consensus at the heart of any political process. Otherwise, the region will remain a hotbed for insurgency and instability for years to come.

References

Achen, Christopher H., and Duncan Snidal. 1989. 'Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies.' *World Politics,* 41(2): 144–169.

Agha, Munqeth Othman. 2019. 'Early Recovery in Syria: An Assessment of the Regime's Role and Capability.' In *Economic Recovery in Syria: Mapping Actors and Assessing Current Policies*, 84. Omran for Strategic Studies.

al-Khateb, Khaled. 2019. 'Ex-FSA fighters recruited by Damascus to fight opposition in northern Syria.' *Al-Monitor.* 13 June. https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/06/syrian-regime-recruit-former-fsa-fighters-idlib-offensive.html

Al-Modon. 2019. 'Russia and Iran Divide up Syria's Security.' *The Syrian Observer.* 8 April. https://syrianobserver.com/EN/features/49638/russia-and-iran-divide-up-syrias-security.html

Etgu, Muslum. 2018. 'Syrian Arab and Turkmen tribes hail Turkish operation.' Anadolu Agency.13 December. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/syrian-arab-and-turkmen-tribes-hail-turkish-operation/1337657

Bahi, Riham. 2017. 'Iran, the GCC and the Implications of the Nuclear Deal: Rivalry versus Engagement.' *The International Spectator,* 52(2): 89–101.

Benoit, Faucon, and Nazih Osseiran. 2019. 'US's Syria Ally Supplies Oil to Assad's Brokers*.' Wall Street Journal.* 8 February.https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-s-syria-ally-supplies-oil-to-assads-brokers-11549645073

Blanchard, Christopher M., Carla E. Humud, and Mary Beth D. Nikitin. 2014.*Armed conflict in Syria: Overview and US response.* Library of Congress Washington DC Congressional Research Service.

Bojicic-Dzelilovic, Vesna, and Rim Turkmani. 2018. 'War economy, governance and security in Syria's opposition-controlled areas.' *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development,* 7(1): 1–17.

Ergun, Doruk. 2018. 'External Actors and VNSAs: An Analysis of the United States, Russia, ISIS, and PYD/YPG.' In *Violent Non-state Actors and the Syrian Civil War,* edited by Ozden Zeynep Oktav, Emel Parlar Dal and Ali Murat Kursun. Springer: 149–172.

The Limitations and Consequences of Remote Warfare in Syria
Written by Sinan Hatahet

Ertem, Helin Sarı. 2018. 'Surrogate Warfare in Syria and the Pitfalls of Diverging US Attitudes Toward ISIS and PYD/YPG. In *Violent Non-state Actors and the Syrian Civil War,* edited by Ozden Zeynep Oktav, Emel Parlar Dal and Ali Murat Kursun. Springer: 129–148.

Federici, Vittoria. 2015. 'The rise of Rojava: Kurdish autonomy in the Syrian conflict.'*SAIS Review of International Affairs,* 35(2): 81–90.

Fulton, Will et al. 2013. *Iranian Strategy in Syria.* Institute for the Study of War.

Hashim, Ahmed S. 2014. 'The Islamic State: From al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate.' *Middle East Policy* 21(4): 69–83.

Hatahet, Sinan. 2017. 'Infighting Among the Syrian Opposition.' *Sharq Forum.*

Hinnebusch, Raymond. 2017. 'The battle for Syria: international rivalry in the new Middle East.' *International Affairs,* 93(1): 223–224.

Hokayem, Emile. 2014. 'Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian civil war.' S*urvival,* 56(6*): 59– 86.

Kagan, Frederick W., et al. 2016. *Al-Qaeda and ISIS: Existential Threats to the US and Europe.* Institute for the Study of War.

Kanat, Kilic, and Kadir Ustun. 2015. 'US-Turkey Realignment on Syria.' *Middle East Policy,* 22(4): 88–97.

Kasapoğlu, Can, and Sinan Ülgen. 2018. 'Operation Olive Branch: A Political–Military Assessment.' Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM).

Katz, Mark, and Va Fairfax. 2011. 'Russia and the Arab spring.' *Russian Analytical Digest* 98(6): 4–6.

Khalaf, Rana. 2015. 'Governance without Government in Syria: Civil society and state building during conflict.'*Syria Studies.* 7(3).

Krieg, Andreas. 2016. 'Externalizing the burden of war: the Obama Doctrine and US foreign policy in the Middle East.' *International Affairs,* 92(1): 97–113.

Kumar, Chanchal. 2015. 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) a global threat: international strategy to counter the threat.' *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities,* 1(4): 345–353.

Lister, Charles. 2016. 'The Free Syrian Army: A decentralized insurgent brand.' The Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World*.* Brookings Institute.

Mansour, Renad. 2017. 'Iraq After the Fall of ISIS: The Struggle for the State.' Middle East and North Africa Programme*,* Chatham House.

Mohseni, Payam, and Hussein Kalout. 2017. 'Iran's axis of resistance rises.' *Foreign Affairs.* 24 January.

Pala, Özgür, and Bülent Aras. 2015. 'Practical geopolitical reasoning in the Turkish and Qatari foreign policy on the Arab Spring.' *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies,* 17(3): 286–302.

Parlar Dal, Emel. 2016. 'Impact of the transnationalization of the Syrian civil war on Turkey: conflict spillover cases of ISIS and PYD-YPG/PKK.' *Cambridge Review of International Affairs,* 29(4): 1396–1420.

Phillips, Christopher. 2015. 'Sectarianism and conflict in Syria.' *Third World Quarterly,* 36(2): 357–376.

The Limitations and Consequences of Remote Warfare in Syria

Written by Sinan Hatahet

Rabinovich, Itamar. 2017. 'The Syrian Civil War as a Global Crisis.' *Sfera Politicii,* 25 (191-192): 44–48.

Rich, Ben, and Dara Conduit. 2015. 'The impact of jihadist foreign fighters on indigenous secular-nationalist causes: Contrasting Chechnya and Syria.' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* 38(2): 113– 131. Steinberg, Guido. 2014. 'Leading the counter-revolution: Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring.' *Social Science Open Access Repository* (SWP) 27.

About the author:

Sinan Hatahet is a Senior Associate Fellow at Al Sharq Forum. He is currently a consultant working with a number of think tanks on Syria. His research is concentrated on governance and local councils, anti-radicalisation, Islamism, the Kurdish National Movement, and the new regional order in the Middle East. He previously worked as the Executive Director of the Syrian National Coalition media office from its establishment in late 2012 until September 2014.