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HASAN KALYONCU ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ
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İNGİLİZCE TEZLİ YÜKSEK LİSANS PROGRAMI

THE DILEMMA OF SYRIAN REFUGEES: RETURNING HOME VS. STAYING
RELATED TO SECURITY AT HOMELAND

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

HAZIRLAYAN
JOMAH ALQASEM

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LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ
MÜDÜRLÜĞÜNE
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Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak sunduğum “**THE DILEMMA OF SYRIAN REFUGEES: RETURNING HOME VS. STAYING, RELATED TO SECURITY AT HOMELAND**” başlıklı çalışmanın tarafımca, bilimsel ahlak ve geleneklere aykırı düşecek bir yardıma başvurmaksızın yazıldığını ve yararlandığım eserlerin kaynakçada gösterilenlerden oluştuğunu ve bunlara atıf yapılarak yararlanmış olduğumu belirtir ve onurumla doğrularım. 12/01/2022.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DGMM	Directorate General of Migration Management
ERW	Explosive remnants of war
FGD	Focus group discussions
GoS	Government of Syria
HH	Household
HLP	Housing, land, and property
IDP	Internally displaced persons
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
INGO	International non-governmental organization
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Sham
KII	Key informant interview
NES	North-east Syria
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OAGs	Opposition Armed Groups
PYD	Democratic Union Party
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SYP	Syrian pounds
SNA	Syrian National Army
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UN Refugee Agency)
UNOCHA	United Nations for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UXO	Unexploded ordinance
VBIED	Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device
YPG	People’s Protection Unit

GEOGRAPHIC CLASSIFICATIONS

Governorate Highest form of governance below the national level (admin level 1)
District Sub-division of a governorate in which government institutions operate (admin level 2)
Sub-district Sub-division of a district in which government institutions operate (admin level 3)
Community Bounded clustering of the population in the form of a city, town, or village (admin level 4)
Neighborhood Lowest administrative unit within a city (admin level 5 or 6).

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to analyze the motives of the Syrian refugees to return, which correlates with security sector improvement in the northwest of Syria, in the areas controlled by Turkey. The research focuses on the priorities of the refugees to return, and in some parts, it highlights some of the Syrian returnees' experiences in the north of Syria. Then it moves into details to security sector deterioration reasons, then recommendations for improvement and development of this sector and the correlation with the political transition as seen by refugees and wished by them (conditions to return).

The study states the push and pull factors of Syrian refugees to return an immense significance. There will be some highlights from migration experts' suggestions on the voluntary return of refugees. These push and pull factors – after stating some of them in the eyes and minds of Syrian refugees- the study will go deeper into security-related ones alone. In the end, the research answers the question “Can Syrian refugees go back home?” and if so, how and when and to where?

ÖZ

Bu tez, Suriye'nin kuzeybatısındaki güvenlik sektörünün iyileştirilmesi ile ilişkili olan Suriyeli mültecilerin geri dönüş motivasyonlarını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır; Türkiye tarafından kontrol edilen bölgelerde, araştırma, mültecilerin geri dönüş önceliklerine odaklanıp, bir kısmı Suriye'nin kuzeyine geri dönen Suriyelilerin yaşadıklarının altını çizecektir. Daha sonra güvenlik sektörünün bozulma nedenlerine ve bu sektörün iyileştirilmesi ve geliştirilmesi için tavsiyelere ve mültecilerin gördüğü ve istedikleri siyasi geçiş ile korelasyona (geri dönüş koşulları) değinmektedir.

Çalışma, Suriyeli mültecilerin geri dönüşü için itici ve çekici faktörlerin büyük bir önem taşıdığını ve göç uzmanlarının mültecilerin gönüllü dönüşü konusundaki önerilerinden bazı önemli noktalar olacağını belirtmektedir. Bu itici ve çekici faktörlerin – bazılarını Suriyeli mültecilerin gözünde ve zihninde canlandıktan sonra - çalışma sadece güvenlikle ilgili alanlarda daha da derinleşecektir. Sonunda araştırmamız şu soruyu yanıtlayacak “Suriyeli mülteciler eve dönebilir mi?” ve eğer öyleyse, nasıl, ne zaman ve nereye?

Keywords: refugees, Syrians, return, security, apparatus, returnees.

Introduction

Through the past ten years of the Syrian conflict, the world witnessed unprecedented displacement and deportation movement of Syrians inside their country and out of it. According to the United Nations (UN), more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees are registered in Turkey and over 6.5 million in the neighboring countries and beyond. There are also more than 6.6 million internally displaced people inside the country. The biggest bulk of these internally displaced people came from the south, east, and middle of Syrian territories to the north – mainly north Aleppo and Idlib provinces – next to the borders with Turkey. Many reasons led to these influxes of refugees to the north or even a step further to Turkey and outer world countries, which made them climb the ladder to be the world’s biggest refugee population in modern history. The brutal conflict and violence led to the killing of more than 500.000 (Specia, 2018) people as the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights reported, (SOHR is an independent and impartial UK-based human rights organization founded in 2006 by Rami Abdulrahman) more than half of the population are outside their homes, tens of thousands are in detention facilities or forced disappeared, many families shattered, injured and disabled people, combined with insufficient income for families, decreased purchasing power, worsening security conditions, limited employment opportunities and other grievances of this war which continues without a stop for the 10th year. Each year of the conflict had witnessed certain events that journalists, historians, and many local and international writers had documented. Still, the central theme was security-related incidents which made many politicians and writers depict north Syria as “a second Gaza strip” (Balanche, 2020) in a sense that both areas’ level of security is similarly flawed, small in geography, and dense in population.

According to the Directorate General of Migration Management in Ankara, there are 3.650.000 registered Syrian refugees in Turkey under the status of temporary protection till the time of writing this thesis (Management, Temporary Protection in Turkey, 2014). This number puts Turkey as the first among the world countries in hosting refugees. Above the former number, comes other Syrian refugees in Turkey who are under touristic, work, or student residency permits. Furthermore, there is still a considerable number of Syrians without neither temporary protection status nor residency status, and they are very few in numbers - illegally staying as refugees.

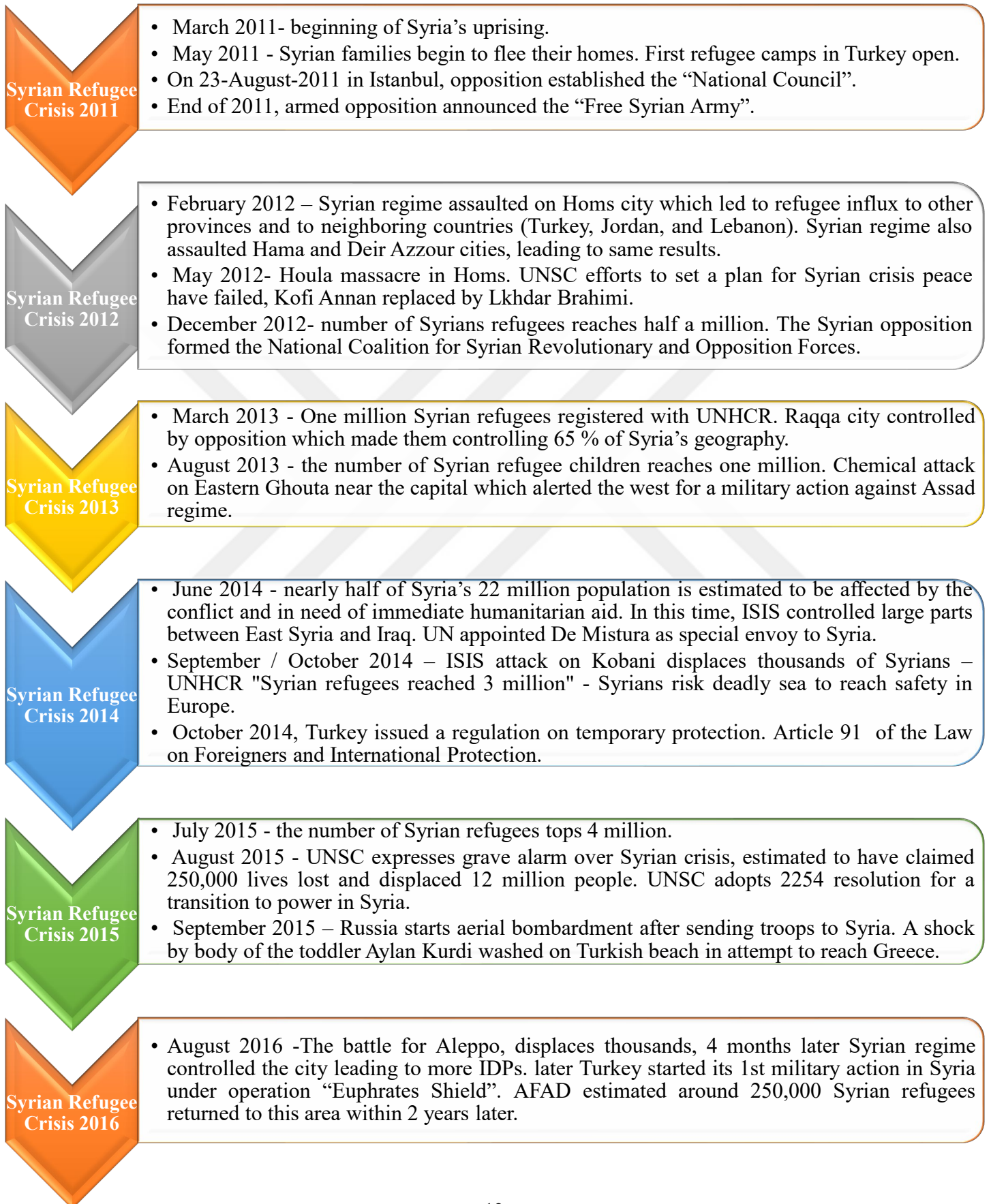
The drivers and patterns of the displaced Syrians were partially mentioned as there is no space for mentioning everything about the Syrian crisis, but the research covers most related topics. For example, many Syrian youths left their country and still leaving it – especially in

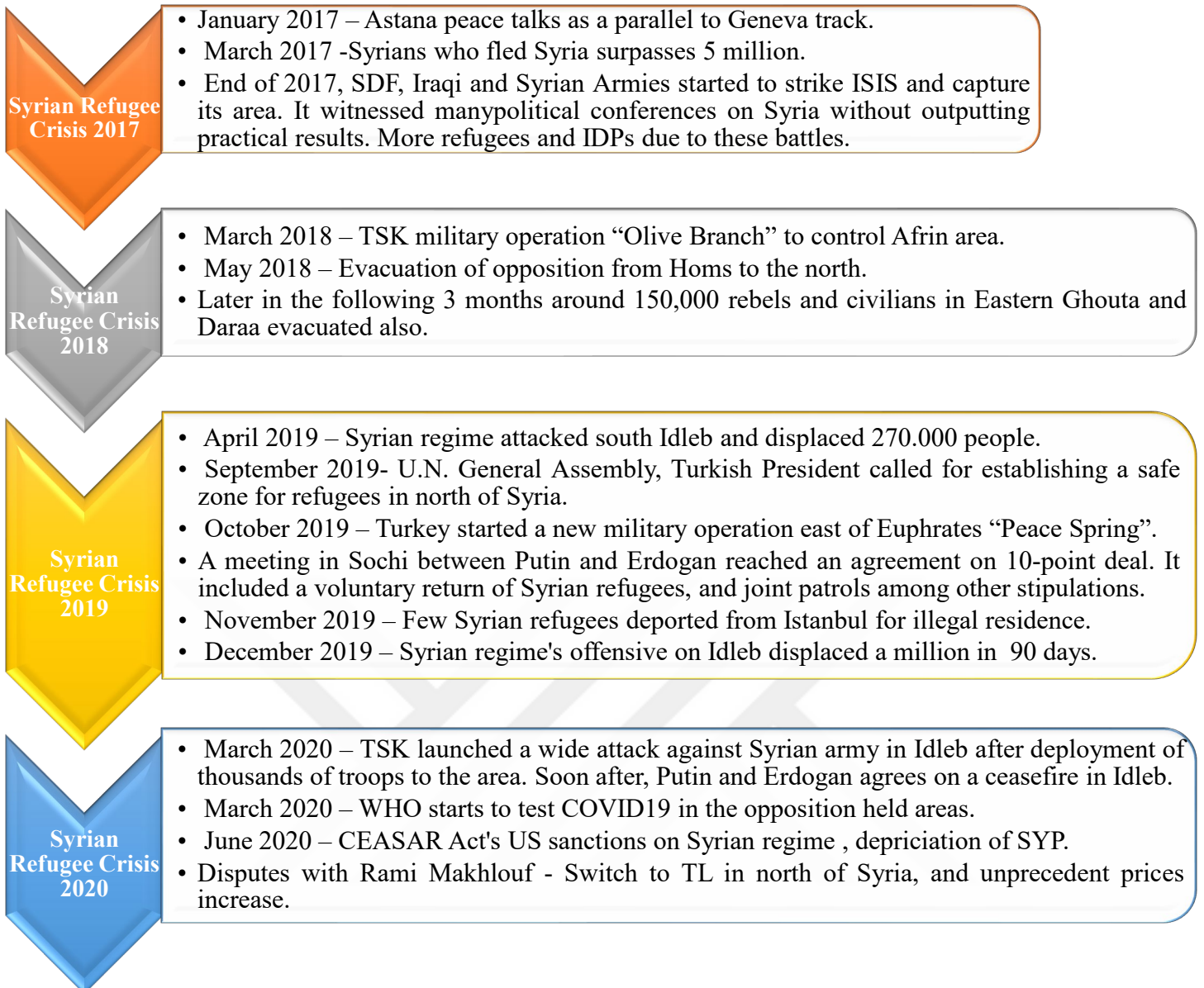
Syrian regime-controlled areas – fleeing away from forced conscription. There are other reasons and pushing factors for Syrians to run away from the country, but all of them are revolving around the deteriorating security situation in the war-torn country. The Syrians' search for safety continued till today due to the multiple security threats they lived.

There is a simple timeline of the major incidents that caused Syrians' mass displacements in the below sequel. This narration of the main incidents focuses only on the exodus or influx of IDPs (internally displaced people) and refugees outside their communities. Throughout the course of the last ten years, many mass displacement events happened, and most of them were initiated by the conflict parties. Also, most of them were forcibly deported from central and southern areas of Syria. Even later, it was a common technique used by the Syrian government - called "Green Buses" (Denselow, 2017) and this term was metaphorically used as these vehicles were used to transport deported people to the north and were painted in green - through public transportation in Syria. Other mechanisms were also used to mobilize Syrians within the country or outside, as well.

In general, the research tried to put some milestones or big events in a small synopsis to get a general idea about the refugees' crisis in Syria throughout the last ten years (Yacoubian, 2021).

Figure 1: Syria's IDPs and refugees influx timeline: since the uprising till 2020





Since early 2011, when the protests in Syria started, violence rate started to increase, checkpoints of the Syrian army and intelligence services ramped up the 14 provinces of the country, security inspection and detention campaigns, interrogation, and executions of protestors in the intelligence services of the Syrian regime, etc. and many other related reasons pushed the opposition to be armed and start fighting the Syrian government, these are the reasons for Syrians to begin leaving their country. After the first three years of the uprising, most of the Syrian geography was under opposition forces’ control, but right after ISIS - a radical group in Syria emerged - it made a new equation on the Syrian arena. For two years only, ISIS controlled a third of Syria (Cameron Glenn, Rowan et all, 2019) in the north and east of the country, connecting these areas to Iraq. The main provinces of Raqqa, Deir Azzour, and Hasakeh are the wealthiest areas in Syria in water resources and oil.

Later, Syria entered a new parallel political venue through a tripartite agreement in Astana (Aljazeera, 2017) between Turkey, Russia, and Iran. During 2018, the opposition lost

many areas in the south and central provinces, and they were evacuated in buses to the north of Syria, specifically, Idleb and north Aleppo (Al-Shobassi, 2017).

One year before, ISIS was deteriorating; Turkey and the Syrian opposition groups fought them in Al-Bab and Jarablus (Sinan Ülgen, 2017), while to the east, the Syrian regime and SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) were racing on the banks of the Euphrates river to control areas from ISIS. In 2019, the Syrian government launched another offensive on Idleb controlling parts of it, and Turkey controlled Tal Abyad and Ras Alain east of the Euphrates. The successive incursions and offensives from different actors worsened the refugee influx. Refugees' movement outside the country came due to the increase of violence made by the oppression of the Syrian government, ISIS, YPG, and part of OAGs, which made people leave their country.

The latest pandemic of COVID19 had impacted the migration of Syrians outside through the north to Turkey or through the south and east towards areas controlled by the Syrian regime and Syrian Democratic Forces. The precautions measures of COVID 19 virus infection had restricted the movement of internally displaced Syrians towards the regions controlled by different parties (crosslines movement). These movements are a first step in the movement plan for refugees who plan to migrate outside the country. Despite the late infection so far, in Syria but the border closure with neighboring countries coming at the same time with sanction from the U.S new Caesar act (Department U. S., 2019) made the movement idler for Syrians inside their country, albeit from the movement abroad.

One of the realities in the frame of this topic is that there is still an ongoing movement of refugees outside north of Syria to Turkey or to other neighboring countries till the time of writing this thesis. One significant component of this movement is the parallel movement of family union for Syrian refugees in Europe at most and other abroad countries. The same applies to Turkey as Syrian refugees in Turkey can make family reunification applications in their province. This process takes a long time, and in many cases, the evaluation of the applications comes with negative results. Here, the applicants' family members come to Turkey via illegal ways and smugglers. This movement outside Syria through Turkey is the primary classification of all Syrians fleeing to Turkey (some students want to pursue their higher study at Turkish universities, patients with chronic diseases and complex medical cases, i.e., Syrian cancer patients who come to south Turkey for treatment, tradespeople, and businessmen who come to Turkey for trade).

In general, the biggest ratio of Syrian crossing to Turkey after mid 2016, when Turkey closed the borders for ordinary Syrians in Syria who wanted to come to Turkey and left a sole

option: having permission for crossing. The crossing permission can be granted for NGO workers, tradesmen registered in one of the Turkish provinces' chambers of commerce, patients who need special treatment that is not available in hospitals in north of Syria. This movement decreased the movement of Syrian citizens to Turkey and increased the Turkish security control over the personnel who are moving across the two sides of the borders.

Turkey's Directorate General of Migration clarifies in article 49 of the temporary protection law, about this opportunity for Syrian refugees in Turkey to bring their family members from Syria. According to the temporary protection regulation (Article 49), applications for family reunification in Turkey with relatives (spouse and children) who may be residing abroad and wish to join in Turkey, shall be evaluated by DGMM, which may be in contact and work in cooperation with relevant public institutions, international organizations, and civil organizations, as relevant. Such requests, therefore, should be raised directly with the Turkish authorities (UNHCR, 2017). This regulation complies with the network theory, a fundamental valid fact in migration studies.

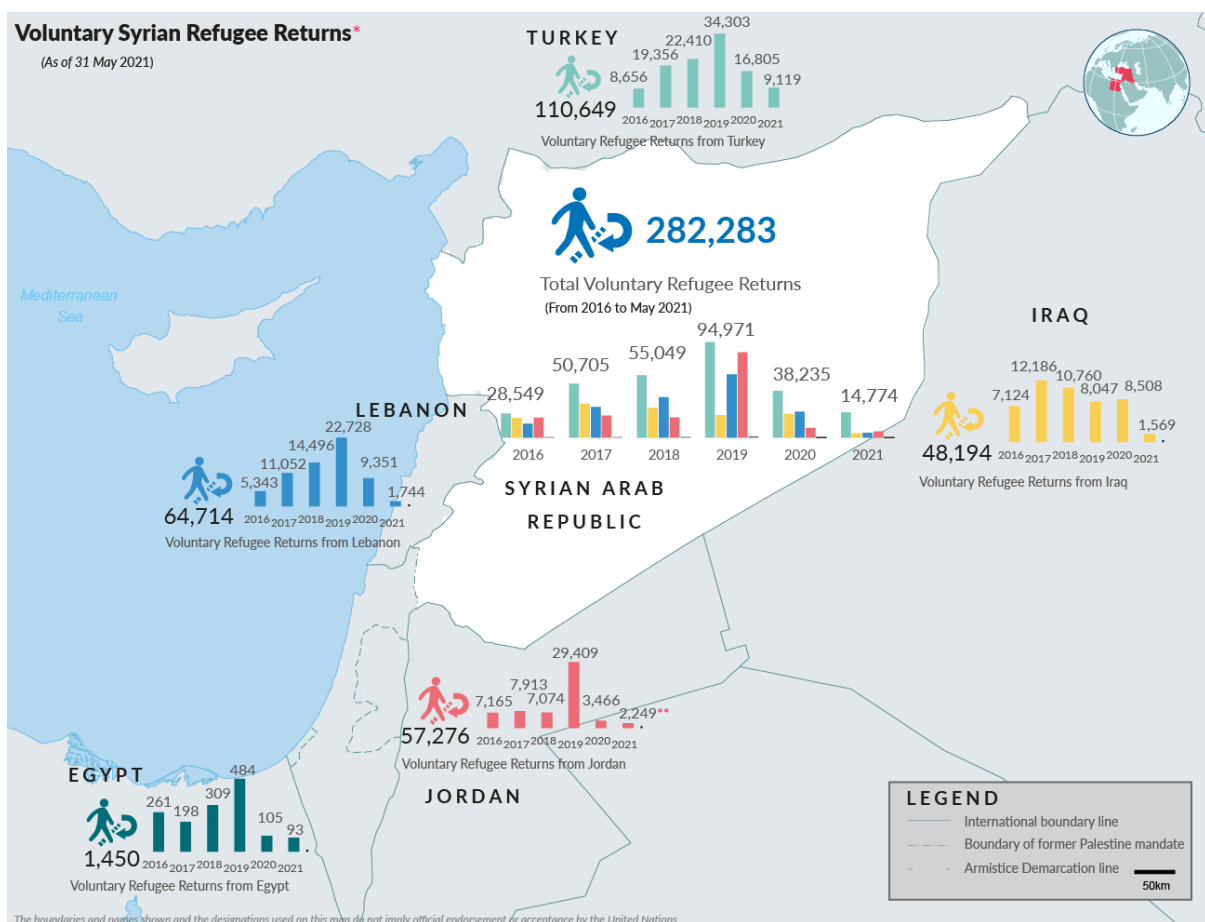
In general, there are a lot of details in the process of Syrian refugees return, and a big question mark revolves around the borders, destination in the home country, conditions and minimum requirements for return, mechanisms and estimated timeframe for return, numbers, and some statistics of the former return movements.

The current motives vary in degrees of influence over the actions and behaviors of refugees or their lives' planning. However, few scholars have drawn the direct correlation between specific beliefs of security between refugee groups and their decision to return home. Likewise, for many Syrian refugees, life is not easy for them to make a living abroad, but it is still safe compared to life in Syria, controlled by its current regime. That is why, like any other community affected by a conflict, Syrians are always on the move, even those inside certain countries of asylum. When their living conditions change, they move from house to house, neighborhood to another, city to another, or even country to another.

The current scholarship showed specific facts about the returning of Syrian refugees to the north of Syria, especially those staying in Turkey. These facts revolve around general motives of Syrians to stimulate them for thinking of return. Another spectrum of research focused on the humanitarian efforts provided to Syrians in Turkey or in the north of Syria, praising the vital role of the Turkish Red Crescent, AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency), and other international and local humanitarian agencies operating there.

Other groups highlighted the return of Syrian refugees from Lebanon or Jordan to the south and central Syria or the areas controlled by Damascus government. In some other articles and research, there is a concentrated highlight on return movements as total numbers in specific time durations; in Mixed Migration Centre’s Quarterly II report (Report, 2020) on the Middle East area, there is a focus on returnees from Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq to Syria in specific duration with some statistics and figures. But it still has a big difference with statistical inferences from Turkish AFAD’s statics which refers to more significant numbers of Syrian returns. However, the Mixed Migration Centre’s figures rely on UNHCR official website figures.

Figure 2: UNHCR Statistics of Voluntary Syrian Refugee Returns May 2021



In Yahya, M., “Unheard Voices”, (Yahya, 2018), the author focuses on Jordan and Lebanon as hosting countries of neighboring Syria in a specific time when Damascus government controlled most of the areas in the middle and south of the country. Thus, after mid-2018, the returnees were returning to Syria’s regime-controlled areas only. This is not the geography that the thesis focuses on; oppositely, the areas out of Syrian regime control are the focused upon. Also, this research sets the horizon for a voluntary return of refugees in Jordan and Lebanon under certain conditions which enable the process of refugees return in this

specific context. This research highlights an essential aspect of security and protection improvement and its correlation with the return movement.

In Al Abdullah, M., (Mohamed Al Abdullah, 2020) for Omran center for studies, there is essential deep access to the opinions of a good deal of Syrians who left Syria to the neighboring countries and who are willing to return to Syria in the future. The study also covers the willingness to return to not only opposition-held areas but also the Syrian regime-controlled areas. The study on Omran center used one survey and many FGDs to collect the data, but in general, the focus on the security sector in the opposition-held area was weak. The survey scan of the study is horizontally very wide, while this thesis has a more focused concentration on the positive relationship between the returning and the security as on top of the needs of Syrians to return to the northern areas (Studies, 2020).

The Day After organization made in 2020 a similar survey report on “Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Perceptions on Return to Syria,” which, unlike Omran center, only studied the case of Syrian refugees and their will to return. However, the survey covered the inputs collected from Syrians residing in Turkey, in more than ten provinces, but at the same time, it lacks the voice of the local people in the north of Syria who may have experience in return (After, 2020).

As of the UNHCR’s statistics and literature related to returnees:

There is a significant and rapidly growing body of academic and technical literature on Syrians in Turkey, but it is fragmented and hard to access, specifically the return topic. The UNHCR provides valid and accurate data for Syrian returnees – who came from Jordan, Lebanon primarily - to areas controlled by the Syrian regime. But in the northwest of Syria, since there is no physical existence of the UNHCR in those areas, the data is not as rich as in other areas. The UNHCR wrote in a paper that returnees to the areas controlled by the Syrian regime would consider the following things before turning their minds over returning:

- Protection concerns in some areas remain significant for returning IDPs, returning refugees, and the resident population. Fear of retaliation, military conscription, security screening, arrest, charges illegally applied at crossing points, and associated limitations on freedom of movement are major obstacles to safe, dignified, and sustainable returns.
- Destruction of property, infrastructure, and disruption of services is enormous and will remain an obstacle to large-scale sustainable return. Explosive hazards continue to affect many communities, causing death and injuries and limiting delivery of aid, access to farmland, and rehabilitation of services and infrastructure.

- While progress is noted, needs for, and difficulties in, accessing civil documentation, accompanied by related high costs, delays in accessing documents to prove Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) rights, and lack of resolution mechanisms for HLP compensation or restitution remain obstacles for return.
- Access of humanitarian actors, including to areas of return, remains selective and restricted in certain parts of the country and generally highly regulated, thereby limiting inter alia, the ability to assess conditions and safety in these areas.

According to Mixed Migration organization second-quarter report: A total of 17,377 arrivals in Turkey were recorded during this quarter, which is a 62% decrease from the previous quarter when 46,183 arrivals were recorded (-28,806). Most arrivals are from Afghanistan (40%) and Syria (17%).

In RAND Corporation's "Syrian Refugees Won't Be Going Home Any Time Soon," it quotes that from 2016 to 2018, only 143,254 Syrian refugees - out of over 6.7 million, including approximately 5.7 in the Middle East and another 1 million in Europe - returned to Syria. As the Syrian civil war winds down, the question looms: Can refugees return home? (Culbertson, 2019)

Theoretical Framework

The Network theory in migration

Network theory is present whenever people are present and making dynamic connections. One notable example is migration, as people move to new locations and create new ties and connections while also having old ones (Massey, Douglas S., et al., 2006). This theory is applied to the Syrian displacement and migration context in the way that Syrian refugees who came to Turkey clustered in small communities in the early years of the conflict in specific provinces or areas inside Turkey based on their network of kinship and acquaintance. Thus Syrians from Damascus were the majority of refugees in Istanbul city, while refugees from Aleppo were the majority in Gaziantep. Similarly, the refugees from Idleb and Hama gathered in Hatay, refugees from Lattakia and Homs gathered in Mersin, refugees from Deir Ezzour and Raqqa gathered mostly in Sanliurfa, and refugees from Hasaka gathered in Mardin and so on (Sönmez, 1989).

This phenomenon is justified socially under the network theory since first comers to Turkey were the attractors for the latecomers who helped in settlement and accommodation.

This theory applies to the first direction of the Syrian refugees' migration outside of their country, but other theories apply to the way around returning to the place they left.

Security Management Concept

Security is multivariate; security concept may be utilized practically in varied domains or contexts. Security management as a practice enclaves many sectors, such as military, law, public security, and domestic security, to private security (Scheuchzerstrasse, 2009). With so many practice areas, alignment with the nature of security requires a broad approach considering international systems, security of nations, security of groups, and the security of individuals. One such definition is security science, which is an emerging academic discipline that brings together many concepts into a structured body of knowledge. Security science, at its most simplistic, includes security management, security principles, the built environment, and security risk management (Hedström, K., Dhillon, G., & Karlsson, F., 2010).

This concept has flowered after the Cold War, and its employment in the research serves the topic in a the case study for Syrian opposition groups who are at war with the Syrian Government while working for peace at their areas of control. According to Benajmin Miller, *“The subject matter, that the security field addresses, is the threat of organized inter-group violence, and the ways to manage and to prevent it. Here a somewhat broadened version of the traditionalist security concept is in order, which should treat peace as a central element of the field alongside war. Yet, regarding the competing explanations of war and peace, the door should be kept wide open to a great variety of causal factors, theories and explanations, on the condition that they logically and empirically affect war and peace.”* (Miller, 2008) Thus, this concept and the best practices for it in different contexts are projected over the research topic in the Syrian opposition context.

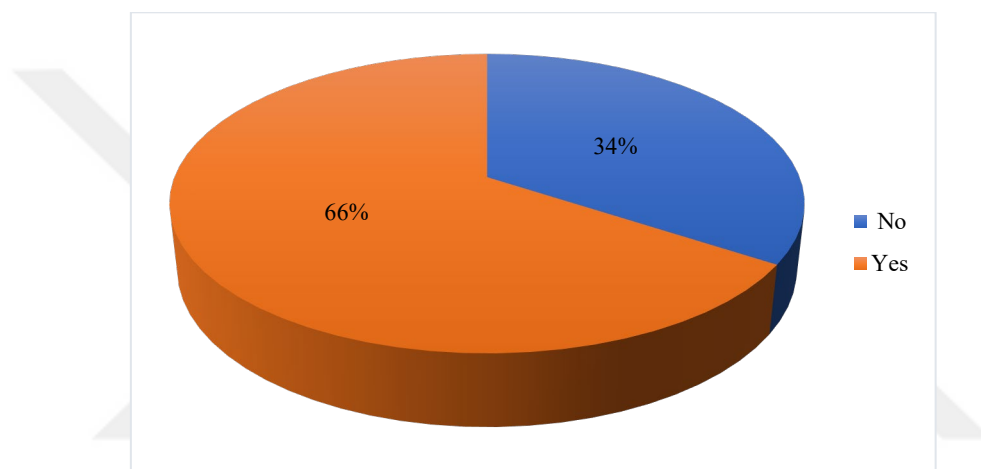
The Attachment Theory: How Childhood Affects Life

The attachment theory argues that a strong emotional and physical bond to one primary caregiver in our first years of life is critical to our development. If our bonding is strong and securely attached, we feel safe exploring the world (Van Ecke, 2005). According to Ammar Kahf, the general manager of Omran Center for Strategic Studies – a Syrian think tank center in Istanbul - *“If our bond is weak, we feel insecurely attached. We are afraid to leave or explore a rather scary-looking world. Because we are not sure if we can return. Often, we then don't understand our own feelings”*.

The second factor is the concept of the return itself. When someone leaves his home to another place searching for a better life, they will return later when conditions at home improve or when they are equipped with tools to make life change back at home.

In the research, a sample group of Syrian refugees in Turkey was asked about their wish to return to their home country, and 66% answered “Yes,” which is a logical answer under the frame of the attachment theory since a lot of Syrians are longing to their past in Syria and they feel nostalgic to their reminiscences back at home. Additionally, the rate of Syrian refugees’ wish to return to their homes, changes accordingly in correlation with security situation in their homes – which measure how much Syrians are attached to their country.

Figure 3: Syrian refugees in Turkey on their wish to return



Return Migration Theory

Return migration is a key phenomena in research on international migration. The theory introduces a particular section and draws attention to the existing blurred boundary between mobility as a transnational practice; for instance, it applies in the form of return visits and purportedly permanent or long-term return migration. Second, it examines the effects of transnationalism on return migration intentions and experiences. Third, it explores how migration trajectories involving various forms of ‘return’ moves that create different forms of transnationalism (Carling, 2014). This theory is reflected in the surveyed segment of Syrians who passed an experience of return after the Turkish military operations in northwest Syria, where a number of Syrian refugees who were residing in Turkey returned to their areas in north Aleppo. It is also applied in the research over a small percentage of Syrian refugees who are settled in Turkey, and they drop visits to the northwest of Syria area from time to time since they had two homes to move through. These returnees have migrated away from their hometowns back in time, but returned later after the atmosphere was allowing this for them.

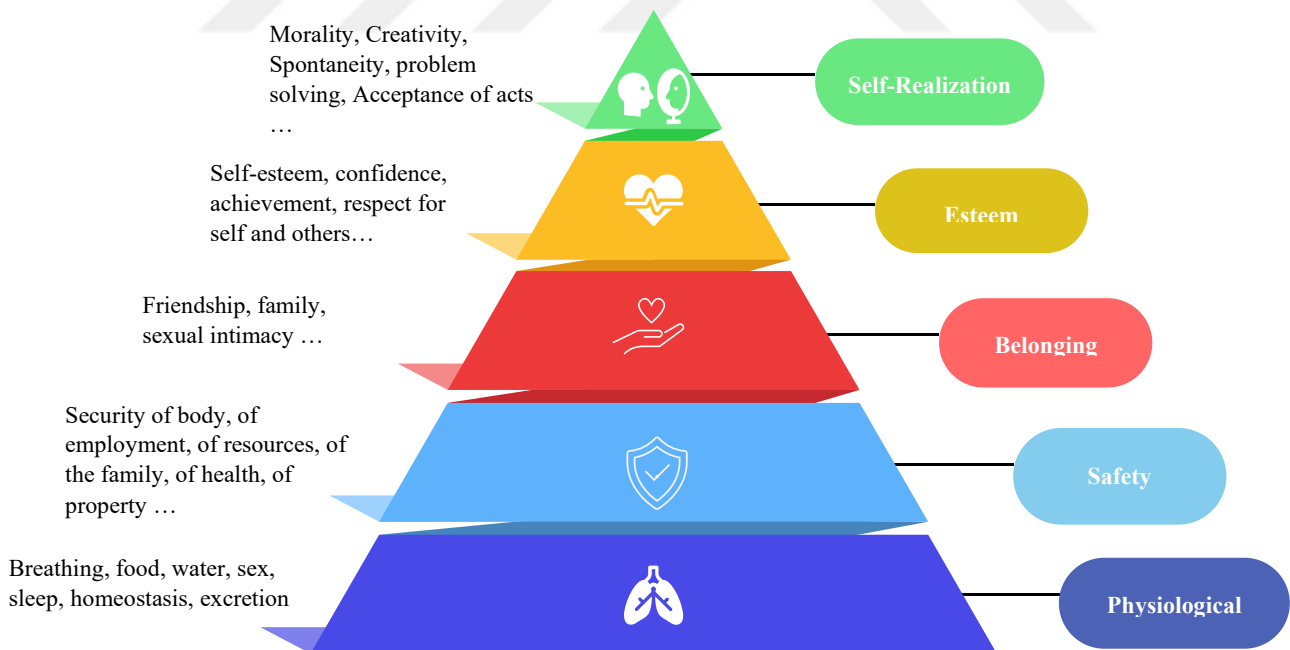
Aside from the reasons and pushing factors for the Syrian refugees, the thesis will touch on the security sector in the areas under Turkish control in the north of Syria from inside. Moreover, the study finds safety for refugees is on top of their priorities, and it is the main factor for their return. A long-term safety prevailing in these areas would positively reflect on the return movement. Generally, when humans make decisions about their lives, they prioritize safety. As many psychologists and anthropologists put safety and security on top of humans' needs, this is a valid demand for Syrian refugees abroad and is a precondition for their return.

Thus Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1908 – 1970) set up his theory of Hierarchy of Needs, which categorizes the five needs of humans pyramidally as follows:

- Self-actualization: includes morality, creativity, problem-solving, etc.
- Esteem: includes confidence, self-esteem, achievement, respect, etc.
- Belongingness: includes love, friendship, intimacy, family, etc.
- Safety: includes security of environment, employment, resources, health, property, etc.
- Physiological: includes air, food, water, sex, sleep, other factors towards homeostasis.

So, safety and security need comes right after the physiological ones, which gives it high weight coming after food, water, and air directly.

Figure 4: Maslow's Pyramid of Needs



So, the theory of Abraham Maslow can be projected to the Syrian context where refugees need a valid and consolidated security for their return. Security needs are the requirements that keep us away from harm and threats. All the Syrian refugees met and

interviewed in this research exclaimed that safety and security were major reasons for their departure outside their country.

Statement of the Problem

The neighboring countries of Syria had received millions of Syrian refugees who fled Syria after the war in 2011. The gradual streaming of refugees, ongoing war back at home, lack of a horizon for a solution to the crisis, internationalizing the conflict, pumping more weapons and money to the conflict parties, and many other reasons made Syria mere chaos. After ten years of this conflict, more than half of Syrians are outside their homes. The problem that the thesis discusses is the return of these refugees and IDPs to their homes and what are the requirements for this return movement. Then it tests how in the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey, the return movement is closely connected to the improvement of security apparatus in the northwest of Syria? This scope of Syrian refugees in Turkey who are willing to return to the northwest of Syria is problematic in regard to:

- Can the political solution be a big encouragement for refugees to start returning?
- To which extent will the deterioration of the economic situation and lack of services in the north be linked to both bad security situation and refugees return will?
- How can Turkey and other actors' stabilization efforts impact refugees' decision of return? And how close is security improvement from stabilization efforts as a whole?
- How are Syrians looking at ongoing bombings, kidnapping, theft, smuggling, and other crimes because of the bad security performance of the existing security apparatus?
- How can local authorities face the challenge of the superiority of military forces over the civil administration existing in the area and opposition armed groups' dividedness and intervention in civil affairs?
- Is the judiciary's lack of independence and ill performance of courts and judicial system a reason against returning?
- What are the needs for having effective security apparatus in the area? What are the reformation and rehabilitation steps? What is the needed logistical support? And what can be an effective roadmap for the future?

Over the last few years, thousands of Syrian refugees have voluntarily returned to their country, though this represents a very small minority of the overall refugee population. According to media and human rights groups' reports, smaller numbers have been forcibly returned from Turkey and Lebanon to Syria. The experiences of these returnees are often not encouraging to others who might consider going home, while there are enormous obstacles in

the way of those who wish to return to their former homes. Since there is a unique connection between security situation improvement in the north of Syria and the returning of refugees residing in Turkey, there is a positive relation between security priorities and the returning of refugees.

Methodology

The research relies on a mix of qualitative and quantitative techniques. This came because the study topic is vast and has ten years time, occurring concurrently. Since the topic is a vast landscape for our research, the study set some restrictions or limitations like:

- 1- **Geography:** the study will explain the return of Syrian refugees to the northwest of Syria and specifically the areas controlled by the opposition supported by Turkey.
- 2- **Time:** the study will focus on the time-space of the last four recent years only, i.e., after the first Turkish military operation in North Aleppo and up till 2021. It sparked the first mass return of refugees in Turkey or IDPs in other areas.
- 3- **Targeted audience:** Due to the research enablers and the researcher's existence in Turkey, there will be a focus only on Syrian refugees in Turkey who returned to Syria. It was reasonably selected as a neighboring country to the northwest of Syria, where the study tests the return movement. It is also the biggest country in the worlds hosting refugees in the world, and the majority are Syrians, 3.6 million.

This research analyses the security situation in Syria, focusing specifically on the problem for the civilian population. The reference period is 2017 towards the end of 2021. Some additional information was added during the finalization of this thesis in response to feedback received during the quality control process until the mid of 2021.

The data collection will be through key informants' interviews and surveys:

- 1- The first survey will be designed to collect info, data, and feedback from Syrians in the northwest of Syria who lived in Turkey or ran away to Turkey and returned later when their towns and cities were safe after the Turkish military operations. 389 surveys were recorded which is the exact wanted number.
- 2- The second survey will assess the desire of Syrian refugees in Turkey to return to the northwest of Syria, understanding the hindrances and motives from their point of view. 392 surveys were recorded as three extra were there before closing the link of the online survey.

Key informants' interviews:

- 1- Interviews with migration six experts from Goc Idaresi (Migration Directorate General of Turkey in Ankara), AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of

Turkey), UNHCR Ankara Senior Officials, directors of migration studies centers of universities in Turkey and abroad, etc.

- 2- Interviews with the nine Syrian personnel responsible for security, from local councils to military police and other security officers inside northwest of Syria (in Afrin, Azaz, Mare, Jarablus, and Albab areas).
- 3- On the Turkish counterpart, interviews with three Deputy Governor coordinators of the areas and police and military coordinators administrating the areas northwest of Syria from Kilis, Hatay, and Gaziantep provinces.

Sampling methodology

To achieve the aim of this study, the researcher used two stages, simple random sampling SRS, by dividing the beneficiaries into two categories:

- The Syrian refugees in Turkey: according to the Turkish directorate of migration, the Syrian refugees in Turkey are 3.6 millions (Management, Statistics, Temporary Protection, 2021)- till the times of writing - and the sample was calculated with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Therefore the researcher will interview (385) persons in different Turkish cities (on top of them Istanbul, Gaziantep, Kilis, Hatay, and Urfa).
- The Syrians living in northern Aleppo: according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Syrians living in north of Aleppo estimated by 1.7 M, and the sample was calculated with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, therefore the researcher will interview (385) persons in different communities in this area.

According to the Raosoft website, there is a need to have 385 samples from a population of 4 million, and it has a 5% error margin with a 50 % response distribution.¹ Research should aim to cover:

- General description of the security sector's situation and its gaps:
 - A. Security situation and conflict impact on civilians.
 - B. How security sector can improve, with fundamental dynamics change and political leadership vision.

¹ Raosoft: In terms of the numbers you selected above, the sample size n and margin of error E are given by

$$x = \frac{Z(c/100)^2 r(100-r)}{E^2}$$

$$n = \frac{N x}{(N-1)E^2 + x}$$

$$E = \frac{Z(c/100) \sqrt{x(N-1)}}{n}$$

where N is the population size, r is the fraction of responses that you are interested in, and Z(c/100) is the critical value for the confidence level c.

- Returning possibilities for the future through a scan of civilians' former return movements through the last three years.

Table 1: Demographics of the sample of the research data²

Sample	Type	Gender		Age			Education				Social Status				Total
		M	F	T	Y	O	I	S	U	H	S	M	W	D	No.
Surveys	Syrian Returnees	72%	28%	7.5%	76%	18.5%	2%	32%	50%	16%	18%	64%	7%	11%	392
	SYR Refugees in Turkey	81%	19%	2%	92%	6%	-	12%	68%	20%	27%	70%	1.5%	1.5%	389
Key Informant Interviews	D.Governors	100%	-	-	100%	-	-	-	100%	-	-	100%	-	-	3
	Syrian Security Personnel	100%	-	-	100%	-	-	65%	35%	-	-	90%	10%	-	9
	Migration Experts	66%	33%	-	84%	16%	-	-	16%	84%	16%	68%	16%	-	6
Total		613	186	38	672	89	8	177	539	75	176	536	38	49	799

Demographics in sampling were projected to the thesis topic via the following findings:

- 76% of the participants are males, while 24% are females, which shows the higher interest of males about return decisions and cultural dimensions of females' view of the return concept. Syrian female refugees' participation rate was higher than their fellows in Syria, which correlated to the level of education, technology knowledge level, and financial capacity.
- The average age of the participants was 73% young Syrians between 18 – 40 years, while 27% who are above 40 years old. This reflects an anthropological fact of the Syrian people as most of the community is young; paradoxically, they are the most harmed group of the community.
- 23% of the participants were under secondary school level of education while 77% were with university and above education levels. It indicates that Syrians with better education were more moving outside the country, which is connected to the UN agencies report of the brain drain ongoing in Syria because of the war.
- The participants to the surveys and the interviews were mainly from Aleppo and Idleb, which are the main provinces that Turkey partially controls. Around 37% of participants were from Aleppo, 23% from Idleb, 8% from Homs, 6% from Damascus, and 26% from the rest ten provinces. Some southern, eastern, and coastal territories were a minority in the survey because they are far from the Turkish borders and they

²Letters refer to the demographic categories in gender, age, education level, and social status. (M: Male, F: Female – T: Teenager, Y: Young, O: Old (how do you define teenager, young and old; give the ages – I: Illiterate, S: School, U: University, H: Higher studies – S: Single, M: Married, W: Widow, D: Divorced).

are controlled by opposing actors. Families that are mostly expected to remain in displacement - in the light of a missing political solution for the country - are those from central and southern areas that are the government of Syria control.

CHAPTER 1: SECURITY BACKGROUND AFTER TURKISH OPS. 2016

This chapter analyzes the security background in Syria after 2016, to assess variables that Syrian refugees in Turkey take into account when planning and deciding their return to the northwest of Syria. The Turkish-held areas kept facing many security challenges and a lack of stability due to the existing conflict dynamics. The current security theme in the northwest of Syria is a product of many incidents that took place in the past few years; therefore, the chapter also includes actors that directly impact the security status in the northwest of Syria.

The chapter discusses first the opposition-held areas in the northwest of Syria as it is the geographical scope of the research. It moves to the government of Syria-controlled areas, and at last, SDF-held areas in the northeast of Syria – who are considered the opponent actors who are impacting security in the targeted areas of the study.

1.1 Syrian Opposition Armed Groups

This area is the most important one for the research as it is the targeted geography here. The study discusses the security situation in these areas after the first Turkish operation in December 2016 against ISIS, then in March 2018 against SDF in Afrin, then again against SDF in October 2019 in the east of Syria, and the last one was in 2020 against the Syrian regime in Idleb. Each operation happened in a different time-space in the Syrian conflict, different political environment, different objectives, and different outcomes. The media reported from the Turkish presidency and ministry of foreign affairs that these operations intend to defend the national security of Turkey and create a safe zone for millions of Syrian refugees to go back to their home country.

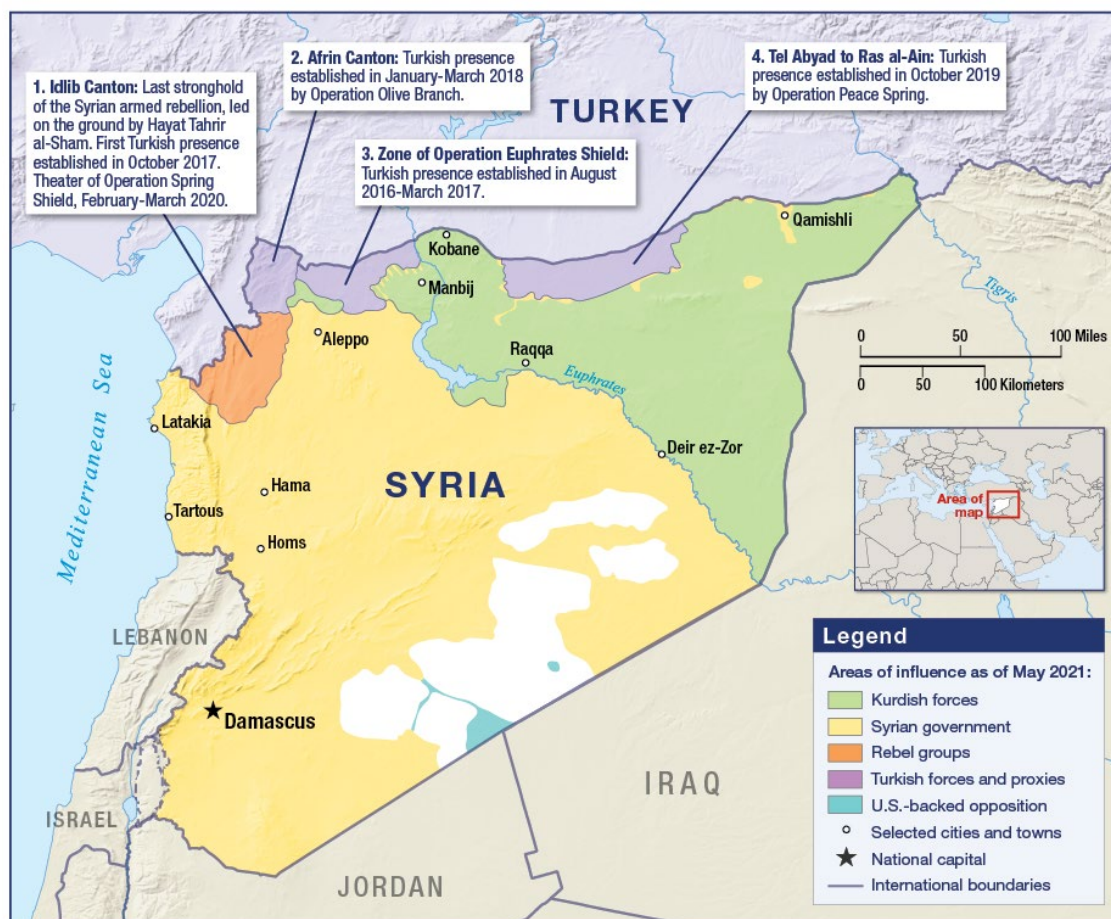
The Syrian National Army controls over 8,835 K.M² square area of the Syrian geography. These territories have over a thousand towns and cities, populated by almost 1.3 million people, including Afrin, Tal Abyad, Ras al-Ain, Al-Bab, Azaz, and Jarablus districts. These areas came under opposition armed groups' control successively in the past four years, after expelling ISIS and SDF from them. There are towns like Azaz that were already under the opposition's control before the Turkish operations.

After fierce battles that lasted for more than three years between opposition armed factions and ISIS that took thousands of lives on both sides, these battles culminated in a major military victory in 2017 in northern Syria, as part of an operation called "Euphrates Shield,"

which the rebel factions fought with support and cooperation of the Turkish army and the participation of its special forces, as the operation succeeded in defeating ISIS and SDF from there. The area stretching from the city of Azaz in the west to the border city of Jarablus in the east, passing through the city of Al-Bab (which was the main stronghold of ISIS), became under complete control of the opposition armed groups. Following this operation and at the beginning of 2018, another offensive called “Olive Branch,” (Haber, 2018) which succeeded in expelling the Kurdish Protection Units YPG from Afrin area, which is a terrorist organization for Turkey. Then it was followed by Operation “Peace Spring” (Hurriyet, 2019) in the fall of 2019, which pushed the Syrian Democratic Forces, laying the control of the National Army factions supported by the Turkish army on the cities of Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain.

Figure 5: Turkish Military Operations in Syria map (2016-2020) Source: Center for American Progress

Turkey's Presence in Syria, May 2021



SOURCE: Adapted from Max Hoffman and Alan Makovsky, “Northern Syria Security Dynamics and the Refugee Crisis,” Center for American Progress, May 26, 2021, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2021/05/26/499944/northern-syria-security-dynamics-refugee-crisis>.

Later, in 2020 there was a fourth military operation that Turkey called “Bahar Kalkani/Spring Shield” (Ozcan E. E. & Barakat M., 2020) which came after the last offensive

of the Syrian regime on south Idleb areas earlier in 2020, in which there was an aerial bombardment to a Turkish Army bunker in Saraqeb that killed dozens and in reaction to it, the operation started. The Turkish operations, in general, were not long in time or high in cost and so far, achieved a good level of planned goals. After the end of the fighting and warfare violence in those areas, a gradual return from the people of those areas started to occur. After these extensive military operations, a new challenge began, manifested in the management of these areas by the Syrian Interim Government and the National Army (Özkizilcik, 2021), which was formed a few days before Operation Olive Branch, and it seemed that imposing security and achieving stability was one of the most difficult and complex challenges facing everyone.

Figure 6: Syrian Interim Government Structure 2019-Present “Suriye Gundemi”³

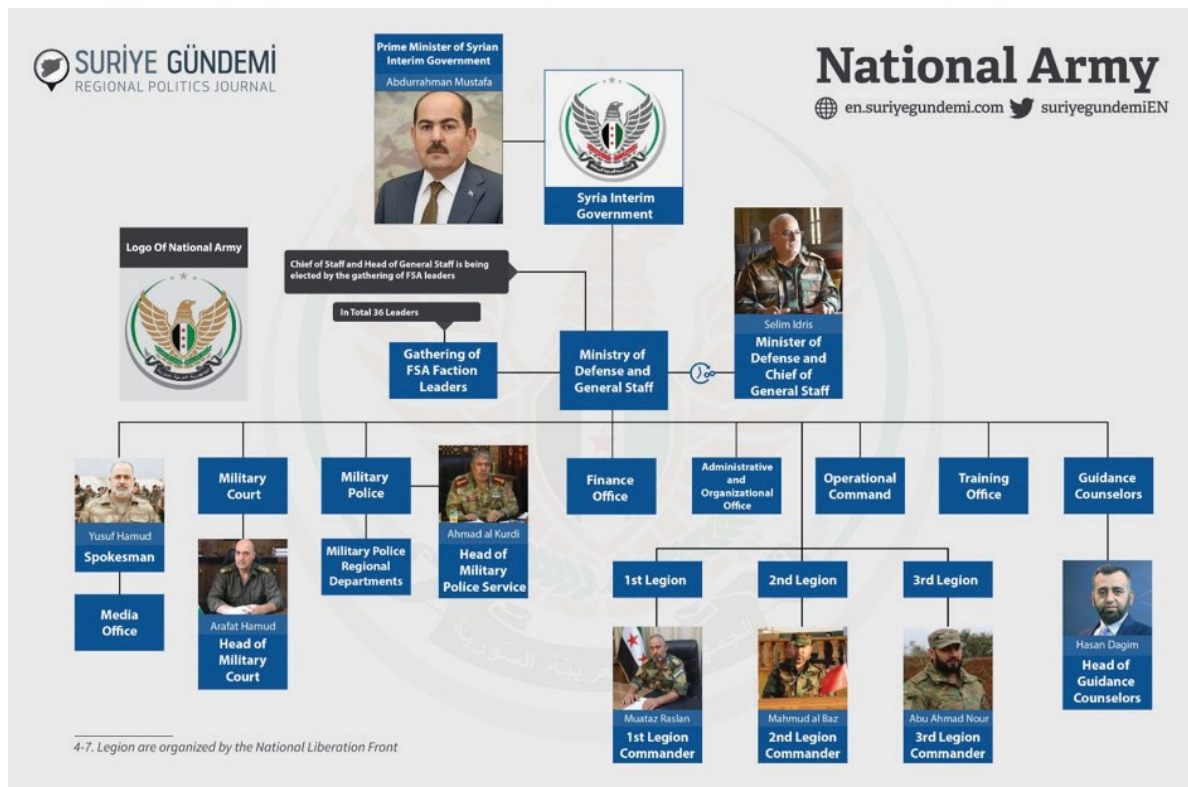


The current situation in the areas controlled by the Turkish-backed opposition factions is full of developments in the security absence, the spread of chaos, the frequent and continuous tensions between the factions, and corruption and governance failure in the liberated areas.

³ Syrian Interim Government, Suriye Gundemi, (2019), <https://en.suriyegundemi.com/syrian-interim-government>

Despite the formation of the Ministries of Defense and the Interior in the Syrian Interim Government, and the establishment of the Military Police, the Civil Police and many security bodies, the most prominent problem that casts its shadow over northwest of Syria areas and its residents, is the security issue and chaos that has become prevalent in the region. The state of chaos has negative repercussions on all social, economic, and security levels, as hardly a day passes without these areas witnessing assassinations, kidnappings, or detonation of explosive devices or car bombs in markets and gatherings, harvesting the lives of dozens, even hundreds of civilians, and targeting the headquarters of some military factions and their checkpoints. The targeting reached the interim government building in Azaz city (Anadolu, 2021) and the headquarters of the Ministry of Defense in the village of Kafirghan (News, 2020).

Figure 7: Syrian National Army Structure Under the Interim Government Umbrella



The local councils' first security apparatus experience faded due to three main factors:

1. The regime forces' military incursions over areas out of their control, which led to the collapse of the initial local governance structures.
2. The level of militarization of the revolutionary movement increased, and the factions took over the management of security affairs in addition to the military.
3. The emergence of preliminary police experiments formed by defectors from Syrian regime's security institutions.

Generally speaking, the majority of the local councils preferred to leave the security management to the competent authorities, driven by several reasons, including:

1. Rearranging its priorities and focusing on the service file, especially with the increased needs for services in a dire humanitarian crisis.
2. Unwillingness to have negative friction with the military factions.
3. Insufficient resources are needed to form security offices.

The research will review in the following list, in which the most important security actors in opposition-controlled areas are mentioned:

First: The Free Police

The police corps witnessed a high number of defections compared to those that occurred in the military and security services, as their number is estimated at 500 officers and thousands of members (Al-Ahmad A. , 2020). While some of the defectors chose to stay away from the field scene, some of them became involved in managing security in the areas controlled by the opposition factions in cooperation with civilians, especially with the increase in popular discontent caused by the high rate of thefts, crimes, and encroachment (Chen, 2019) on public property. Among the experiences that emerged at the end of 2011 and the beginning of 2012: the judicial police in Haritan and Tal Rifaat, the Revolutionary Security Bureau, and the revolutionary police stations in most of the areas that were out of the regime's control.

The police experiment moved to a more organized phase by mid-2012, when several experiments appeared that are still in place, the most prominent of which are:

- Free Police in Aleppo and Idlib (Baladi, Aleppo Free Police: 3 years experience, 2016).
- Police command in Eastern Ghouta.
- Eastern Qalamon and Badia Police Command.
- Police experience in Homs: Internal Security.

In addition to existing root experiences operating under various names, such as The Public Order Keeping Forces, Revolutionary Police Stations, Public Security, Security Committees, and the Judicial Police. However, they were local experiences that had not developed into sectoral or regional examples with a clear institutional structure.

Second: The Local Judiciary

In the absence of the courts that belong to the judicial institution of the regime, various alternatives have emerged among different terms of legal references, mechanisms of formation, operation methodologies, nature of jurisdiction, and subordination. The most prominent of which are:

- The Supreme Judicial Council in Aleppo (Al-Halabi, 2015).

- Courts of the Islamic Authority for Liberated Areas' Administration (Al-Shamiya, 2015).
- Judicial Council in Eastern Ghouta (Baladi, Eastern Ghouta ... Judiciary types and law forms , 2015).
- House of Justice in Houran (Al-Ahmad S. , 2018).
- The Supreme Court in the northern countryside of Homs.
- Courts of Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, "Al-Nusra," formerly called the houses of justice.

Third: The Security Offices of the Factions

At the beginning of its launch, the military opposition factions formed minimized "security committees" whose tasks were to collect, analyze information, and define a list of targets to be dealt with. The experience later developed and was framed by security offices embedded within the factions' structure. The security offices of the factions can be classified into four models:

- A. The security offices of typical Free Syrian Army factions, most notably: The Sultan Murad Legion, Alshamia Front, Faylaq Al-Sham, Hamzat Legion, Alsharqia Army ...etc.
- B. The security offices of the National Islamic factions such as Ahrar al-Sham, Islam Army, and Skour Alsham.
- C. The security offices which emerged from the military alliances: The Executive Force "Al-Fateh Army", the security office of the Free Idlib Army, the joint security office of the Ahfad Hamza Brigades and the Abu Amara Brigades, the Homs operations headquarters.
- D. Security offices of extreme jihadist factions, such as Hayat Tahreer Alsham

Decentralization has prevailed over the management of the security file in the areas controlled by the armed opposition factions, due to the absence of a central reference body to manage this sector.

Decentralized security bodies were formed in the areas controlled by the opposition factions as an alternative to the authoritarian discipline system, which was in place during the Syrian regime's control. While many of these security agencies have experienced their demise, others are still active and providing their security services. The first parties that attempted to address the security threats were the local councils, as their leaders had to deal with several problematic files imposed by the new reality, such as the security file, especially with the emergence of manifestations of security chaos. One of its tasks was to maintain public order and protect public properties.

The research assessed that the governance challenges exist because of the presence of many terrorist sleeper cells affiliated with different parties of the conflict, which aim to destabilize the region, stressing that the Syrian National Army is the one who bears the full responsibility for maintaining order and security (Orient, Here is Syria, 2021), in the absence of centralized administration (Al-Asi, 2020). A police commander who was interviewed for the research expressed “*an incomprehensible ambiguity in Turkish policy in its administration to northern Aleppo,*” citing the lack of coordination between the institutions of the various Turkish agencies (intelligence, internal security, governors, and the Turkish army forces), and “*this created a state of dispersion and tension throughout the region.*”

A politician pointed out that bad economic conditions are one of the main factors of destabilization and administrative failure in the region. Low salaries and few job opportunities open the way for robbery and looting by people in need.

A senior military member interviewed for this research argued that the conditions in northern Syria are filled with complex security and social tensions in light of the growing feeling of injustice and alienation by IDPs in the region. The leader reasoned that the region is still under the control of the military factions (Al-Araby, 2020), in addition to the failure of activating the judiciary bodies and local councils. Adding to it, the obstruct to involve them in the process of governing the region. One of the main factors that led military factions to rule the region is through control over the border crossings between Turkey and Syria’s territories which was done through the senior military members of the corps and battalions, with the almost complete absence of civil administration such as judges, local council representatives, and others (Investigative, 2017).

In the context of governance challenges that are common in north Syria, a police leader who was interviewed, pointed out that the root of the problem is due to the multiplicity of administrative references from the Turkish side, because each region of northwest of Syria areas in northern Aleppo is administratively affiliated with a different Turkish province, and this, in turn, caused many problems in governing the region (Al-Okla, 2016).

In general, the security situation in armed opposition groups is the worst in comparison with regime and SDF areas, although the security status in other areas is not too far better than OAGs areas. According to an analyst, there are two main trends of security that are considered the main threats for Syrians living in northwest of Syria, which is: the internal fighting between the armed groups from time to time, and the IEDs, VBIED, and other bombardment attacks from sleeper cells or from other opposing parties. The research will focus on the main

weaknesses in controlling the security situation and how these weaknesses can be bridged through a doable action plan.

1.2 Syrian Government Controlled Areas

Like many other dictatorships in the Middle East area, the Syrian regime relied on security forces and the army to foster its iron grip of rule over the country. Since the early days of the Syrian uprising in 2011, the Syrian regime headed by President Assad prioritized keeping the state institutions operating and on top of the pyramid, security and military institutions. The Syrian regime behavior since the beginning focused profoundly on creating two ideas for internal and external audiences as follows:

- A- Internally for Syrians in the grey area who are neither pro nor against the regime, whom, the regime wanted to show himself as a guarantor or order of state and provider of services vice versa chaos.
- B- Externally for people and governments of the west and east, the Syrian regime worked hard from the beginning on marketing an idea for the future of Syria; either the Syrian regime or terrorism and extremism (Becker, 2015). “Thus, the strengthening of IS, as well as its extreme methods, allowed the Assad regime credibly to label the Syrian opposition as terrorists, and therefore to minimize the chances that Western and Arab powers would contribute significantly to the overthrow of the Assad regime”.

The security situation in Syria’s regime-controlled areas can be categorized into the following:

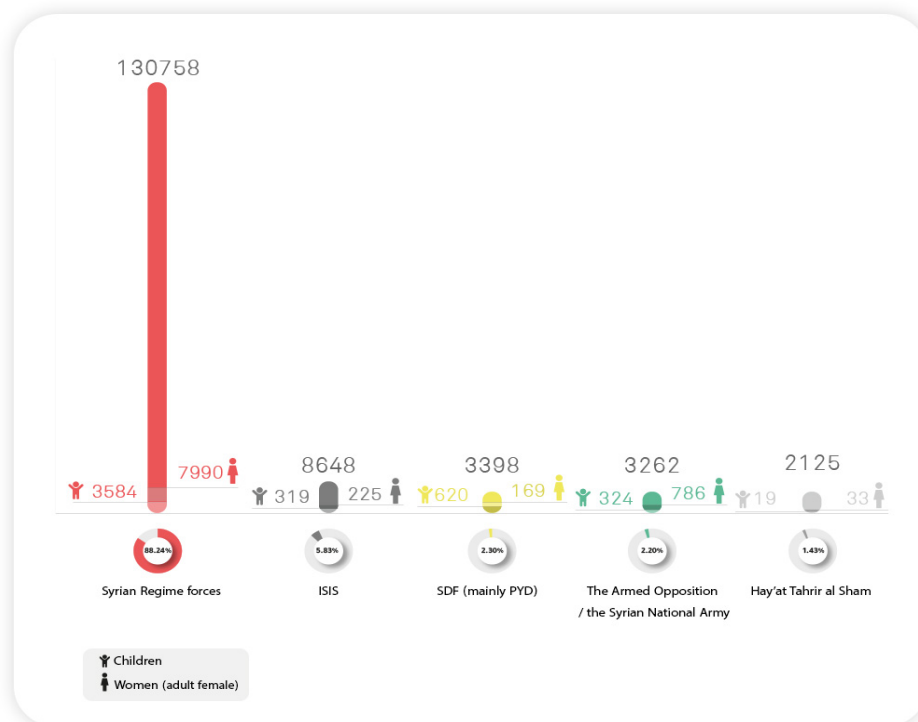
1.2.1 Arbitrary Arrests, Enforced Disappearances, Torture, and Ill-Treatment

Since the beginning of the uprising, Syrian regime’s security forces have made broad campaigns of search and inspection arresting dozens of thousands of citizens arbitrarily and unlawfully, enforced illegal disappearances (Luther, 2017), treated detainees inhumanly with torture and interrogation (SNHR, 2014), using an extensive network of detention centers across Syria. The majority of the detainees were young men who were involved in activism participating in the revolutionary action on any level (organizing protests and coordination committees, media activism and journalism documenting what is going on in the country, political engagement in the uprising and political change endeavors, medical people who aided the injured protestors, aid workers who later worked on supporting field hospitals, IDPs camps, and others...etc.), (Arbitrary detention, 2020). Even more, elders, women, and children below 18 years were not exempted from detention by the regime. Former detainees said they witnessed people dying from torture in detention. Especially in the early years of the revolution, most of the young men in Syria were afraid of being stopped by any security or army

checkpoint and taken to intelligence services facilities. Even without movement across roads and checkpoints, the regime forces made a lot of search and detention campaigns attacking houses of civilians. Many political activists remain till our day behind the bars without communication or declare on their destiny, while others are facing trials under the newly founded anti-terrorism court and military courts, others with bad health conditions in military hospitals, and others were secretly executed, killed, and buried without telling their families and relatives (Al-Najjar, 2018). Those arrested were peaceful protesters and activists who participated in organizing, filming, and covering the demonstrations, as well as journalists, humanitarian aid workers, journalists, and doctors. In some cases, activists reported that security forces detained relatives, including children, to pressure them to turn themselves in. This security risk is the major and the most real concern that Syrians considered in their decisions for their futures, especially those related to movement outside the country. The Syrian regime made more than 88% of the total arrest operations in Syria from March 2011 till August 2020, according to SNHR (Rights, n.d.), which reached 130,758 people through this duration. While the rest of the actors together, made the rest 12% which shows the scale of detention risk for Syrian civilians as the most reason for leaving their country.

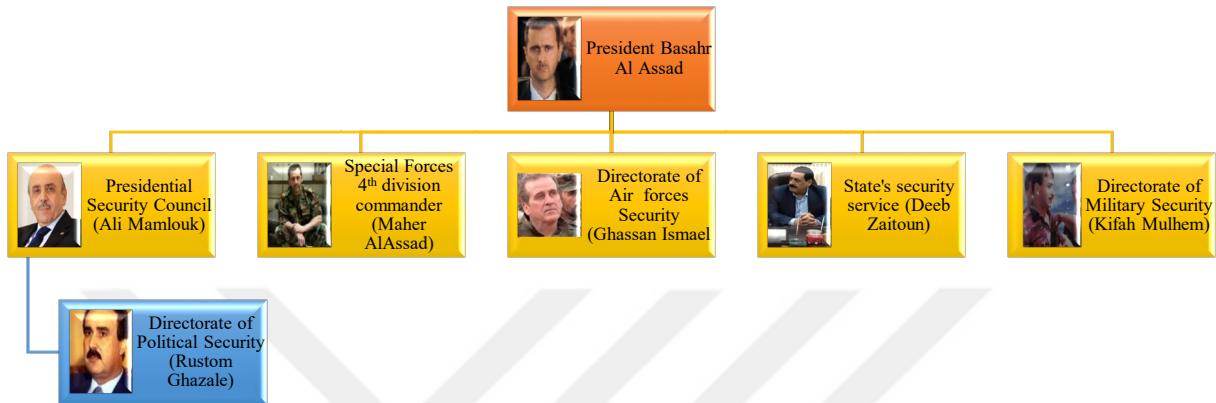
Figure 8: SNHR Infographic on statistics of Syrian civilians detention from 2011-2020

At least **148,191 of the individuals** detained at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and August 2020 are still imprisoned or forcibly disappeared



Many political activists remain behind bars incommunicado, while others are facing trial, including before military and anti-terrorism courts, for exercising their rights. Under the Anti - Terrorism Act of overbroad of the Syrian Crisis Management Cell in July 2012, all uprising and revolution related detentions will be processed through this sole judicial channel.

Figure 9: The Structure of the Syrian Regime Security Apparatus (practical, not formal)



The above structure of the regime’s security structure gives a general idea about how the Syrian crisis was managed by Assad’s top security officials in a fierce way. According to leaked documents from Zaman Alwasl, there is more than 78000 official security personnel, and more were unofficial, especially in the first two years of the conflict. The organization of the Information and Security Services in Syria is structured around six different organizations. Some report directly to the President of the Republic, others within their Armed Forces, while others to the Baath party itself.

Viewing the security environment in the regime’s areas as coherent and subject to a controlled central security force is beyond reality, since the influx of foreign militias allied to the Syrian geography and the decision to form local military groups to be supervised by senior regime men. The accumulation of security failure of the official bodies and their inability to confront the expansion of the revolutionary movement contributed to pushing the regime to a set of procedures that eroded its central security authority, starting with the formation of supportive local militias under the auspices of the Syrian regime army or security branches. These policies led to the regime replacing its intense de-facto authority in the military and security establishment with mercenaries from the local population affiliated with armed militias that have grown and expanded in size and influence over the past three years (BBC, 2012).

These groups will create a real danger to the regime if they get out of its control. If it gains a broad base of followers on the ground and builds strong ties with society, this gives them the ability to negotiate with the regime over control and influence, and to work with

international parties to achieve its own interests that may conflict with the regime. Therefore, the regime placed at the top of its priorities, during the year 2016, the inclusion of these groups by institutionalizing them and ensuring their loyalty as part of its plan to secure its survival as a balancing and stabilizing factor. These measures have generally contributed to the following results:

Granting the local militias some security powers to control the local community for their whereabouts and their military duties. Allowing its security and military roles to grow transiently to localities so that most of them become central militias with branches and branches. The militarization (Bickford, 2009) of society and linking its options to the system's survival and sustainability exacerbated the volume of abuses and violations against the state and the citizen. Institutionalization (Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila al-Shami, 2016) of these militias by economic necessities and their transformation into transient entities for the central military and security strategy. Activating the military arms of loyal political parties such as the Ba'ath Party (Factbook, 2021) and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and this strengthened their local authorities and made them a partner security force, linking them with the centralized force of mutual benefit and interest.

A review of the most important security actors in the regime-controlled areas which one part of them were there before the uprisings and another part was after. These security forces are listed below as follows:

1. National Defense Forces (Lund, 2012)
2. Sokour Al-Sahraa (Desert falcons)
3. Al Bustan militia
4. The Coast Shield Brigade Militia
5. The mobilization of the Aljazeera and the Euphrates
6. Political militias

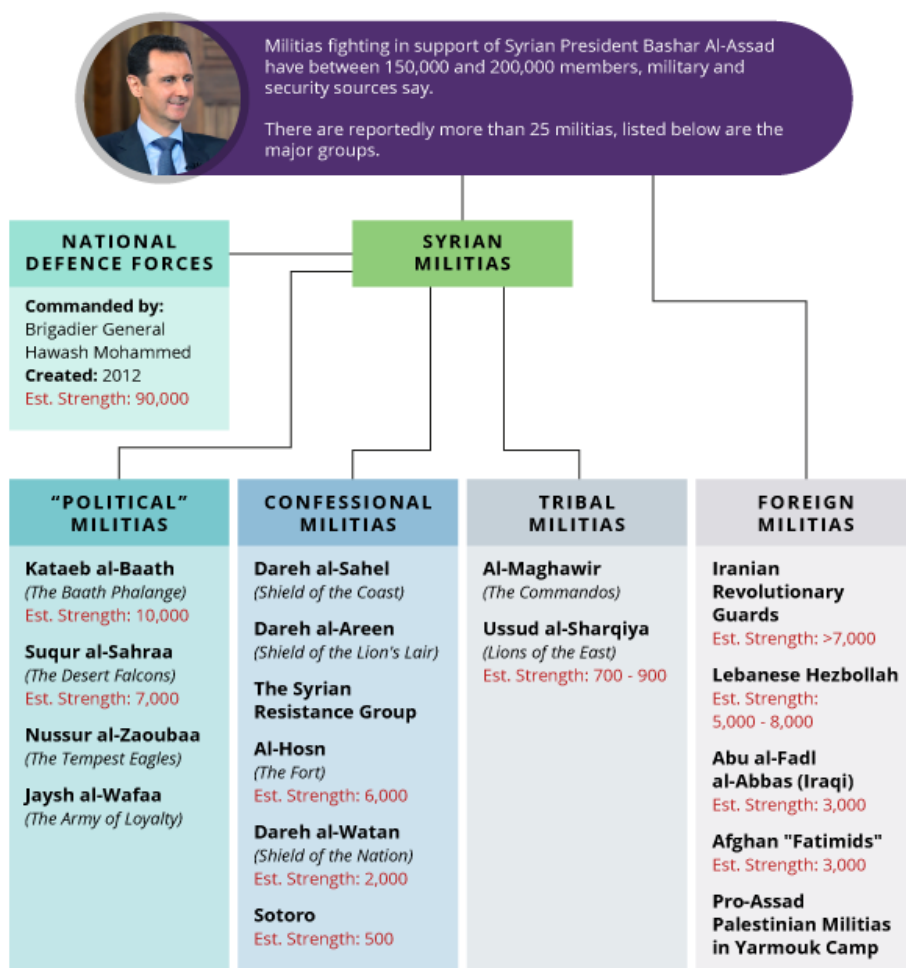
These militias emerged from political parties and worked to mobilize their volunteers under partisan or political slogans, the most notable ones:

- Baath Brigades
- Nusour Al-Zawba`a (Baladi, Who is the Falcons of the Zawbaa militia?, 2014)
- The Arab National Guard (Al-Hariri, 2017)
- The Syrian Resistance (SOHR, 2020)

7. Sectarian militias (Christian and Druze), the most important of which are:
 - Jaysh al-Muwahidin (Suwaid, 2014)
 - The Sotero forces (Rajab, 2019)
 - The Usoud Alwadi Brigade (Yazaci, 2020)
8. Palestinian militias (Al-Jazeera, 2014)

Figure 10: Middle East Eye, 2015, Pro-Assad militias in Syria

Pro-Assad militias in Syria



Source: MEE and agencies



1.2.2 Kidnapping

The second most faced risk is kidnapping which is a security trend and almost like a fashion, especially in regime-controlled areas. Sometimes, the kidnapping takes place between

the pro-regime militia themselves as a settlement of accounts. According to Merriam Webster⁴, kidnapping is: “an act or instance or the crime of seizing, confining, inveigling, abducting, or carrying away a person by force or fraud often with a demand for ransom or in furtherance of another crime.”

The kidnapping victims in Syria increased to very high numbers especially in the early years of the conflict. The ongoing war, the fragile security, the emergence of conflicting militias and armed groups with opposing agendas and ideologies, all these factors, was the reason for this security breakdown and chaos, which led to a suitable environment for kidnapping gangs and criminals. Hundreds of kidnapping cases were documented, especially in the capital and Aleppo province. Organ trade (Rosenbaum, 2015) also blossomed in these areas by gangs, and ransom-oriented crimes sprung up as well. Most of these gangs directly relate to the security forces in Damascus due to their mutual interest, i.e., protection & immunity vs. bribes and material benefit. Also, during the early years of the conflict in Syria, the Syrian regime lost a lot of soldiers and officers from the army due to many reasons (defection, killing, running away, arrest in prisons for pro-opposition military figures ...etc.), which created the need for civilian fighters and thus the pro-Assad militia - or what it is known locally for as Shabiha - started to emerge and develop. Hussein Nofal, head of the forensic medicine department at Damascus University, has been compiling evidence of the organ trade and estimates 18,000 Syrians have had organs removed for sale over the first four years of war. Both soldiers and civilians killed in the conflict are being used as sources for organs, which are then sold on an international network, the Violation Documentation Center said (VDC, 2012).

It was approved through many security operations that pro-regime militia was involved in the kidnapping crimes, and the regime officials turned a blind eye to these actions to assist army forces in the military operations to seize as much as possible geographies which geographies went off the regime control. More than half of the country was off the hands of the Syrian regime, later the regime could control more than half of the country back. This repeated warfare and the violence made Syrians' numbers increase in camps inside and outside the country. This significant number of IDPs helped the kidnapping crimes to spring especially in a volatile environment where many do not have official documents, forgery and fake civil records, public institutions broke down, radical groups existence and foreign fighters marriages

⁴ A 150 years aged American dictionary and famous resource between English learners. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/about-us>

to Syrian counterparts, child warriors recruitment, poverty, and beggars wide-spreading in big cities, the materially-led illegal envy for businessmen and capital owners...etc.

These reasons facilitated the widespread kidnapping in the Syrian regime-controlled areas before 2016. The continued level of kidnapping in the country, if not forestalled, will produce several negative phenomena which endanger the whole sets of generations to come, whom all innocents.

1.2.3 IEDs Attacks and Explosions

According to Global Terrorism Index (Index, 2019), Syria comes the 4th on top of the list, following Afghanistan, Iraq, and Nigeria, in 2019 annual report. Also, there is a parallel index, from the same organization, the Global Peace Index, which Syria was the last in order of 162 countries listed from the whole world, in the 2014 annual report. Based on two domains - safety and security adding militarization - the world countries are assessed to levels, which Syria was at topmost due to the notable deterioration in peace between 2008 and 2014. These deteriorations in safety and security and the excessive militarization from the Syrian regime, a bloody stalemate between government forces loyal to the president, Bashar al-Assad, and the numerous rebel groups fighting against it, worsened peace possibilities in the country. Syria saw brutal conflict derives including those related to refugees and displaced persons (estimated at over one-third of the population), ease of access to small arms and light weapons, and overall level of violent crime, including IEDs attacks and booby traps which blossomed in Syria between all parties of the conflict – ISIS was using it in highest rates.

The Syrian regime used IEDs in most of it, for assassinating and taking down its opposition figures or its loyalist who are not desired to exist anymore. Many cases were reported that the Syrian regime used this technique to execute many of the opposition or the suspicious loyalist to him, in this way.

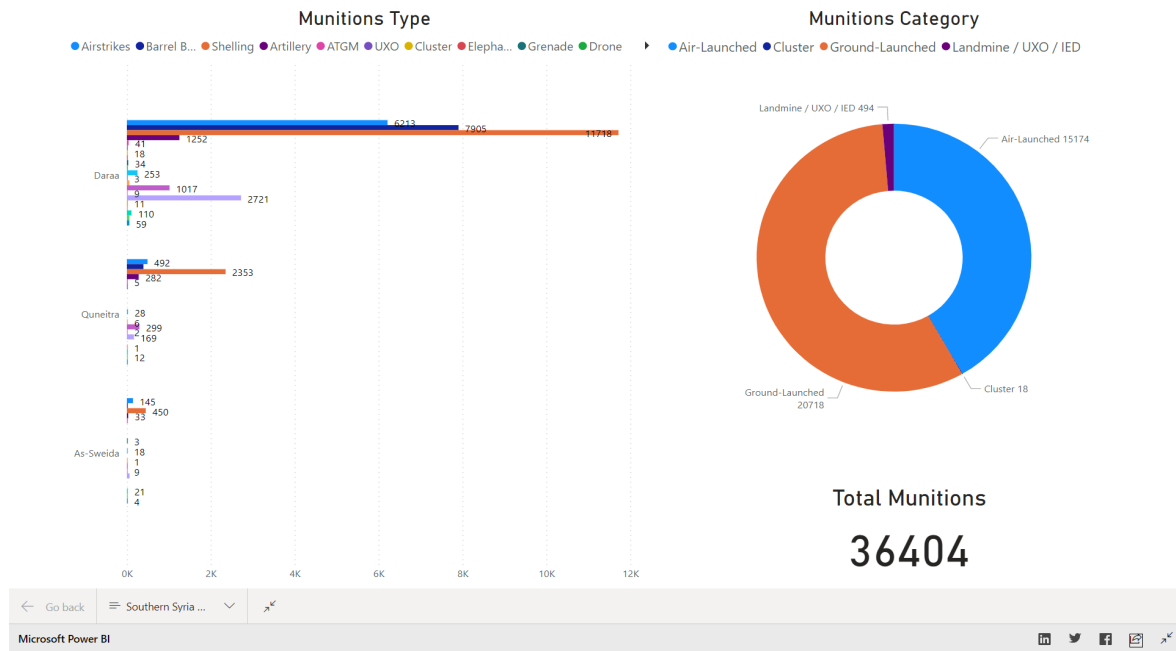
The Syrian regime was accused of the assassination of many pro-regime figures by IEDs or other styles, i.e., Muhammed Saeed Albouti – Syria's Mufti, who was killed in a mosque by a staged explosion, followed by assassination in Emaan Mosque in the capital in May 2013. Another example is the crisis cell group (Albawaba, 2020) explosion (Muhammed Alshaar (Alriyadh, 2012) who was the minister of interior at that time, Emad Rajha who was the minister of defense, Hesham Bakhtiyar who was the head of National Security Service, Hasan Turkmani the head of the crisis cell, and the president's brother in law Asef Shawkat who was the deputy minister of defense) where opinions clashed over the doer's identity, until June 2020 when Amani Makhoulouf - a close kin from Assad's mother side and personal friend of Bushra Al Assad (President's sister and Asef Shawkat's wife), - revealed a new secret

accusing Maher Al Assad behind the bombing due to rumors and leaked intelligence information from senior Iranian Security Generals about the intentions of Asef Shawkat of holding a coup while others were communicating with France, Turkey, and Gulf states. Earlier in 2016, an article for The New Yorker (Taub, 2016), referred to the same facts and possibilities related to the case. Other cases included executing army officers from Deir Azzour who were involved in assassinating the former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Alhariri (Jame Jami and Rustom Ghazali) adding to it the killing of Issam Zahruldeen, who fame committing war crimes (as an attempt to clean blood stains from the regime's hands). Many other security and army officers were considered as burnout pawns, especially in the last two years (this is because the regime used them to regain control over lost areas since 2013 and now they are not needed anymore, or because they made gross violations of human rights and crimes which by killing them, the regime would avoid any prosecution in the future from the international community). Likewise, many inter-Assad family disputes came up, i.e., dispute with Bashar Assad's cousin Rami Makhlouf – Number 1 businessman in the country – and the killing of the personal bodyguard of Maher Assad.

On the second occasion where the regime used IEDs to target the opposition figures, there is an enormous number of cases from the beginning of the uprising until our day. The Iranian militia and the regime used this technique to get rid of its opposing community easily or to get rid of the reconciled former opposition personalities (Eastern Ghouta and Daraa are rich contexts with these assassinations and IED bombings for the ex. Opposition fighters and leaders in the south of Syria). The north was also under the regime's scop penetrating or infiltrating the area was harder since the opposition controlled it.

The Carter Center estimated that a minimum of 36,404 individual explosive munitions were used across southern Syria, after reviewing 9,546 documented conflict events between July 2013 and May 2019. (Conflict Mapping, 2019) These figures provide policymakers with an understanding of the scale of explosive weapons use in southern Syria, the complexity of the challenge, and the need for a response towards this contamination.

Figure 11: Southern Syria 3 provinces data on IEDs from 2013-2019



1.2.4 Military Conscription

Article 46 of the Syrian Constitution clearly states that “compulsory military service shall be a sacred duty” and that “defending the territorial integrity of the homeland and maintaining the secrets of state shall be a duty of every citizen.” Legislative Decree No. 18 of 2003 - known as the “Military Service Law”- governs the administrative and structural components of the armed forces more broadly. Prior to the current law, Legislative Decree No. 115 of 1953 formerly governed conscription. Syria’s Conscription Law has been amended a total of 13 times since it was issued—nine times since protests began in March 2011 (2011, 2014, 2015, 2016, three times in 2017, 2018, and most recently, in 2019).

The Syrian Army consists of mainly professional officers and conscripts. Almost all Syrian males, with some exceptions, must undergo 18 months of military service after they are 18 years old and upward. The regime stopped discharging drafted men for compulsory military service since the start of the conflict in 2011, including officers along with rank-and-file members. Even though the required term of service before the conflict was for no more than two years. As a result of this policy, all the soldiers have served continuously until now - some of them for more than eight years. The Syrian regime’s rhetoric stands on the military service - which is repeated on various occasions – that the military institution is fighting terrorism and that no discharge can be considered till every inch of Syria is liberated from terrorism.

In late 2018, when the Syrian regime controlled most of the country and had one last strip over the north, a pretended mechanism had been set up to facilitate the return of Syrian

refugees to their country - after more than 6 million people were forced to internally displaced, and about 7 million Syrians sought refuge outside their country over the past nine years, according to statistics. Most of the Syrians at eligible military service age, fled the country as they did not want to be involved in the war's parties, and many young people resorted to university registration to postpone military compulsory service. These young Syrian males had the right to postpone their engagement in the military service based on the legislative decree no. / 12 / of 2019 (AP_News, 2020), "military compulsory service for eligible man is postponed for a period of one year, renewable," according to specific criteria. For example, on the condition that the young man's age does not exceed 26 years for a student at a university college whose study period is four years. The postponement is canceled upon completion of the study or if he is absent or discontinues his studies without an excuse. It is also permissible in time of war to cancel the academic postponement of all those charged upon a decision from the Commander in Chief.

Considering the current situation in Syria, the fulfillment of the conditions required to postpone military service in accordance with the law, does not guarantee the progress of the transaction without paying heavy bribes.

Former Brigadier General Ahmed Rahal, who is currently residing in Turkey, assures that "corruption is not something new to the security sector in Syria, and even before the revolution in 2011, the young man used to pay bribes in exchange for the so-called fixed services by fabricating a healthy excuse for him. For this reason, for example," The medical committees responsible for assessing the health situation for those who supposed to be recruited were constantly changing."

The exemption of the service for the expatriated citizens outside the country through discharge fee, is an old law in Syria, and it was modified in 2014 (Expatriates, 1997):

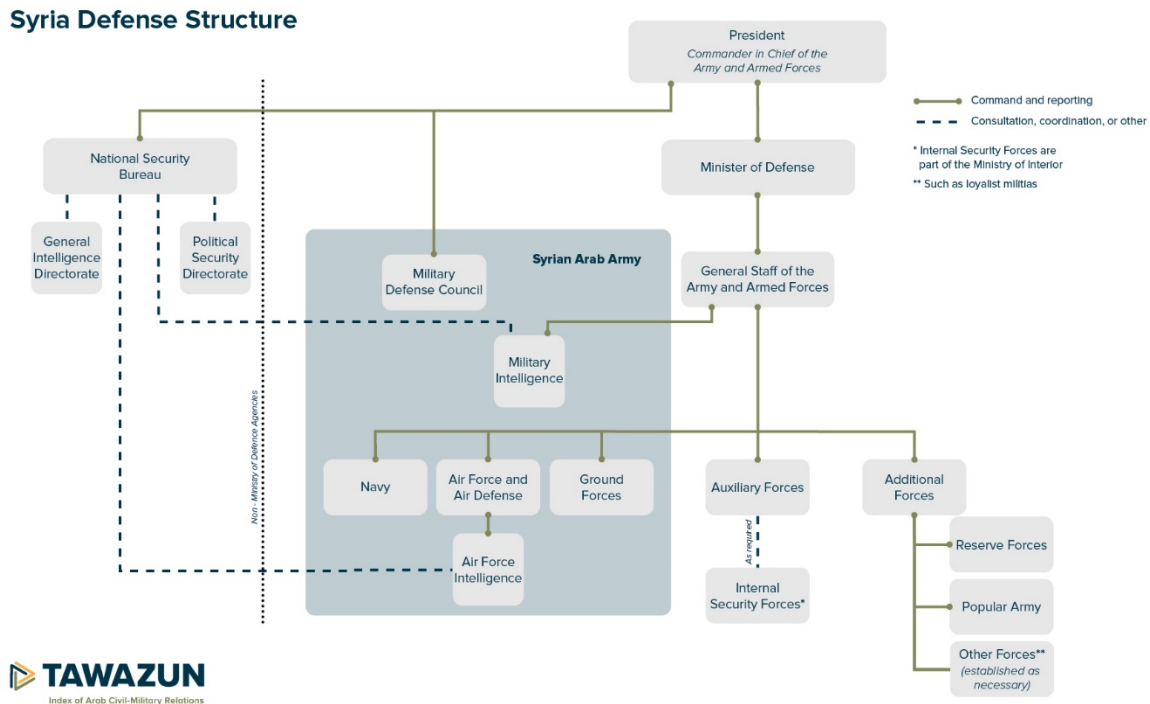
Table 2: The exemption of the service for the expatriates through discharge fee, is an old law

Lieutenant's Monthly Wages (in Syrian pounds) Covered by a Single Discharge Fee

	2007	2009	2014	2017	2019
Value of waiver fee in law	35 months' wages	30 months' wages	\$8,000	\$8,000	\$8,000
Can assets be seized?	No	No	No	Provisional seizure	Executive seizure
Salary in Syrian pounds	7,715	9,645	19,250	19,250	66,683
Value of waiver fee (Syrian pounds)	270,025	289,350	1,904,000	3,480,000	3,480,000
Value of waiver fee (US\$)	6,000	6,430	8,000	8,000	8,000
SYP-US\$ exchange rate (official)	45	45	165	435	435
Waiver fee as a multiple of a lieutenant's salary	35	30	68	180	52
SYP-US\$ exchange rate (market)	45	45	238	435	1,100
Value of waiver fee as multiple a of a lieutenant's salary (market exchange rate)	35	30	99	180	132

The Russian International Relations Council (RIAC, 2010) estimated the total number of military personnel prior to 2011 at about 325,000, of whom 220,000 were ground troops, 100,000 were air forces (60,000 of them were for air defense, 40,000 were air forces), and 4000 thousand were naval forces, with 8000 border guards and 100,000 fighters from the "People's Army." The army before the revolution consisted mainly of recruits who had an average service of 2.5 years, and the annual recruitment rate was 125,000, with 354,000 reservists remaining. Then the number of army fighters decreased by about two-thirds after 2011, and in 2012, "Russian and Iranian military assistance prevented the collapse of the regime and its forces, according to a study by the "Tawazun" research center (Tawazun, 2020), which estimated the number of army fighters in 2020 at 169,000.

Figure 12: Syria Defense Structure (Tawazun Center)



This means that the young man inside Syria is forced to carry weapons or remain fleeing from the security forces, unable to practice his life normally. A young man must obtain a "marriage license approval" from the recruitment division to get married. There is no escape from the conscription division's approvals to travel, work, and buy or sell a property. In addition, many young Syrians evade the joining of the military service due to their poor financial conditions and their need to support their family, as the recruited gets a salary that does not exceed \$ 50 per month, and it is barely enough to cover the basic needs of one individual. There is no escape from the approvals of the recruitment division, and Syrians, regardless of their social, and financial ranks, are afraid from sending their sons to the frontlines fighting with the regime - religious and moral obligation implies that the son will either kill or get killed by fellow Muslim Syrians. This was a reason for a big part of Syrian youth continuously leaving the country.

1.3 PYD/YPG Controlled Areas

The security function of the actors entrusted with the implementation of security tasks in the Self Administration areas is similar to that which prevailed in the areas of the regime before the revolution, in terms of the necessity of societal control in line with the nature of the political dogma of the ruling party, to legitimize political arrests, the militarization of society

and link its trends with the security compass of the central force. The security structure witnesses conflicts in institutions and a duality of references between the regime and the PYD. Perhaps the greatest threat which is threatening public security is the ideological link between the military and security branches of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has separatist tendencies and hostility to neighboring countries especially Turkey that consider it a terrorist organization.

After the start of the revolution, the PYD began to form organized cells, especially within the ranks of the so-called “Revolutionary Youth Movement” under the leadership of Khabat Deriki (former leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party), who is considered by many parties to be the founder and first commander of the People's Protection Units (that is recognized by Turkey as the Syrian branch of PKK). The military and security organizations of the party increased later with the development of events, including:

1- People's Protection Units and Women Protection Forces

It relies on the volunteer factor to join and lead large military operations in the countryside and inside cities that are set as targets for control. The general framework of the military hierarchy is made up of the general leadership of the People's Protection Units and Women Protection, and then the Military Council of these units, and field commanders from the leaders of the battalions, companies, and regions. The units based their military legitimacy later Article 15 of the "Charter of the Social Contract for Democratic Autonomous Administration," which was ratified in session No. 1 on 01/06/2014 (PYD, 2014), and stated that the People's Protection Units are the only national institution responsible for defense and territorial integrity and sovereignty, and it is in the service of the people's interests, and the protection of its goals and national security. It is estimated that the number of protection units ranges from 20 to 30 thousand fighters.

2- HPX: Self Defense Forces

The social contract announced by the Self Administration approved the formation of the Defense and Self-Protection Authority on January 21, 2014. The Legislative Council approved the Self-Defense Law on 07/13/2014. This law includes the obligation for every family to introduce one of its members between the ages of 18-30 to join the defense forces. The performance is mandatory for the "self-defense duty," which lasts for a period of 6 months and was raised to 9 months on the 1st of January 2016. The mission of this body is to work on developing laws that regulate the process of compulsory conscription of young people. This process is carried out in particular by the Autonomous Administration on the

Kurds in their areas of control, while the allied parties implement the order in their areas of control, especially the Al-Sanadid forces of the Shammar clan.

3- HPC: core protection units

Their tasks and duties are derived from the explanations of the Autonomous Administration, and they aim to protect their regions and neighborhoods from any attacks that may occur considering the events that the area is going through, such as setting up checkpoints on public roads leading to the neighborhoods, collecting information about any suspicious person and their movements in the area, and supporting the People's Protection Units and Women in the area. Battlefronts, and coordination with all Asayish forces centers and security forces operating on the ground.

4- Internal Security Forces: Asayish Rojava

It is the central part of the security apparatus of the Self Administration and operates in the areas of the northeast of Syria, under the co-leadership, Ciwan Ibrahim and Eitan Farhad. During nearly four years of its formation, Public Security has evolved from referring only to YPG or SDF forces that carry out all security tasks, to emergence of security institutions that play different roles and consist - according to their administrative structures - from:

- Traffic Police (Traffic)
- Anti-Terrorism Forces (HAT)
- Women's Asayish,
- Checkpoint Security
- Public Security Agency
- Division of Combating Organized Crime.

By the end of 2016, the Public Security Agency owned 45 centers, including 21 in the Jazira Canton, 5 in Kobani canton, 19 in Afrin canton, and more than 195 fixed checkpoints throughout SDF areas. The number of individuals and personnel joining all these institutions ranged from 4 to 5 thousand members.

Likewise, the escape of young men from the area began after the imposition of compulsory recruitment by SDF forces, which imposed recruitment on Arab youths because of the increasing threats they received. In addition to the lack of adequate protection for the militants of SDF at the military points that they take in the vicinity of the oil wells in the towns of the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor.

The assassinations continue

Regarding the security situation in the area, there is clearly the presence of sleeping cells in the area, by those who reject the presence of the American forces and the militants loyal to them. They are working to carry out swift operations, whether by targeting the patrols with explosive devices or attacking the military centers and points of SDF, while continuing the assassinations by motorcycles commonly used by the region's people.

These operations made the region live in a state of panic and terror, following the refusal of the militants loyal to the US forces to continue working with them, due to the lack of the necessary protection. SDF leadership is frequently asking the US forces to provide protection similar to that provided to the militants tasked with the protection of the oil fields controlled by the American troops in the region, including the Al-Omar field, which is the largest oil field in Syria (Musto, 2020).

People smuggling operations boom

In parallel with the increase in the number of young people fleeing, the human smuggling profession has regained its prosperity in the region with the aim of reaching Turkish territory, which is related to conscription related causes, lack of services reasons, and economic causes since the area is relying on Syrian Pound till today in the monetary exchanges and there is a clear connection to Damascus government in many economical aspects.

Generally, the security situation in SDF is complicated and varied between Kurdish and Arab populated demographics and it is uniquely linked to the political stand of the Self Administration of the regional and international players in the arena. There is continuous Arab/Kurdish tension in the southern line of the area on the Euphrates banks while it is calmer in northern areas close to the border with Turkey. This differentiation is also clear when it comes to actors and interests of actors; a frequent existence of the Syrian army or National Defense and YPG/Asayish clashing in Qamishli and Hasakah cities from a time to time is noted, while in the south, it is mostly ISIS sleeper cells targeting SDF members (despite the fact that not all the times, it is sleeper cells of ISIS, it is sometimes normal civilians or former OAGs members who is retaliating through small arms fires shooting on checkpoints, and running? Many analysts see it as the best step to resolve the insecurity prevailing in SDF-

controlled areas. It is to make decentralized security apparatuses in the three provinces, and these three can come all under the Self Administration umbrella.

CHAPTER 2: CONDITIONS AGAINST RETURN

The research will focus on analyzing the connectivity and relatedness between two main concepts: improved security at hometown and the willingness of refugees to return in relation to the first concept. The research focuses on both facilitators and hindrances for return in scope of security and stability in certain areas under opposition-held areas in the northwest of Syria. So, it focuses on the four main chapters that discuss the facilitating and hindering conditions for return, then it gives a collection of challenges, needs, and steps needed for having an effective security apparatus.

A Georgetown University Migration based center – Institute for the Study of International Migration – listed three main barriers facing Syrian refugees to return (Lichtenheld, 2019):

- Security barriers (Thousands of refugees are wanted by the regime or considered traitors for leaving, so they are afraid of being arrested by the government's intelligence services. Men returning to Regime-held areas would face a risk of military conscription.
- Housing barriers.
- Economic barrier.

These security concerns have led many refugees to precondition their return on an acceptable political solution to the conflict. The most fundamental challenge for the refugees who fled their countries is a lack of basic security needs, which made them leave their country at the beginning. The continuity of these security conditions and the longer time it takes to solve them, the further Syrian's return will be. But this topic discusses the main factors standing against the Syrian refugees' return which the research gathers them in the frame between the political solution, lack of safety, and deteriorating economics. These are widespread problems, preventing refugees in many countries from considering return and obstructing Turkey's efforts to establish a "safe zone" (Nevett, 2019) in north Syria. Many Syrians do not trust any actor involved in the conflict to ensure their safety and neutrality towards all.

Other returning obstacles include reported increases in crime rates, corruption, and extortion within a traumatized populace. Many Syrians have observed the lack of trust that now runs throughout Syrian society, which increased during the decade of the conflict. In article written by Kerry Anderson about the obstacles of Syrian IDPs returning to their homes he stated (Anderson, 2020):

“If the conflict had ended with some form of a transition government that represented different parts of society and sought reconciliation, there would be some hope for creating security and beginning to restore trust. However, since the regime has mostly won the war through a combination of brutality and external alliances, and appears to have little interest in reconciliation, it is difficult to see how the society can move beyond deep divisions.”

2.1 Push and Pull Factors

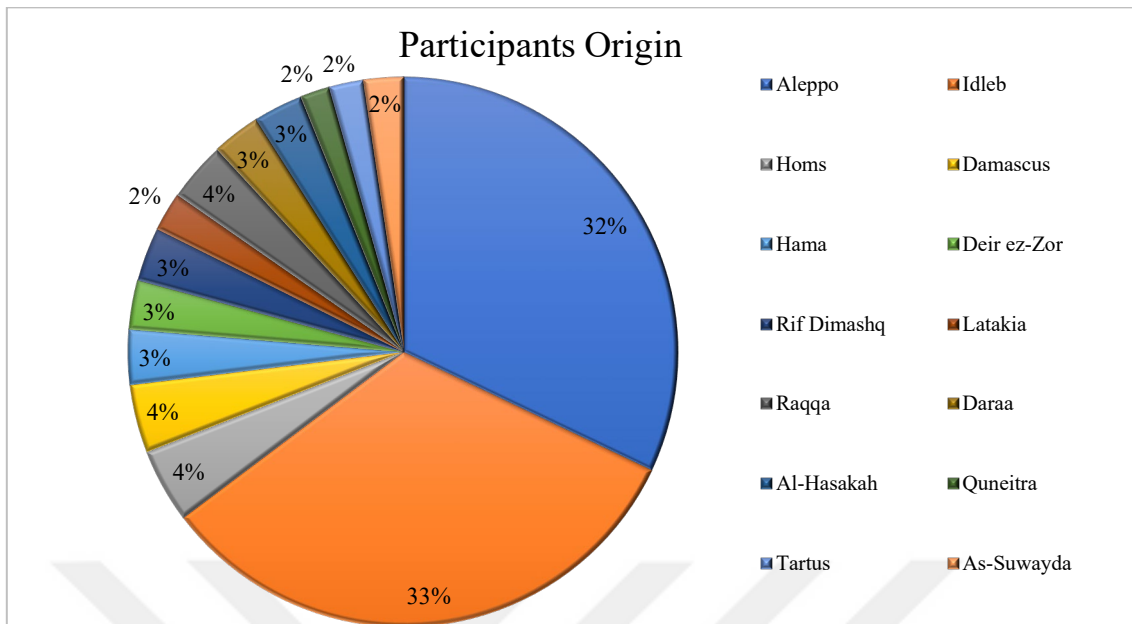
“Push” factors are conditions in migrants’ home countries that make it difficult or even impossible to live there. At the same time, “pull” factors are circumstances in the destination country that make it a more attractive place to live than their home countries. Common “push” factors include violence, gender inequality, security concerns, lack of shelter, and ultimatums by authorities (W., 1983). While “pull” factors include access to shelter, availability of services, stable security situation, and kinship/partisan affiliations. In the case of Syrian refugees, the research studies the push and pull factors driving Syrians for forced displacement or return to Aleppo, Homs, and Dar’a, which are focused on by another World Bank study. This study clarifies some illustrative patterns of factors informing the calculus of decision making, prompting movement, and starting the evacuation action. It shows through three main themes that the Syrian population in three different cities made their mind on departure or return. This matrix explains the push and pull factors divided into first, second, and third drivers for the population to leave or return. It orders the priorities for Syrian in these three cities based on the level of importance to each theme which is absorbed differently. Security and availability of shelter are the main push and pull factors for Syrian reached through the report which scales the importance of these concepts to Syrians more than the rest. This indication is one of the main reasons for highlighting the importance of the topic.

Table 3: Push/Pull Factor Matrix for Aleppo, Homs, and Dar'a (1: Primary Driver, 2: Secondary Driver, 3: Tertiary Driver (Bank, *The Toll of War: The Economic and Social Consequences of the Conflict in Syria*, 2017))

Theme	Factor	Description	Aleppo		Homs		Dar'a	
			Push	Pull	Push	Pull	Push	Pull
Political Stability	Security	The perception that departure/ return is related to the physical safety	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Forced relocation	Formal /informal authorities in a given area create conditions that displace populations	1		1	1	1	1
	Available shelter	Sustained access or no access to safe living space	1	1	1	1	1	1
Accessibility	Infrastructure	The extent of infrastructure damage, irrespective of service provision		2	2	2	2	2
	Access to services	The absence/presence of service provision, through public or private networks		2	2	2	2	2
	Food availability	Access to affordable food through either local markets or aid organizations	2	2	3	3	1	1
Affiliation	Economic opportunity	The prospect of generating income	3	3	3	2		3
	Kinship ties	Ethno-sectarian, religious, tribal, and family connections		2	1	1		3
	Partisanship	Political beliefs that serve as a reason for departure, discrimination, or return		2	1	1		2

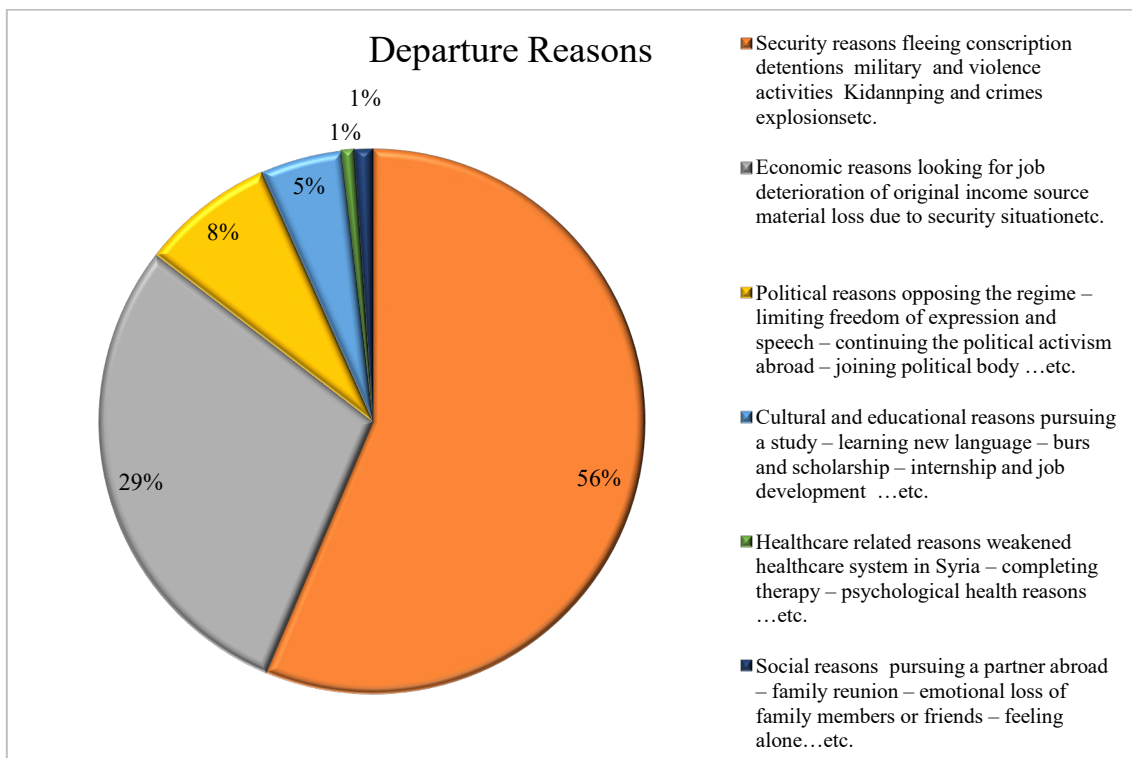
Similarly, the survey made for this research focused on two main provinces close to the Turkish borders and partially controlled by Turkish forces; Aleppo and Idleb formed around 56% of the total. It is normal behavior for the Syrian refugees from a migration point of view to run to the closest country; thus, people from southern parts fled to Jordan, people from the middle parts of Syria fled to Lebanon, people from northwest parts fled to Turkey, and people from northeast fled to Iraq.

Figure 14: Syrian refugees in Turkey and Syrian returnees together, by province of origin in Syria



Those surveyed people showed different reasons for their departure from Syria, and it is no surprise, the security push driver was the main one. Over 75.5% of the total people stated that security reasons were the main reasons Syrians decided to leave the country, matching the problem of this research. The rest vary between political, economic, educational, and cultural reasons that pushed Syrians to leave the country on gradual time-space.

Figure 15: Reasons for Syrian refugees and returnees to depart the country

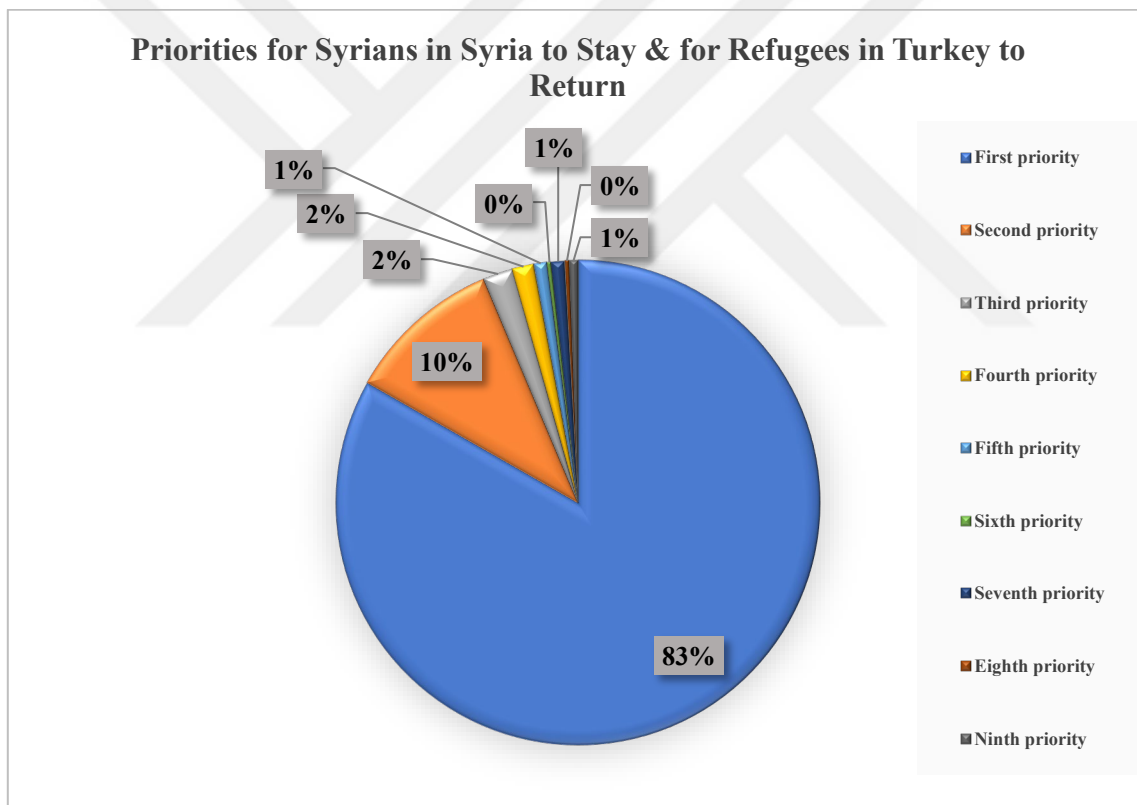


Throughout the decade of the conflict – also stated in many indexes that set Syria as one of the top ten hazardous countries globally – Syrians lost trust in all parties of the conflict and their ability to provide security services in a sustainable way and with solid security apparatus.

2.2 Lack of Political Solution

Through the research many interviews and surveys were made and a main cross-cutting point between them all was the political solution of the crisis as a priority for Syrians to return. Many Syrian refugees in Turkey whose areas originally in Syria are controlled by the government of Syria are not accepting the idea of returning to north west of Syria. They prioritized political solution as it was seen the only solution for permanent return. So, is it 83%? Give references to your tables/figures in text!

Figure 16: Priorities of Syrian returnees to stay and refugees to return



During the last ten years of the political crisis in Syria, the country passed two main political streams: the Astana channel and Geneva 2254 UNSC resolution channel (UNSC, 2015). The 2254 UN Security Council resolution was promulgated on 18 December 2015, which set a peace plan for the country through a transition that would be followed by setting up a new constitution for the country and democratic and free elections. The UN Security Council resolution also set these elections a free, inclusive poll that includes refugees and diaspora outside the country. The political transition mentioned in the resolution is extracted

from talks between the Syrian regime and the Syrian opposition represented by the National Coalition, which will be co-occurring with the ceasefire.

The time frame of the ceasefire was six months, and in 18 months, a new constitution was to be found, and five and half years later, still, neither was lived. The failure of applying this resolution has many factors, on top of them the Russian support of the Assad regime and vetoing many anti-regime international initiatives (Team R. C., 2015).

The Astana peace track for Syria was launched in the Kazakh capital in early April 2015, and many rounds followed later. The Astana peace talks had trilateral guarantors of Turkey, Russia, and Iran, who were divided between supporting Assad and opposing it. Unlike the Geneva track, which was purely political, the Astana peace talk was linked to the military commitment of the protagonists. It proved its efficiency in suspending the hostilities that only lasted in areas of the physical existence of the Turkish army in the northwest of Syria. Astana peace talks continued between March and May 2017, to establish a memorandum agreeing on installing four “de-escalation zones” that joined:

- 1- Idleb
- 2- North Homs countryside
- 3- Eastern Ghouta
- 4- Daraa

Three of these four areas were completely controlled by the Syrian Regime backed by Russian aerial coverage and Iranian troops. In mid-2018, Daraa was evacuated to northwest areas controlled by the opposition forces - only Idleb was partially spared – while in 2020, part of south Idleb and North Hama areas were held again by the regime forces. Turkey was not much backed by western countries in Astana’s political strive (Dalay, 2020), but it could install a semi-safe zone in Idleb after deploying thousands of troops. After 2020, the military and political landscape were relatively calm until May 2021, when the presidential election came, which all Syrians and world states predicted to be a sarcastic staged democracy. Russian diplomats seized this era to call the international community for an inclusive plan for Syria’s reconstruction and refugees return which will be under the Astana peace talks’ framework by which Geneva track will be excluded – U.S and western countries are promoting this track (Team E. , 2018).

The research topic discusses the relation between the political solution of the country that passed over many failed attempts over the decade, and the return of refugees who are setting their return conditioned with a political inclusive solution. The political solution that

Syrian refugees are considering is closely linked with security environment improvement in their home country.

Russia tried to expedite the return of refugees to show its triumph - with its protagonist Assad Regime – after the first quarter of 2020 year, by controlling 65% of the total Syrian geography. The call for the return of Syrian refugees to their country started from the Syrian Refugee Conference (AFP, 2020), which was held on 11 and 12 November 2020 at the Umayyad Conference Palace in Damascus, by support from Russia and was boycotted from Washington and its allies. This conference reinforced the Russian-Western division on the issue of the Syrian crisis (Berlin, 2018).

The departure of al-Assad stipulates the call to return to the grieving-homeland Syrians around the world, with a widespread campaign calling for the departure of Al-Assad. The refugee conference organized by Russia in Damascus, aimed to restore legitimacy to the Syrian regime, trying to revive it again and impose it on the Syrian people.

In a meeting with a Turkish official for the research, he added: *“If all the parties of the crisis are unanimous and agree on the form of the solution in Syria, and that it is purely political, then why does the war continue, and the politics are absent? Why do they not agree on its foundations and its location, is it in Geneva or Astana? then why not be entrusted with the task of sponsoring a political solution for the United Nations, like Dayton, Rwanda, and South Africa.”*

Turkey undertakes responsibility for the refugees on its lands, whose number exceeds 3.6 million refugees, and also supervises the management of the Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch areas, in addition to ensuring the de-escalation zones in Idleb, but the eastern Euphrates region remains its main concern, because there are threats to its strategic security.

Turkey's political vision in Syria can be summed up with four basic goals (Francesco, 2021):

- 1- Preserving Syria's unity, politically and geographically.
- 2- Preventing the establishment of a terrorist entity adjacent to its borders with Syria.
- 3- Securing Syrian refugees' safe and voluntary return to their country.
- 4- Preventing a new tragedy that may force 4 million people in Idleb to flee to it.

Therefore, Turkey clearly stated that any new wave of displacements will not affect Turkey alone, but it will affect the European continent as well.

However, at the political level, the international community has been divided over how to tackle the refugee issue, especially as the fighting has decreased and the Assad regime's hold on power seems assured. The United States and the West in general have rejected the repatriation of refugees, while Russia and Iran — the Assad regime's major allies — have

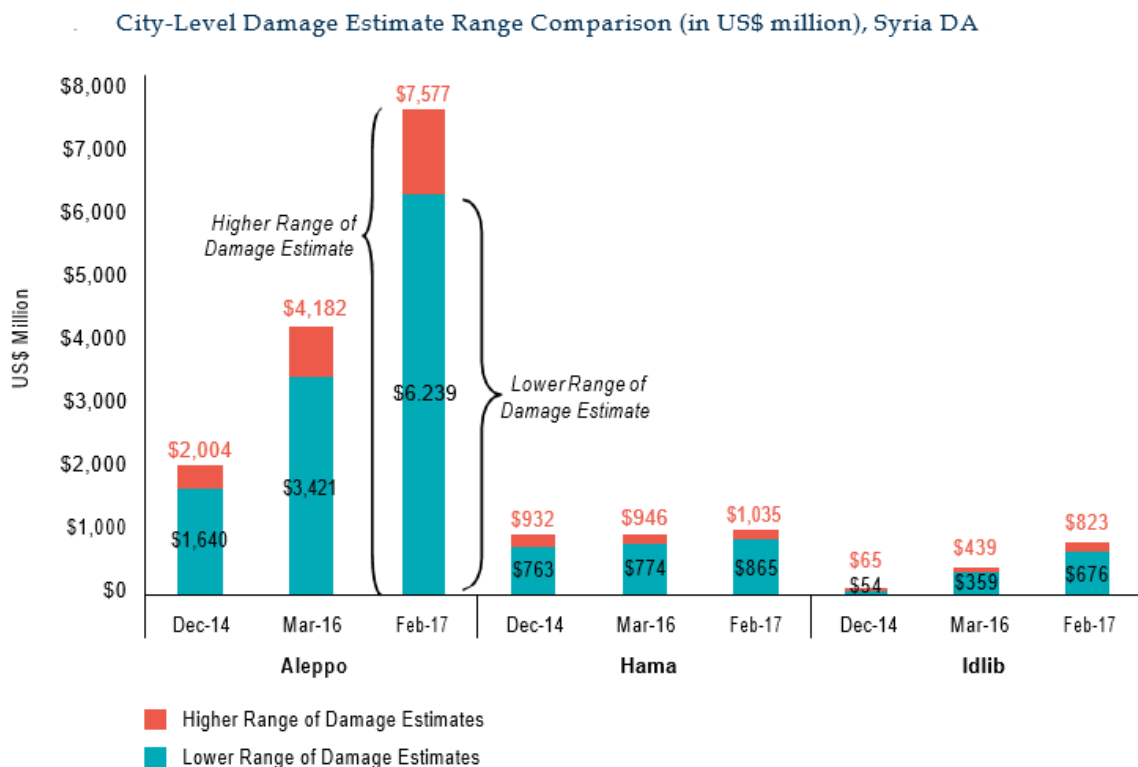
called for their immediate return. This research briefly examines the Turkish and international politics of Syrian refugee return in the case of Turkey.

2.3 Lack of Public Services and Infrastructure Damage

The armed conflict that began in 2011 Syria - followed the violent suppression of a protest movement - has had disastrous consequences for country's infrastructure and economy. It is estimated that reconstruction will cost US\$250 to US\$400 billion or even US\$1 trillion. The conflict has damaged and destroyed vital infrastructure across communities that used to be or is under the control of the opposition groups.

According to World Bank, as of February 2017, the total damage in three main cities in north of Syria (that are controlled by GoS and OAGs), for the three cities covered in this phase (Aleppo, Idlib, and Hama) were estimated to range between US\$7.8 and US\$9.4 billion. This represents an approximate increase of 70 % since March 2016 and 215 % since December 2014 for the three cities.

Figure 17: Syria Damage Assessment of Aleppo, Hama, and Idlib Cities, 2011-2017, Source: World Bank



The high levels of damage forced families to move in with relatives resulting in overcrowding for third of the total hosting communities near the Turkish borders. Repairs were stranded by high costs of items and services as well as by insecurity.

Figure 18: Syria Damage Assessment of Aleppo-Idleb-Hama cities by sector, 2011-2017, Source: World Bank

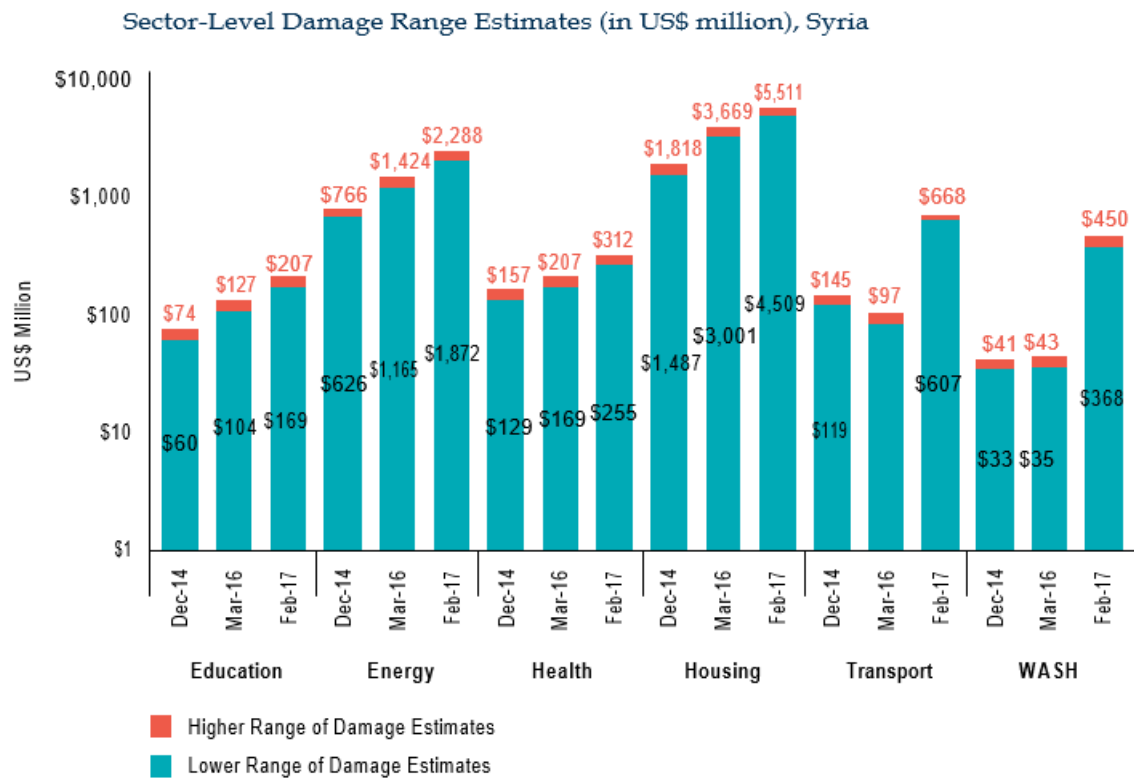
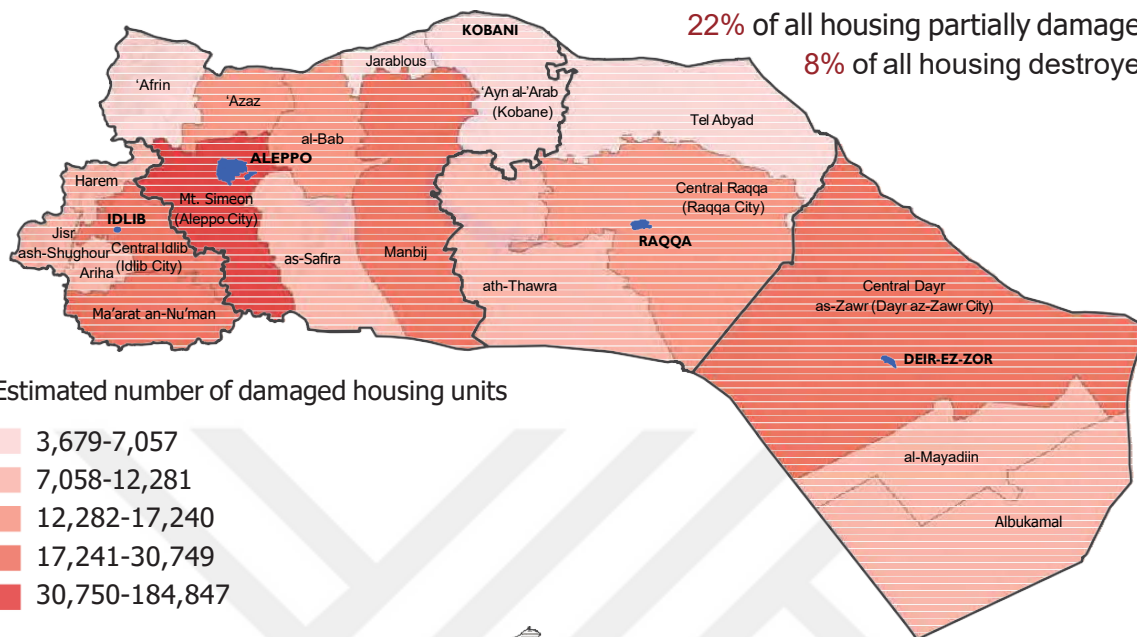


Figure 19: Governorate-Level Estimates of Housing Damage 2011-2017, Source: World Bank

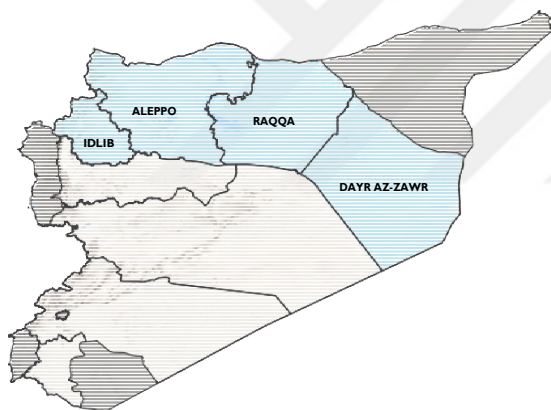
ESTIMATED DAMAGE TO SYRIA'S HOUSING SECTOR (within the 4 surveyed governorates)

22% of all housing partially damaged
8% of all housing destroyed



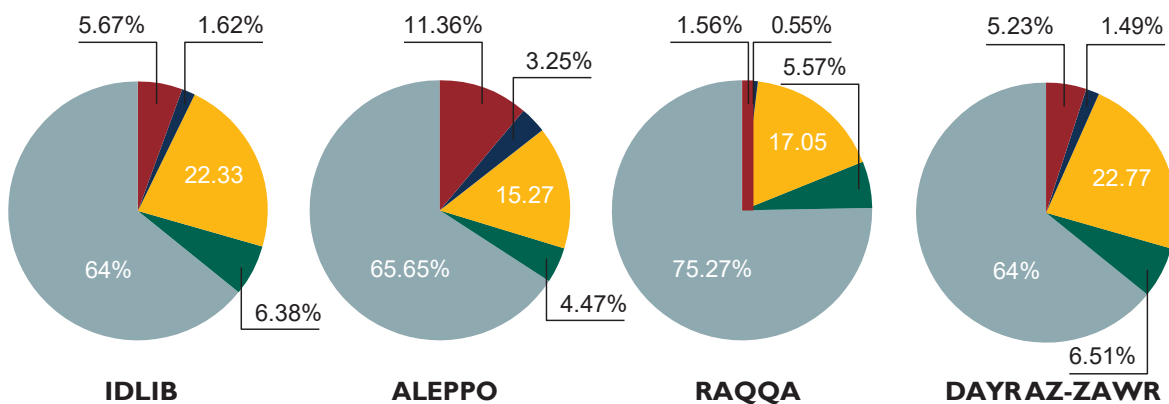
Estimated number of damaged housing units

- 3,679-7,057
- 7,058-12,281
- 12,282-17,240
- 17,241-30,749
- 30,750-184,847



Governorate	Est. apt. units	Est. other types
Aleppo	319,209	461,750
Idlib	46,396	182,922
Day az-Zawr	28,128	122,537
Raqqa	12,669	114,911

■ Governorates not included in coverage



- Partially damaged apartment units
- Destroyed apartment units
- Partially damaged other types
- Destroyed other types
- No damage to housing

Challenges were faced by communities in WASH and electricity infrastructure as water and electricity from the network were widely unavailable to houses. Estimated damages increased in all sectors, with damages in the WASH sector increasing more than ten times and damages in the transport sector increasing nearly seven-fold till the end of 2017. Even in stabilized communities across the northwest of Syria, returnee IDPs population faced substantial barriers to accessing sufficient water, as a result of damage to public infrastructure as well as unaffordability of alternative sources (Web, 2019).

Moving from damages of infrastructure to the lack of service is like getting out from a room to its neighboring one, thus, millions of Syrians are suffering from unemployment, poverty, homelessness, food and medicine shortages, and destruction of public. Health, education, housing, transport, energy, and others main public services are impacted by the conflict all, but every sector in different percentage. Housing is the most affected, with 65 % of the estimated damages – not including looting/ internal damage. In the water sector, there were 260 water assets damaged; ranging from water tanks, treatment facilities, and dams (this does not cover the damages to the water pipe network, and it is only in 6 governorates from 2011-2017). Water infrastructure’s dependence on electricity infrastructure has impacted the service delivery. In addition, population shifts due to the influx of internally displaced persons in relatively conflict-free areas (such as Dana and Azaz districts) have placed additional stress on public infrastructure.

Table 4: Loss value to public services by sector, from 2011-2014, Source: World Bank, Courage Services.

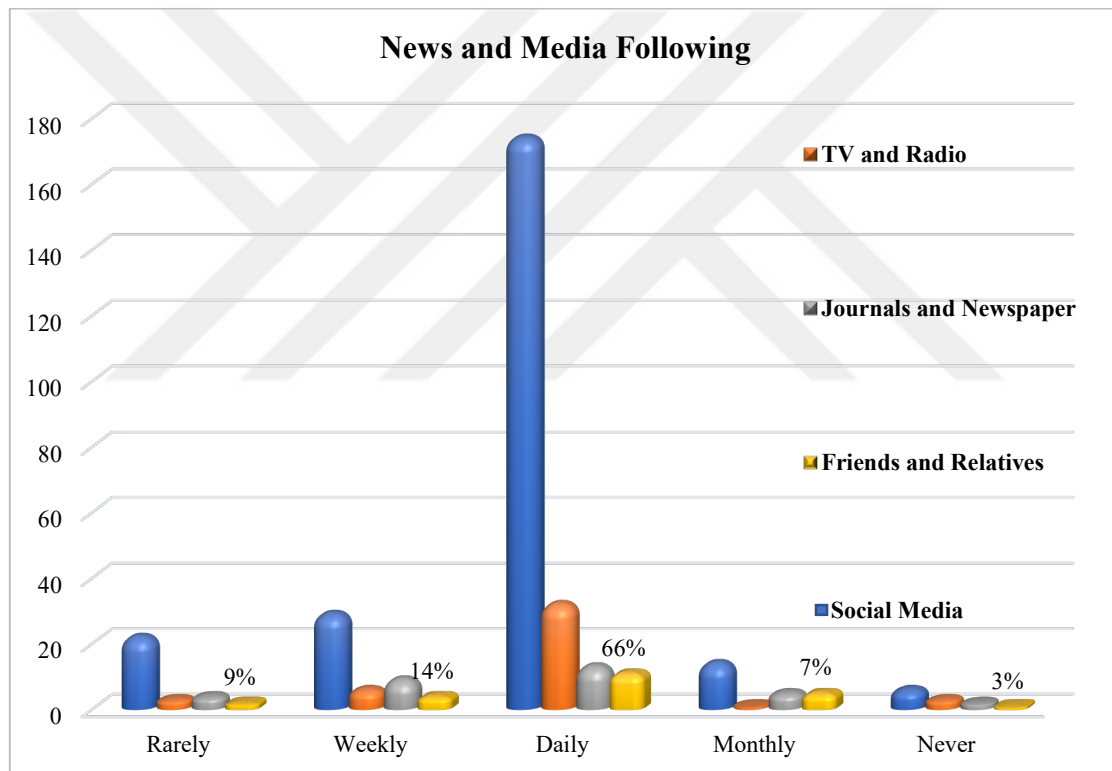
TOTAL VALUE OF DAMAGES BY SECTOR (in \$ Millions)		
Sector	Low Estimate	High Estimate
Housing	2,386	2,916
Health	203	248
Education	101	123
Energy	648	791
WASH	61	75
Roads	180	221
Total	3,579	4,375

After the Turkish military operations from 2017 till the day of writing, there were many stabilization initiatives and projects made in order to improve the status of public services in the area, despite slowness. Roads pavements, water pumping, energy network rehabilitation, and delivery of electricity and others, were the services provided to Syrians in Turkish controlled areas in the northwest of Syria. NGOs played very vital roads in later years in reviving the area and resupply the public services to these areas. Turkey coordinates the

humanitarian aid on the ground through the disaster and emergency agency AFAD. There was also a massive investment in infrastructure rehabilitation, education, and health – above all in the areas of Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch– in order to provide public services to the population.

Another related challenge for the returnees is the contamination of the area with UXOs and IEDs. The news that refugees are following covers partly incidents about UXOs explosion which is detracting for them. *“The tremendous challenges extend far beyond UXOs - mine clearance and physical rebuilding of infrastructure and housing: a huge loss of skilled labor, contraction of the economy, currency devaluation and the collapse of public services”* (Bank, Syria Country Profile, 2017).

Figure 20: News and Media follow by Syrian refugees and returnees – frequency & source



In relation to the research topic, the connection is apparent between the return willingness of Syrian refugees abroad and the availability of public services in suitable time and quality, but still, the primary value comes to security and personal safety.

Even if public services erosion in the country were recovered, according to simulations published by the World Bank, many Syrians would only consider returning if they sensed their personal safety is also ensured (Bank, World, 2019).

2.4 Deterioration of Economy and Livelihood

The Syrian economy suffered from ongoing tremendous destruction throughout the country. GDP went down from \$60.2 billion in 2011 to \$37.1 billion in 2020, according to HDX (Humanitarian Data Exchange) (HDX, 2020). The size of the economy and the structure of Syria's economy has changed due to the war. So, agriculture and government services together were growing while other sectors were shrinking as overall. Until 2017, agriculture was accounted for the third of Syria's GDP and was like a safety tire for almost more than a quarter of Syrians, including internally displaced persons (Constituency, 2018). This growth in agriculture was a normal consequence of the enormous destruction that occurred to other sectors. The sector that was mainly affected was industries since most of the manufacturers left the country or brought their machinery outside the country, and many were damaged or stolen during the war (Butter, 2015).

Unemployment rates increased from 12.04% in 2011 to almost 90%, according to World Bank's predicted analysts' data. Despite these high levels of unemployment still, some businessmen in different industries were complaining about the lack of manpower. This is the result of the massive migration of work-age workers and the loss of death, injury, arrest, exile, and other factors. Thus, conscription and the lack of security, especially for work-aged youth, made the human pool of the workforce leak quickly.

After a decade, the conflict is still ongoing, and the economy is still suffering, notably transforming from a productive industrial solid state's economy to a smuggling, kidnapping, and arms sales based economy. According to the Syrian Center for Research Policy, there are around 12 million Syrians were without an income, and 90 % lived in poverty in 2018. Most Syrians rely on informal labor, especially in opposition-held areas, since these areas are not stable and under attack from time to time, which is the factor that did not help in founding the roots for the recovery of the economy. Oppositely, most citizens depend heavily on the state for income, essential goods and services, and administrative documents in the regime-held areas. In the big cities, most habitants are public sector employees or blue-collar laborers; the minority elites are industrials, tradesmen, and businessmen. The bureaucratic powers that were already sprawling were consolidated into urban centers that were firmly defensible and under the regime's control. This is why the Syrian government worked throughout the last decade of keeping public state institutions operating at whatever cost, and this strategy succeeded to an extent. The Syrian regime kept working on this strategy till the U.S administration passed the Caesar act, which compelled stricter embargo on the regime and added many regime leaders to the sanctions list – the sanction list included people from

Hezbollah, Iranian related militia, and some Lebanese banks – and thus the already destroyed Syrian economy started to crumble but counter efforts from Russian, Iran and other Arab pro-regime countries, were exerted to fight back.

Another major venue that was heavily impacted is the real estate and housing sector. The war has caused extensive damage to residences and infrastructure throughout the country. Beyond destruction due to fighting, many areas experienced looting that badly damaged homes, with robbers sometimes going so far as to strip wire to sell the copper. The lack of housing combined with internal displacements that have led to crowding in many areas has helped to create a competitive, expensive, and often corrupt rental and housing market. In some cases, returnees find other displaced Syrians living in their former homes and have limited options for reclaiming their property.

One other major challenge that Syrians face is the deterioration of livelihoods and earnings of households in Syria. The average laborer would need to work around 86 days to earn the equivalent value of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) set at 224,385 SYP, according to data collected by REACH's Market Monitoring exercise (Reach, 2020). Many families thus sent their children or females to work or beg even, which has recently been a widespread phenomenon in the Syrian community.

Similarly, in regions suffering in opposition-held areas economically, local populations suffered shortages of food, water, electricity, fuel, ...etc. Some armed opposition factions also profited from sieges; throughout the uprising, regime and armed opposition forces-imposed customs fees on goods crossing from areas they controlled to enemy-controlled areas. These unofficial commercial crossings benefited both sides economically. Thus, it can be said that there is a certain level of dependency on the regime operating economy, which is still stretching bonds to the opposite side in the Turkish-held area in the north of Syria, but these areas are gradually detaching from Damascus, economically. Thus, there is a different exceptional economy formed in the north of Syria, which is mainly relying on Syrian refugees economy in Turkey, when most of the suppliers, cargo, importer, and exporters are all from Syrian refugees in Turkey who has their networks in north of Syria facilitating this job in the field. But, as in every area and every crisis, there are hardships, there are many as in Afrin, Azaz, and other regions: Insufficient jobs and economic opportunities and many other obstacles. However, the combination of security concerns and economic difficulties are major factors discouraging the return of these Syrians to Turkey.

Figure 21: Syria's economic indicators 2008-2015 - Source: IMF

	2008	2009	Est. 2010	2011	2012	Proj. 2013	2014	2015
(Change in percent, unless otherwise indicated)								
Output								
Real GDP	4.5	5.9	3.4	-5.9	-21.3	-17.4	-16.7	-15.0
Oil	-0.2	-0.4	3.4	-9.9	-28.9	-14.2	-22.8	-70.1
Non-oil	5.2	6.8	3.4	-5.4	-20.3	-17.8	-16.0	-9.0
Nominal GDP (LS billions)	2,448	2,521	2,792	2,849	2,741	3,309	3,257	3,640
Oil	647	402	542	617	336	169	85	8
Non-oil	1,801	2,119	2,250	2,232	2,405	3,140	3,171	3,632
Nominal GDP (\$ billions) 1/	52.6	53.9	60.0	58.9	42.4	30.4	21.1	14.0
Crude oil production ('000 barrels/day)	381	377	386	340	240	210	160	40
Gas production ('000 barrels/day)	48	53	63	73	56	39	34	28
Employment								
Overall unemployment rate (in percent)	10.9	8.1	8.6	14.9	...	...	60	...
For people below the age of 30 (in percent)	19.6	15.2	17.5	...	...	...	...	...
Prices								
GDP deflator	16.0	-2.8	7.1	8.5	22.2	46.2	18.1	31.5
CPI inflation (period average)	15.2	2.8	4.4	4.8	37.4	89.6	29.2	25.8
(In percent of GDP)								
Central government finances								
Revenue	20.1	23.8	20.6	14.9	14.5	9.2	7.3	6.2
Oil revenue	5.4	5.1	3.5	...	...	...	...	...
Non-oil revenue	14.7	18.7	17.1	14.9	14.5	9.2	7.3	6.2
Expenditure	22.9	26.7	28.6	30.5	30.0	27.7	29.5	29.9
Current expenditure	15.9	18.3	18.1	19.8	22.3	24.5	27.8	29.2
Development expenditure	7.1	8.4	10.6	10.7	7.8	3.2	1.6	0.7
Overall balance	-2.9	-2.9	-8.0	-15.6	-15.6	-18.5	-22.1	-23.7
Non-oil budget balance	-8.2	-8.0	-11.6	-15.6	-15.6	-18.5	-22.1	-23.7
Gross public debt	37.3	31.2	30.0	38.1	64.2	86.2	118.6	149.9
(Annual percentage change)								
Money and credit								
Broad money	12.5	9.2	12.7	-7.8	...	...	...	...
Credit to the private sector	27.7	27.1	25.6	8.5	...	...	...	...
Net foreign assets	-16.5	2.3	1.4	-15.3	...	...	...	...
Net domestic assets	39.3	13.1	18.4	-4.6	...	...	...	...
Credit to government	-55.9	47.6	49.2	338.9	...	...	...	...
Credit to public enterprises	46.5	10.8	10.9	-17.8	...	...	...	...
(In billions of U.S. dollars, unless otherwise indicated)								
Balance of payments								
Current account balance	0.1	-0.8	0.5	-2.2	-3.9	-6.4	-5.8	-4.9
(in percent of GDP)	0.2	-1.5	0.9	-3.7	-9.2	-21.0	-27.7	-35.1
Overall oil balance 2/	-1.7	0.1	2.8	1.7	-0.1	-4.1	-4.0	-2.6
(in percent of GDP)	-3.1	0.2	4.6	2.8	-0.3	-13.6	-18.8	-18.4
Non-oil exports of goods and services	13.8	12.1	14.1	13.5	8.4	7.7	7.5	7.6
Non-oil imports of goods and services	-14.3	-15.1	-18.3	-16.9	-12.9	-12.5	-11.9	-11.4
Foreign direct investment (in percent of GDP)	2.8	4.8	3.8	2.4	...	...	...	...
Official Gross foreign assets 3/	17.0	17.4	20.7	20.3	12.4	7.9	5.1	1.0
(in months of imports of GNFS)	10.7	13.0	12.1	11.6	8.9	6.2	4.4	1.0
Exchange rate								
Real effective exchange rate (in percent, + appreciation)	19.1	1.3	2.9	...	...	...	...	...
Official nominal exchange rate (LS/\$, average)	46.5	46.7	46.5	48.3	64.7	108.7	154.1	259.9
Parallel market nominal exchange rate (LS/\$, average)	46.5	46.7	46.5	48.3	79.9	149.8	179.2	297.1

Sources: Syrian authorities; Syrian Center for Policy Research, World Bank, and Fund staff estimates and projections.

CHAPTER 3: CHALLENGES FACED BY SECURITY APPARATUS

The conditions on the ground affect the scale and composition of returns in different ways. With continuing concerns regarding insecurity in Syria, Syrian refugees' return has been irregular and selective and thus does not represent a large-scale return. Conditions in Syria have somewhat predictable effects on the return of refugees; improved security conditions and access to services in Syria always lead to an increase in the number of returnees.

This is linked simultaneously with the conditions in host countries which affect repatriation in more complex ways.

3.1 Conflicts of Factionalism and Change of Management.

The local security apparatus in opposition-held areas northwest of Syria is fragile and at constant threat from bordering enemy actors (SDF and Syrian Regime). This same structure of the current security apparatus was very local and primitive nuclei from local fighters and defectors in the same village, town, or neighborhood. These local self-motivated groups were like night patrols and small anti-criminal forces to preserve security. Later, with the conflict dynamics developments, the need was bigger to create a more professional security force in all opposition-held areas. These forces formed later the Free Syrian Police with support from some western NGOs, and companies that did training and equipping programs for the police- on top of them was AJACS program from British company Adam Smith - and thus this poor apparatus and newly established was prescribed with lack of consistency and complementarity, lack of human resources and weak specialized expertise, the inadequate physical and logistical equipment, and poor strategic planning (AJACS, 2015).

Later, after the Turkish operations started in north Syria, the police were under Turkish governance, and it was more mature and professional and institutionalized gradually afterward. The weak security is at such a lousy level due to its weak institutionalization and limited capabilities and the increasing level of threats exposed to by the opposing forces on the other hand. The indicators of the security chaos in the area were numerous, such as the increase in the number of security incidents such as assassinations and bombings, the high number of criminal security incidents such as thefts, robberies, looting, and crimes against public leaders, and the presence of some cases of detention, in addition to the spread of weapon mafias, drug dealers, and smuggling gangs. These experiences have an essential role in reducing security liquidity and fighting terrorism represented by ISIS, YPG (which is a terrorist organization for Turkey), and GoS, especially in Aleppo.

Here, we must stop at the causes of this insecurity in the liberated areas, which is reflected in the following:

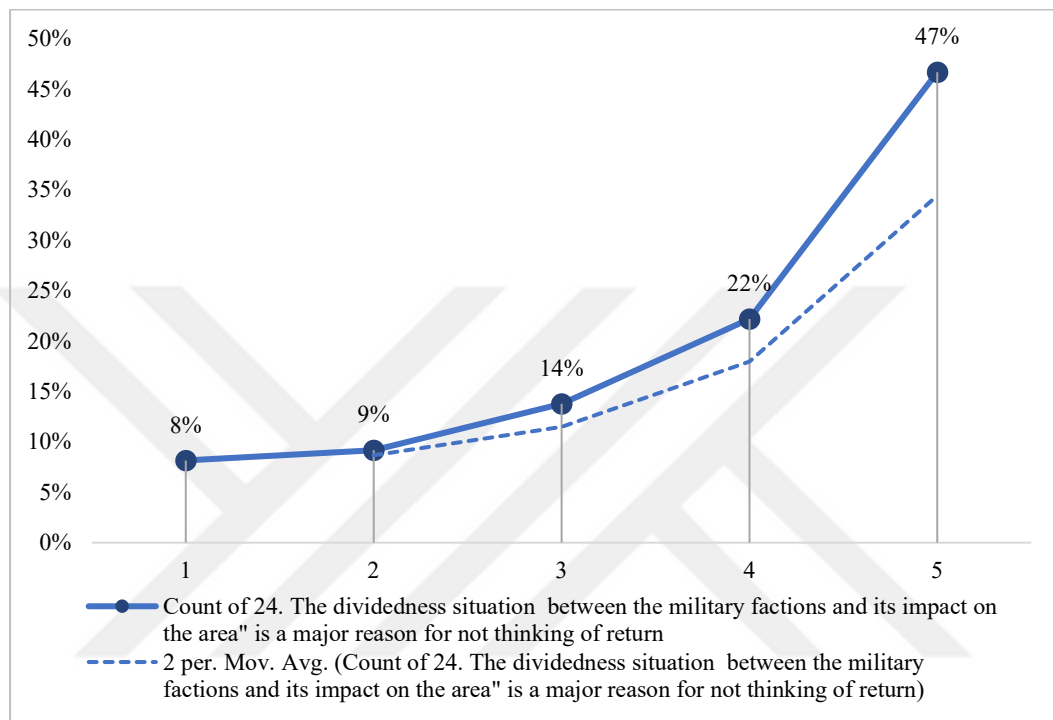
1. First, the national army factions' multiplicity and lack of a clear institutional structure and a disciplined military hierarchy.
2. Second, the military factions in the National Army included members without any prior security study and the factions' interest in a large number of their fighters at the expense of quality and national, ethical, and revolutionary standards.
3. Third, the spread of poverty, need and lack of job opportunities in the liberated areas, as the majority of young people work within the National Army, due to the absence of job opportunities and are not motivated by revolutionary or ideological motives, and this is what the intelligence of the regime and SDF have invested in spying with some weak-spirited members and using them to implement their criminal operations.
4. Fourth, the absence of strong executive authority and the weakness of the security services competent to detect, the weak availability of technology to detect explosives and mines, the lack of experience and knowledge of the security members at the checkpoints, and their lack of awareness of the nature of their mission and the seriousness of their mission for their security and the security of the entire region.
5. Fifth, the region is overcrowded with people and factions who have been displaced from all the Syrian governorates and thrown into a specific geographical area. They are from various and different social backgrounds, and the spread of weapons and the settlement of some old disputes between families and individuals make the scene even more complicated and challenging.
6. Sixth, the failure to create a unified security body that includes experienced and specialized people and not benefit from the expertise and experiences of defected technical officers, whether security forces, military, or police officers.
7. Seventh, some former ISIS members, and leaders returned to the region under family and tribe considerations, and some of them joined some factions and security agencies, often due to favoritism. Even in the nearby Idleb HTS controlled areas, there is this tendency of hostility for the police and security forces in Turkish-controlled areas.

These reasons were the main factors behind the relatively weak and ill-performed security apparatus in the northwest of Syria, which are factual causes and the ad-hoc reality faced by the field security forces daily. Suppose local police stations are to evolve from de facto crisis officers into real, local government police and security forces. In that case, they will need stability and security, the participation of experts, a stable source of income from

foreign and local sources, and a transparent electoral system that gives them legitimacy as representatives of the local population’s will.

The thesis research surveys directed to the Syrian refugees in Turkey and the returnees tackled on this point and it was 69% of them believe that factionalism impacts the areas security situation and thus their return decision.

Figure 22: Factionalism impact on security and return decision



3.2 Independence of Police and Security Bodies from Armed Groups

The civilian police in the areas under the control of the Turkish-backed opposition “Syrian National Army” factions in northern Syria represents an important safety factor for all civilians residing in those areas, especially with the accusations usually leveled against members of the armed factions of chaos, lack of discipline, and the constant fighting between themselves, so the police are a safe haven for civilians.

According to a senior Syrian Interim Government official who was interviewed for this research, there are more than ten thousand police deployed in the three areas under the control of the “National Army”: Olive Branch, Euphrates Shield, and Spring of Peace, but they face difficulties in performing their duties due to the authority of the strong factions, and the negativity of the Turkish side, which often chooses not to intervene in such issues. To control the behavior of the factions, and to prevent some of their members from going too far against the police and civilians, as well as some cases of corruption and incompetence among the police

officers and leaders themselves, especially in the Afrin region, were noted increasing and it is only the Turkish state that is considered as higher authority above SNA military groups.

Recently, incidents of attacks on civilian and military police officers have been repeated, which has raised questions about the significance of this and who is behind these attacks. The latest was in Azaz, where five members of the police force were injured in the village of Sejo as a result of an explosive device attack on a bus while they were on their way to work.

In May 2020, unknown persons assassinated two policemen affiliated with the Criminal Department of the Al-Ra'i District Police on Al-Amiriya Road, east of Aleppo, while earlier this month also witnessed clashes between the "Ahrar Al-Sharqiya" faction and the military police backed by some of the "National Army" factions in the city of Jarablus, northeast of Aleppo, near the Syrian-Turkish border, after the killing of a police officer. Likewise, many incidents come from the tensions between the police and the armed factions.

On these problems facing the police and limiting their effectiveness, a Syrian police leader was met by the researcher; he was in the police central command in the Olive Branch area (Afrin), he said, "The situation in Afrin region is so complex, because the police there is a puppet, and many of its officers are from a poor background. and not that professional,". In an interview with a Syrian journal, he added that the region "suffers from the domination of those with influence and money who take control of matters, most of whom have nothing to do with the security or military sector and they are not loyal opposition."

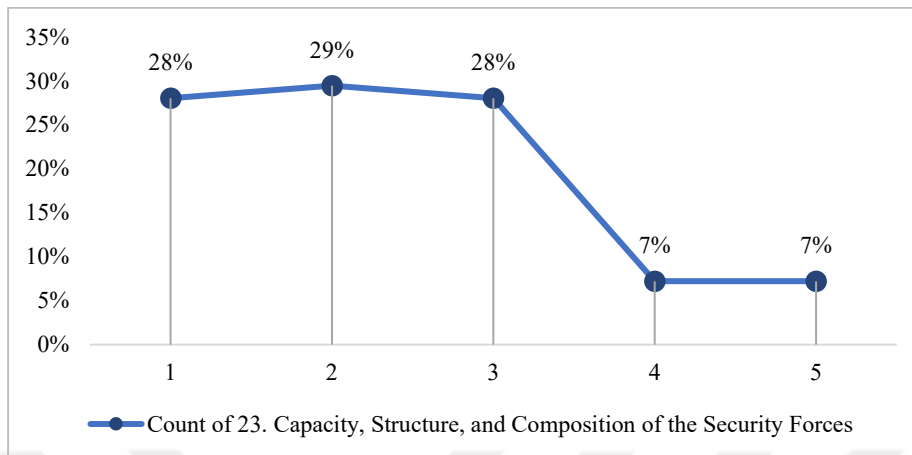
An interviewed military leader argued that the decision-making in northern Aleppo is almost limited to Turkish Officials and their dealings with the military factions in the absence of decisions by Syrians who are governing the region, without activating the role of the interim government and local administration. Based on the above, the leader described the Turkish strategic decision in dealing with the Syrian file as a whole as "hesitant", in contrast to what was dealt with in the Libyan file, indicating that there was a tremendous Turkish reluctance to support the military factions in the past period.

In the ideal situation the security forces and the army of a state has a complementary relation for both roles but there is a clear separation of the functions, roles and responsibilities. The clear description of each bodies responsibilities and the right application of these written tasks would prevent the contradiction or the overlapping between both in terms of who, when and what to do?

Based on the results from the research surveys, there are around 60% of the interviewees who are satisfied with the security apparatus formation, capacity and structure but

the rest are not and the main reason is the dependency on armed groups in almost most of the functions that the police forces are looking after.

Figure 23: Structure, Capacity, and Composition of security forces



Many Syrian parties detected the problem of the lack of independence of the police forces from the armed opposition groups. In 2016 the Syrian Interim Government tried to make an initiative to establish a committee for internal security forces, but it was a failure later at the beginning of the first fight when two opposition armed groups fought with each other, and the military police interfere, as no one put any consideration for them. The police tried to appear neutral during many fighting. Still, shadows and alignments emerged, which were challenging to bypass as an institution, and thus became part of the division with two jurisdictions. They may say that the police and security apparatus is independent from armed groups, but the reality shows an undeniable split.

3.3 Courts' Justice Enforcement and Legal Sector Reformation

Courts and its relentless pursuit of institutionalization and legalization of work through its permanent coordination with the most representative and legitimate local councils among other bodies and the armed opposition groups was not a success so far. The judiciary in Syria has gone through many stages, from independence in 1947 to the present (World, 2019). Since its independence, Syria had enjoyed an inclusive parliamentary system that preserved the independence and stability of the judiciary despite the recent experience until the stage of coups began, especially the coup of the Baath Party in 1963 when the work of the constitution was suspended (Kreitner, 1963). The state of emergency was imposed on the country until the coup of Hafez al-Assad in 1973, when he installed himself as head of the judicial authority in the country and eliminated the principle of the independence of the judiciary and created the exceptional (military and security) judiciary, and released its powers at the expense of the ordinary judiciary to eliminate his opponents in power, corruption and nepotism spread and the

intervention of influential people in the judiciary continued. This continued during the rule of his son Bashar al-Assad without any modification until the revolution erupted in 2011. Bashar al-Assad assumed power and inherited from his father a police state governed by emergency law, in which security men are exempted from any legal accountability, and its constitution combines all the powers in the hands of the president. Bashar al-Assad After the outbreak of the revolution, issued a new form for the country in February 2012, according to which he abolished the article that states that the Baath Party is the leader of the state and society, and lifted the state of emergency, and replaced it with a decree to combat terrorism (Constitution, 2012). The 2012 constitution preserved the president's absolute powers and kept him above accountability. The country's rule was not handed over to a civilian authority, as it should be in the event of the emergency law being repealed, but the country remained under the rule of the army and intelligence services.

Many civil courts were formed in cities out of the regime's control in Syria at first and were managed by law specialists. The free police forces supported them by working and cooperating with them regarding legal notifications to the parties of crimes or complaints, arresting those found guilty, and other work.

Things were going well, and civil manifestations spread in all the cities under the control of the opposition, but it was not long before people started hearing about the Islamic police and Sharia courts (SCDD, n.d.) that refrained from coordinating with the civil courts, which led to chaos in the jurisdiction. The matter remained as it was for a short period until the Unified Judicial Council (Orient, Here is Syria, 2015) was formed in Aleppo, where it relied in its legal references on the unified Arab law established in 1981 (Journal, 2021) after the meeting of the justice ministers of Arab countries in the Yemeni city of Sana'a, and their approval of the "Sana'a Plan to Unify Arab Legislations."

Those security services leaders polled by researchers stressed the need for professional courts and judges, who demand justice and the removal of nepotism from the courts. "The Syrian revolution has emerged, and one of its main causes is corruption and injustice," Col. Mohammad Alshimali added, commenting on courts and judiciary.

On the other hand, a segment of Syrians believes that these courts have filled a loophole, especially in the area of managing personal status. The judicial process in the opposition-controlled areas in the north went through two stages. The first stage was the creation of the unified judiciary based on the unified Arab law, and at that time, jurists, sheiks, and religious scholars participated in the judicial work. Since 2017, judges have been working in the judiciary in the areas of the Syrian Interim Government, including lawyers and defected judges,

who chose to apply Syrian Arab Law with reference to the 1950 Constitution (representing the revolution). The judiciary was formed in accordance with the Syrian Judicial Authority Law, i.e., there was a Magistrate's Court⁵, a Court of Cassation, a Criminal Court, an Appeals Court, and an investigative judge.

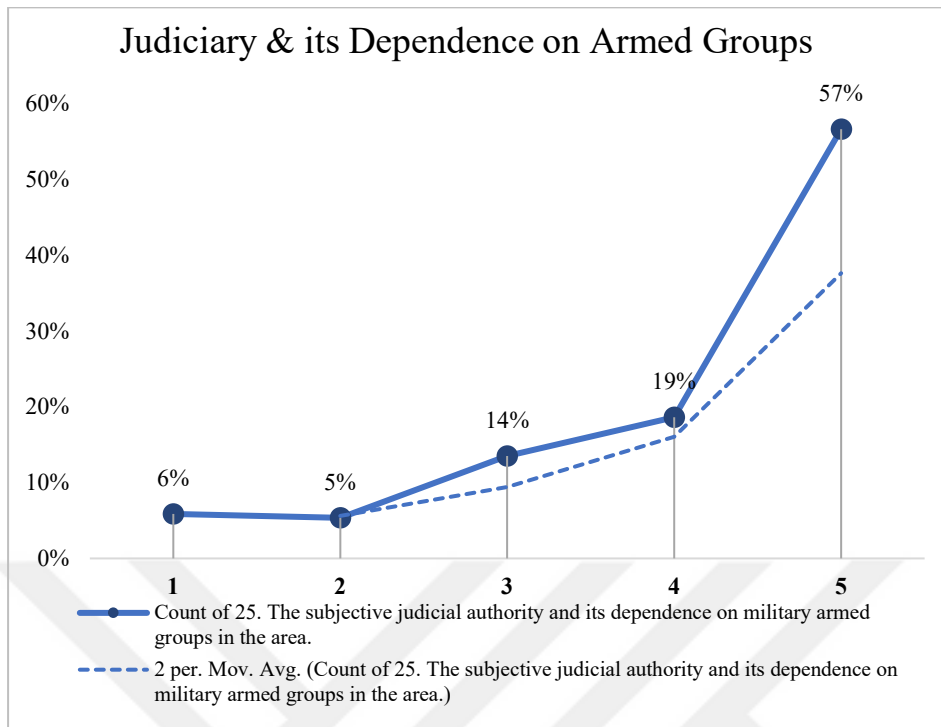
The second stage began after the Turkish government adopted a judicial project in the Euphrates Shield operations area, the “Olive Branch” operations area, and later in the Peace Spring areas. The minister of justice in the Syrian Interim Government explained that judicial work is carried out through Turkish coordinators, and there is still no higher judicial council, indicating that they are currently seeking to form it. He affirmed the independence and non-interference of the military factions or others in the judiciary, indicating that it had been agreed with the Turks to implement the Syrian law and coordinate with them to adopt the Syrian law as an essential reference.

He pointed out that there is a possibility of errors and some positions that may come from the judges, but this is corrected by the Monetary Court, as he put it. Colonel Arafat Alhomud referred that the administration of justice requires an impartial judiciary, a just law, and judicial independence, with an executive force that applies the law and supports the weak and the oppressed, and that despite the achievements made by the judiciary in the areas under the control of the military factions, it has been marred by some missteps and mistakes. The problems with the local tribunals are also common. Opposition-controlled areas have not had uniform judicial power that was independent or effective till the Turkish coordinators of Justice started supervising and supporting the Syrian side. Here we have to reiterate that the need is growing daily for ending all random forms of the judiciary and to support reformed courts with strong and hardly manipulated security forces who are independent of armed groups, with support also from the local councils and other civil bodies that can be an assistance in supporting human rights profile in those areas.

In the surveyed interviewees the results of satisfaction of the Syrian refugees and returnees on the dependence of judiciary on armed groups as an executive body was ver high and thus around 70% of the answers supported this statement. This indicates the existence of a need to reform the current judiciary as it is the follow-up accountability body for the performance of the security apparatus.

⁵ UK, Justice Secretary, Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, Magistrates' Court, <https://www.judiciary.uk/you-and-the-judiciary/going-to-court/magistrates-court/>

Figure 24: Satisfaction of Syrians about Judiciary & Dependence on Armed Groups



Some suggested steps of reform from the interviews of the researcher were:

- Conducting legal awareness campaigns urging society to abide and respect the law.
- Opening offices for free legal services and advice in the targeted areas.
- Printing and distributing brochures that include legal advice and guidance on the most critical issues facing citizens in the targeted areas.
- Conducting media campaigns, such as seminars and meetings, by direct broadcasts on social networking websites and television channels, addressing the most common and critical legal issues facing citizens.
- Assigning lawyers to defend the rights of citizens who are unable due to poverty.
- Turkish coordinators to conduct more frequent visits to courts and prisons by specialized teams to assess the extent of compliance with the law and provide the necessary instructions.
- Holding seminars to spread a legal culture.

CHAPTER 4: CONDITIONS FOR RETURN

There are many motives and factors that encourage Syrians to return to their own country of birth. On top of it is the moral attachment to the place where they were born, and this is every human sense which makes it a major factor for return.

4.1 Stabilization Current Efforts from States, NGOs, and Local Authorities

From the earliest starting point in April 2011, coordination of the Syrian refugee's response in Turkey has been immovably overseen by the Government of Turkey (Manhoff, 2017). Initially, the Government declined help from UNHCR, so UN organizations and INGOs mainly organized themselves in parallel to the Government. This drive to a condition that proceeds with today, including three uninhibitedly associated networks of coordination:

1. A Government instrument that has itself progressed over the long term period, and where the Government fundamentally facilitates it has critical projects, including some NGOs and on occasion UNHCR.
2. A UN framework that masterminds UN workplaces and IOM;
3. A diverse contributor is driven and INGO-driven systems to encourage associations working to response the needs.

After that, the support of refugees mainly continued from Turkey and Jordan; according to the OCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) of 2019, 11.7 million people in need of multicultural humanitarian assistance across Syria, and only 5.7 million of them are receiving aids. Starting from 2011 each year, the organization spent massive money on refugees and stabilizing Syria, including protection, education, health, infrastructure shelter NFI projects, food agriculture and livelihoods projects, and development projects. Those projects and money spent played a considerable role in stabilization the region. The local councils also played a key role in facilitating those needs response.

For many years, it was difficult for INGOs to work in Syria; only few INGOs seemed interested. The Syrian regime was suspicious of INGO intentions. Syria was considered a middle-income country, and there was no legal framework for INGO establishment or operation. A very small number of INGOs worked directly with ministries, others supported well-established organizations financially or in-kind through long-standing agreements, and others worked indirectly and unofficially through personal contacts, churches, or mosques. Various international organizations are keen to work in Syria and have tried to enter the country multiple times, but most were turned down or felt they were not able to work without a protective legal framework. Several organizations expressed interest in working in Syria after the invasion of Iraq, which led to large numbers of destitute and traumatized Iraqi refugees arriving in Syria. The Syrian government decreed that such organizations had to apply for registration to the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, which would be a partner for their work and would have to approve all payments and activities (including countersigning cheques etc.).

At the beginning of the uprising, many NGOs and UN missions unable to work in Syria established offices in Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq to respond to refugees' needs. More than 700,000 people have died since the war began in Syria in 2011, and 13.5 million people inside the country are in desperate need of assistance. The war was damaging to children and young people who - deprived of education and traumatized by the horrors they have experienced - increasingly see their future shaped only by violence.

The stabilization efforts also issue a political conflict between the international actors involved in Syria. In Turkish-controlled areas, there are many efforts to restore infrastructure such as roads maintenance, water stations rehabilitations, electricity networks, urban rehabilitation ...etc. Likewise, there are similar efforts in North East of Syria by the U.S and INGOs operating there and by Russia in the government of Syria-controlled areas.

As the research is focusing on Turkish-controlled areas in this research, there are a lot of projects that the Turkish government-supervised and were funded from mainly NGOs and private funds to the leading services for recovering the area. A Syrian police officer responsible of Mare F.S. stated in an interview with the researcher:

“The investment reality in rural Aleppo cannot be seen as separate from the reconstruction file in Syria, which Turkey is trying to be part of through the cities and towns, destroyed during the battles against the “Islamic State” along its borders; it attempts to prove its presence in the area economically via the enterprises it officially announced, in addition to the projects which private companies seek to implement following a different mechanism.”

Here comes the question of security as part of the central governance performance and management of the military and civil authority in the northwest of Syria. (Baladi, Enab, 2018)

4.2 Encouragement of Refugees to Return by Stabilization Enforcement

There is a close positive relation between refugees' return and the primary conditions of civic stability, law, and order. The conditions of war, conflict, and the kind of insecurity witnessed in Syria make the stabilization an urgent need for refugees to return after a decade of displacement. The U.S State Department defines stabilization as *“a political endeavor involving an integrated civilian-military process to create conditions where locally legitimate authorities and systems can peaceably manage conflict and prevent a resurgence of violence. Transitional in nature, stabilization may include efforts to establish civil security, provide access to dispute resolution, deliver targeted basic services, and establish a foundation for the return of displaced people and longer-term development”* (Department U. S., 2018).

Perhaps the recent statements of some Turkish officials, which talk about “better cooperation from the international community regarding the safe return of refugees to their

country,” and the launch of the “cooperation initiative with neighboring countries hosting Syrians” indicates the presence of a tendency to return part of the Syrian refugee there. Now, when coming to the term return, it should be within the standards of safe and voluntary. In definition, the adjective “safe” correlates with “voluntary ” in relation to the return of refugees. The danger of talking about “voluntary” return only, or even manipulating the specifications and requirements of “safe return”, is that this allows the hosting countries the possibility of indirect pressure on the refugees to return by increasing legal obstacles to renewing their residency, or restricting them in the health, economic and other fields, which forces the refugees to return. It also gives the pretext for the parties and anti-refugee forces to increase their pressure campaigns on governments to return the refugees since the environment required for their return will be available without the political transition in Syria. Many international resolutions on a political solution in Syria began to focus on the issue of Syrian refugees with the decision of the UN Security Council no. 2254, which stressed the need to create favorable conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees and IDPs to their areas of origin and to rehabilitate the affected areas internally, it also should be through a gradual and systematic process under the supervision of UNHCR.

The shield that Turkey made in northern Syria had to be supported by security, military, and civilian foundations, earning the loyalty of both military and civilians to those who protect them and provide excellent services in their areas, which were never available in Syria. Large investment projects launched by Turkey in the northern countryside of Aleppo have provided a source of livelihood for the residents who are protected by a civil police force. Local councils manage their affairs with Turkish supervision and financial support, and their children study the Turkish language in schools, buy Turkish products, and drive their cars on highways established by Turkey (Alkhateb H. , 2018). In addition, the Turkish authorities have turned the civil registry into a Turkish identity system similar to the one in Turkey. The formation of ID cards that are distributed to residents in several areas of the northern countryside of Aleppo, bearing the person's information, is linked to the mother system in Turkey. In contrast to most of the areas controlled by the opposition in Syria, the Euphrates Shield areas in Syria witnessed the establishment of the first organized army, which ended seven years of the factional situation and opened the door to the formation of a professional and institutionalized military body supported by a state whose army occupies the eighth place in the most powerful list armies of the world. Eight months have passed since the formation of the “National Army” from the merger of the “Free Army” factions in the northern countryside of Aleppo, which was considered a “unique” case within the military hierarchy of the opposition factions, following

the start of the Syrian revolution and the transformation of the peaceful movement into an armed one against Assad's forces and their allies.

Three colleges were established as main centers for the army. The first of them was the "Abdul Qadir al-Saleh" college, which represents the official military institution to manage the military education for the fighters. Hamza Division, Al Mutasim Division, and Shamia Front are responsible for these colleges. The military organization that Turkey started in the countryside of Aleppo was not limited to the formation of the "National Army," but the "National Police" was added to it, whose work focused on solving the daily problems facing the people.

The National Police was formed last February 2017 and received training in Turkey, and several batches graduated from it to take over security centers in cities and towns (Postings, 2018). The exercises include intervention against riots, police law, and general discipline, in addition to training on operations in residential places, demining of explosive devices, and criminal inspections. In an interview with the Commander-in-Chief of the Police, Major General A.A, he said that the police gather two branches; the first is the civil police, and the second is the special forces, whose mission is limited to maintaining public order in the area. A defected general from police, Fouad Suwaid, had indicated in an interview that 5,631 Syrians in the countryside of Aleppo had undergone training in five schools affiliated with the Turkish Police Academy since December 2016 and received their duties in the city of al-Bab, Azaz, and Jarablus, in addition to hundreds who received security missions in the city of Afrin and its countryside after completing full control over it. Each branch of the Military Police includes about 100 members, and a commander and two deputies lead each department.

This is in the security sector; on the development level, Turkish started inaugurating development projects, paying attention to infrastructure, opening the door for investment. It pushed the region's economy to stability in accelerating stages. Still, at the same time, this is linked to Turkey to a close degree, reaching the point of being affected by increasing economic inflation in Turkey. The northern countryside of Aleppo is considered a corridor for trucks between the various Syrian areas controlled by different parties, from the areas controlled by SDF in the northeast of Syria to Idlib, which is controlled by the opposition in the northwest, and the Syrian regime-controlled sites bordering it from the south.

On the infrastructure level, they are specifically talking about the roads that helped open the door to an economic movement that linked their establishment to the entry of Turkish companies into the area to start reconstruction. These reconstruction operations in a buffer zone need well-established security to encourage investors, populations, and other functions in Syria

to support. Syrian and Turkish businessmen began efforts to network to launch projects in the region, which culminated in a meeting that included the Vali of Kilis, Head of Chamber of Commerce, Turkish businessmen and industrialists in the **MÜSIAD** organization, and Syrian merchants and businessmen, who have investment projects within Turkish territory. The **MÜSIAD** organization was established in Istanbul in 1990. It represents nearly 35 companies, employs about 1.5 million people, has 75 contact points in Turkish territory, and focuses its work on economic and investment mega projects.

In a previous interview with a senior person in the Syrian Interim Government, he explained that the investments of private Turkish companies – on top of them **ET Energy** and **Gokturk Constructions**- in the countryside of Aleppo are carried out through local council communicates with the company willing to invest, and they agree to implement the proposed projects. Indeed, this policy has resulted in several economic agreements for local councils, including the extension of electricity to the city of Azaz through the privately owned Turkish company -later to Afrin and Idleb - and the Qabasin Residential Suburb project, between the city council and **Gokturk** company. Al-Bab City Council laid the foundation stone for the first industrial city in the region, with the support of Turkey, with an area of 56,100 square meters. The file most closely related to Turkey regarding citizens and their daily transactions is the salaries of workers in new projects, employees in local councils, teachers, and military institutions, all of which Ankara converted into Turkish lira. This increased the region's link to what is happening inside Turkey at the economic and political levels. The decline of the Turkish lira against the dollar was reflected in the region's markets, which witnessed stagnation until the exchange rate stabilized.

The Turkish footprint was visible in the service sectors in the northern countryside of Aleppo governorate. Its repercussions emerged in educational, medical, and service aspects, despite the presence of a spontaneous response through which the Syrian north sought to preserve the original cultural character of the region. Turkey completely controls the educational process in the northern Syria area, even though the curricula prevalent in schools there are the same as the Interim Government curricula modified from the Syrian regime's Ministry of Education curricula. Those curricula included changes in some of the contents and political references, most notably in history and geography. These areas include about 1500 schools, of which about 220,000 students, according to statements by the Turkish Ministry of Education.

As for higher studies, Turkey has recently worked to open branches of its public universities in the countryside of Aleppo, including the universities of Harran and Gaziantep,

which open their doors to students who pass the secondary school in those areas. In June 2018, the local council in the city of al-Bab, in the eastern countryside of Aleppo, signed an agreement with the Turkish University of **Harran** to open a branch inside the city (Alkhateb K. , 2018). The university includes several scientific and literary branches that focus initially on the faculties of engineering and sciences (mathematics, physics, and chemistry), provided that other specializations such as medicine and economics will be provided in the future.

The Turkish Gaziantep University also decided to open a vocational school affiliated with it in the city of Jarablus in the northern countryside of Aleppo after obtaining approval from the Turkish cabinet. Syrian students will receive education in their own language, and the duration of study at the school is two years. In comparison, plans are currently being made to open higher education institutions for four years, according to the university. However, some consider that opening branches of Turkish universities in northern Syria would solve a significant problem that many students suffer from, encouraging them to return to study.

Turkey has provided support to the health sector by reforming and expanding hospitals in the region and renovating several health centers and hospitals, including Mare, Albab, Jarablus, Azaz, and Al-Rai (CANTÜRK, 2018). These hospitals would facilitate procedures for patients who often had to go to hospitals in crossings and other areas to receive treatment.

The **PTT** also opened centers in different cities across Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch operations, which aims to help citizens and employees obtain their salaries through an ATM. It also facilitates the exchange of remittances between Turkey and the region. Moreover, the people of the Aleppo countryside rely mainly on Turkish networks that extend into the Syrian borders, most notably **Turkcell**, **Turk Telekom**, and **Vodafone**.

All the normalization mentioned above and stabilization efforts that the Turkish state has pushed for made a lot of Syrians in north Aleppo areas (who are initially from the area) more stable and less thinking of going outside the country since services started to recover and the security of the area is better than before. According to **HNAP**, the current population of the northern countryside of Aleppo: 2.618.845, and these people are distributed to 174,507 families who are present in 338 villages.

4.3 Security as a Major Part of Services Context

Security is a significant need for human beings in any context, and it comes directly after the physical demands of the individuals. It is a mandatory base on which other accomplishments in a person's life are preconditioned with safety. In modern states, there are many services that the state provides to the citizens in return; citizens pay taxes to the state.

Such as, the safety and security of citizens is a major part of these services profile, and it comes before many infrastructure and social services that the state is committed to provide. Police personnel contributes to the security sector's good governance when they perform their duties effectively and are accountable for the rule of law, the limits of democratic civil oversight, according to all police personnel, and respect for human rights. On the other hand, doubts Ineffective and unaccountable people are a threat to the state and the people due to abuse of power, violence, corruption, discrimination, and inefficiency. Police officers contribute to governance bad for the security sector and threaten the security of the state and the people when their use of their powers is outside the bounds of civil oversight democracy, against the law, or without respect for human rights.

In the case of Syria, the government is repressing its people and creating such an environment of insecurity because of the continuous violations. In Government of Syria controlled areas, actors that maintain security and control on behalf of the government Security and control are maintained by the police, the intelligence organizations, the army, and pro-government militias:

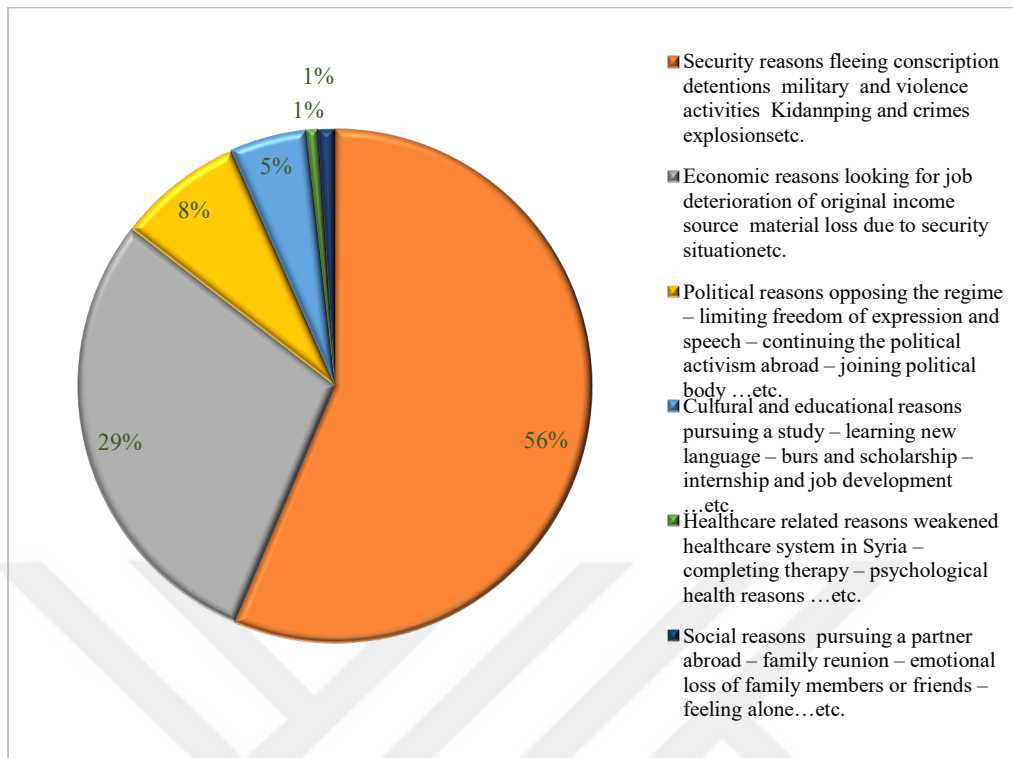
1. The police are responsible for law enforcement together with the courts.
2. The intelligence services monitor the opposition against the government.

The security sector is normally composed of all the structures, institutions, and personnel responsible for security provision, management, and oversight at national and local levels, including both:

- security providers, such as the armed forces, police, border guards, intelligence services, penal and corrections institutions, and commercial and non-state security actors, among many others.
- security management and oversight bodies, such as government ministries, parliament, particular statutory oversight institutions, parts of the justice sector, and civil society actors with a stake in high standards of public security provision, including women's organizations and the media, among others.

While in the opposition-controlled areas, there are many experiences of community-based police, the final one was the Turkish-founded Free Syrian Police. The people still living in Syria are very keen on safety, and their security assessment is the highest than ever before. This very same high-value factor of safety and security for Syrians was the main reason for their return and clearly would be the same for their return. No surprise, 85% of the participants on the research surveys, left Syria for security and economic reasons, while the rest for educational, cultural, and health reasons. This result supports the fact that the majority of Syrians were forced to leave their country for lack of safety.

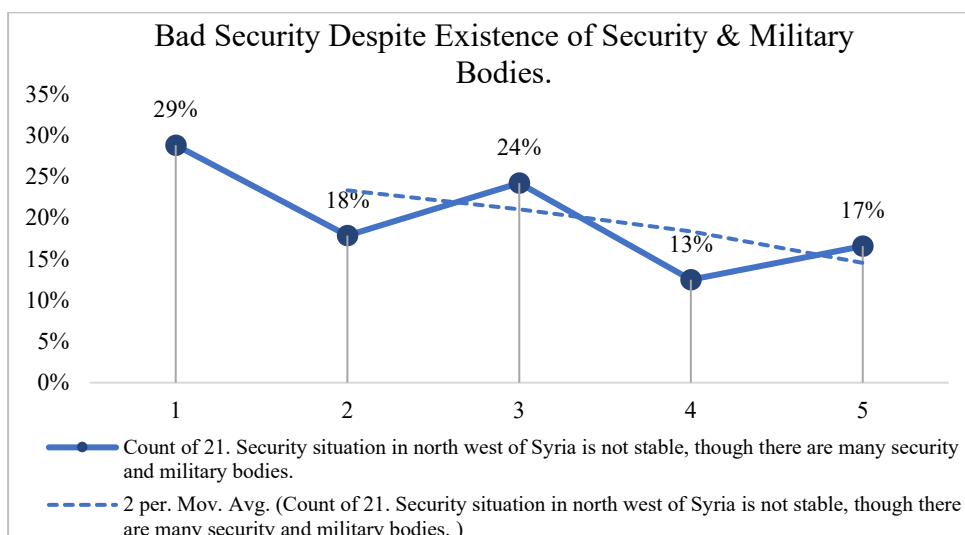
Figure 25: Survey question on pushing factors for running out of Syria.



CHAPTER 5: NEEDS TO INSTALL EFFECTIVE SECURITY APPARATUS

There is a desparate need for having effective security apparatus in north west of Syria as the refugees stated. Since it is the main requirement in the views of the Syrian refugees in Turkey and they consider it a precondition for return, then the answer for a survey question directed to the refugees about their assessment of security and military performance was 60% of them saw it as bad.

Figure 26: Syrian refugees in Turkey observe the security situation in northwest of Syria



5.1 Existing Security Apparatus Reform & Rehabilitation (Clear By-law)

In a fragile security situation in areas that are reviving of war and conflict consequences, security sector reform comes at the first priority of the population. According to Colonel M.S, who was interviewed for this research, he stated with emphasizing tone: *"First, centralization, and I emphasize centralization, is the top priority for reforming the current security apparatus in the northwest of Syria."* Many researchers and government officials in the northwest of Syria – especially from the Turkish side – are interested in setting practical solutions to the ongoing weakness and loose discipline of the security forces in the northwest of Syria. This area is under the spotlight with eyes from other actors aiming to destabilize it as much as possible and as frequently as possible. *"By linking the facilities and services of all police commands to a central command, coordination and cooperation will increase, and for sure, the security situation will improve accordingly,"* he added. If the security bodies keep working separately, there will always be violations, and of course, the problem will continue. The quick response for such a dynamic security situation in the northwest of Syria is waited from Turkey – in the eyes of Syrians – as the governance is thereby direct Turkish involvement on military and civil administration levels. Looking at the current status, Turkey has the most substantial influence on the north of Syria. It contributed to the rehabilitation of infrastructure, health, and education facilities ...etc. more than other actors.

Still, Turkey has begun to face some criticism due to recent security incidents, and thus bigger responsibility to repair the security situation and find practical solutions (SETA, 2019). According to a wide spectrum of the people met for this research, these solutions revolve around rehabilitation and reforming the current security apparatus existing in the north of Syria. Since there is a majority agreement on the need for quick action for reforming the existing apparatus. According to the inputs of the reality we have in this area, this solution is the best option since it is impossible to remove all security apparatus bases and grounds or bring totally new people to govern this sector instead.

Moving from the consensus over this solution, the reformation to the security sector goes through different levels:

- Turkish State: talking specifically on the Syrian Task Force team, which is coming from the president's counselor till the very end of the field police and security forces who are training their Syrian counterpart in the field passing through security directorates in Kilis, Gaziantep, Hatay and Urfa and up in the ministry of interiors in Ankara. All these levels bear a duty of better performance towards rehabilitating, training, and ensuring that all support is duly provided to their Syrian counterpart.

- The Syrian Interim Government, which is responsible for maintaining security throughout the region, through the Ministries of Defense and Interior, and the military and civil police, internal security forces, and military justice branches from them, in addition to intelligence in all its branches and divisions. They have to prove themselves much stronger and demonstrate a successful “After-Assad” governance prototype to the region and other actors.
- The National Army factions and their checkpoints spread throughout this geography, which manages all crossings leading to the liberated areas, are directly responsible for maintaining security and preventing smuggling and entry of suspected persons. Improvement of these groups’ performance in the security sector is demanded as they are the end-body that is a front-liner with civilians in the northwest of Syria. They are first to be questioned about the loose security discipline there.
- The Ministry of Justice through the judiciary, civil and military courts, and strict sentences against criminals lead to deterrence. This becomes more applied with better alignment between executive and judiciary bodies where civil governance should be higher than military.
- The Ministry of Local Administration is represented by the local councils of villages and towns by lighting their entrances and streets, installing surveillance cameras, and distributing them thoughtfully, in coordination with the security bodies.
- Finally, most relief, aid, and civil society organizations will refrain from working under unstable security conditions. Unless there is a better security environment to the work and less interference from armed groups in their work, security bodies in the northwest of Syria have to be a resort for these NGOs when facing any hardship on the ground to be assisted in solving it.

Moreover, there is a crucial note here that all parties in different levels need to understand which is the type of security sector Syria used to have through Assad days and to put this consideration always in front of the eyes when discussing the reformation of the current security apparatus in the north of Syria (Joujati, 2014). This consideration will lead to better-decentralized security agencies and more work on the institutionalization of these bodies.

Similarly, the current security apparatus bodneeded further rehabilitation and continuous training steps. Most of the Syrian police in the northwest of Syria are civil forces who volunteered and worked later with the police. A low rate of defected police officers from regime service is still in the opposition policing bodies.

This lack of professionalism and commitment to the general law and discipline needs continuous training and outreach, which is very poor within the current existing apparatus.

Afrin Police Chief Officer **R.A** commented in an interview made for this research: “ *a 15-day training cycle, a little sport practice and some training on using guns is not enough for a good qualification of the police force! What are the conditions that allow me to hold the gun? Legally, of course, when am I allowed to shoot? When do I get firing? When do I need to enter? How is the intervention process? When it becomes a crime, what should we do first? What is the second step?*”. The officer complained about the weak education and training for the police force in the northwest of Syria, mentioning that the training provided is not enough and they are held once by bringing these candidates to Turkey to receive these 15 days training and then directly sent to the field without proper follow up on their capacity building track. There is no doubt that the insecurity in the opposition-held areas and the spread of kidnappings, assassinations, and arbitrary arrests will lead to disastrous results in these areas, foremost of which is the increase in the large-scale brain drain, and pushing many activists, media professionals and service workers such as doctors and teachers to search for more secure areas.

This brain drain also worsened the recruitment of qualified staff for the policing institution and made it hard to build the police institutions in the northwest of Syria almost from scratch. Together, these related reasons made the Syrian refugees after a decade of war, bearing this idea about the security situation in the north of Syria. In the surveys made for the research, a big part of the answers indicated dissatisfaction from the population in northwest of Syria on the performance of the military and civil security services there.

Figure 27: Concerns about Detention or Movement over Checkpoints.

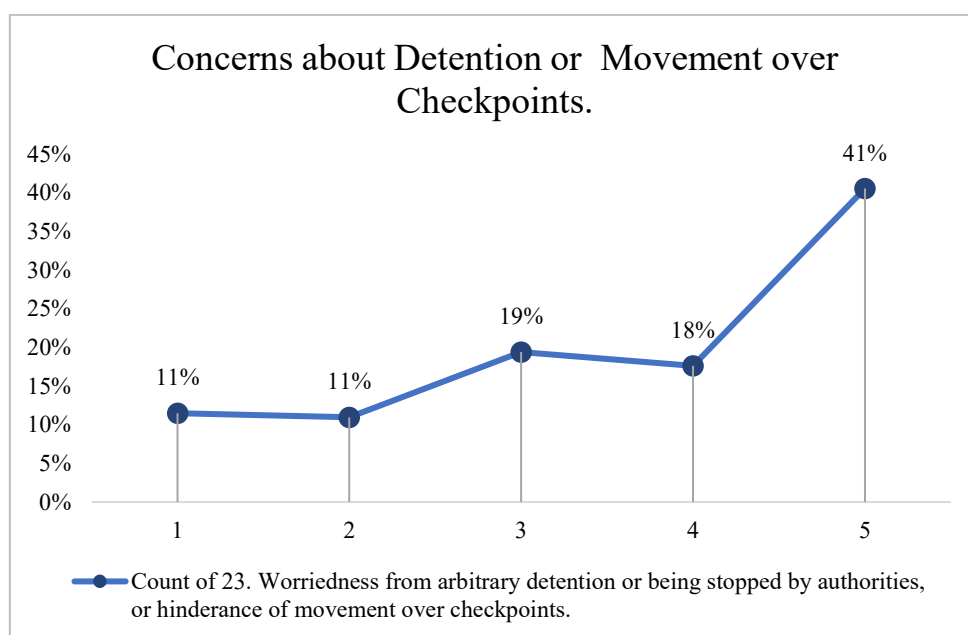


Figure 28: Continuous Explosions, & Bombings Oppose Return

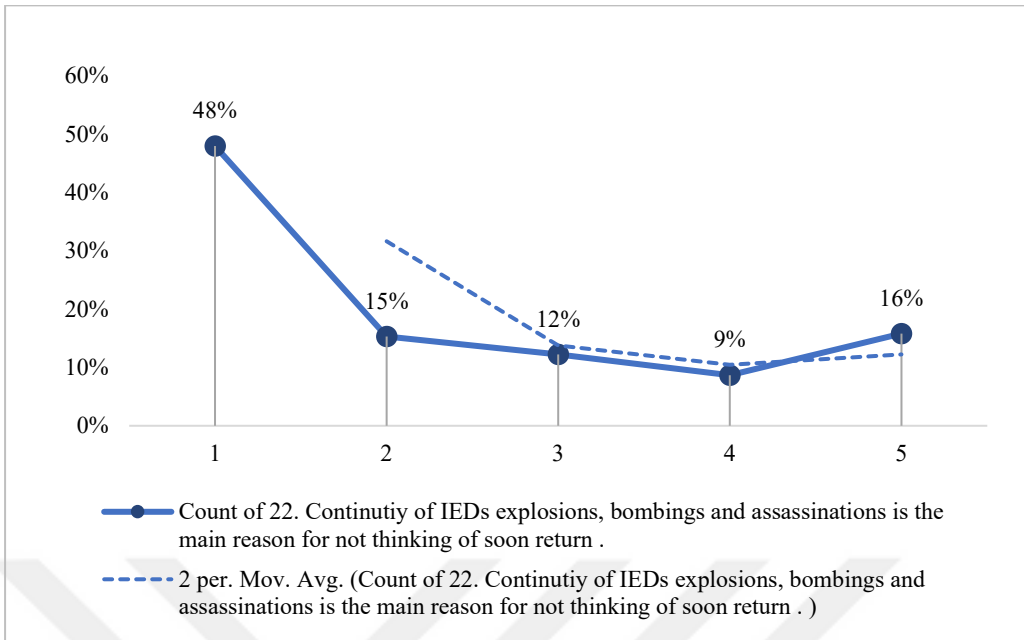


Figure 29: Security Management of Checkpoints, Traffic Management, Counter-narcotics

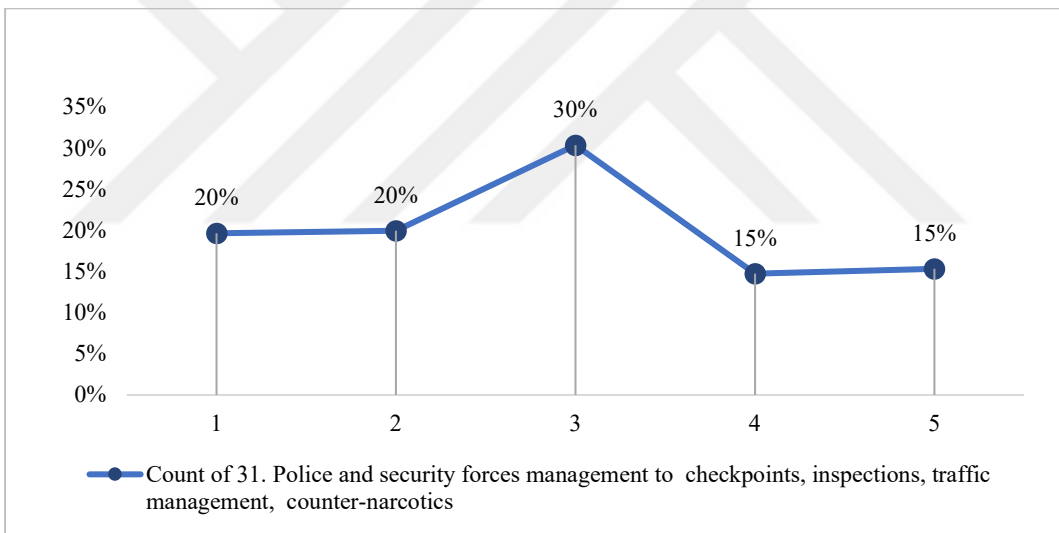
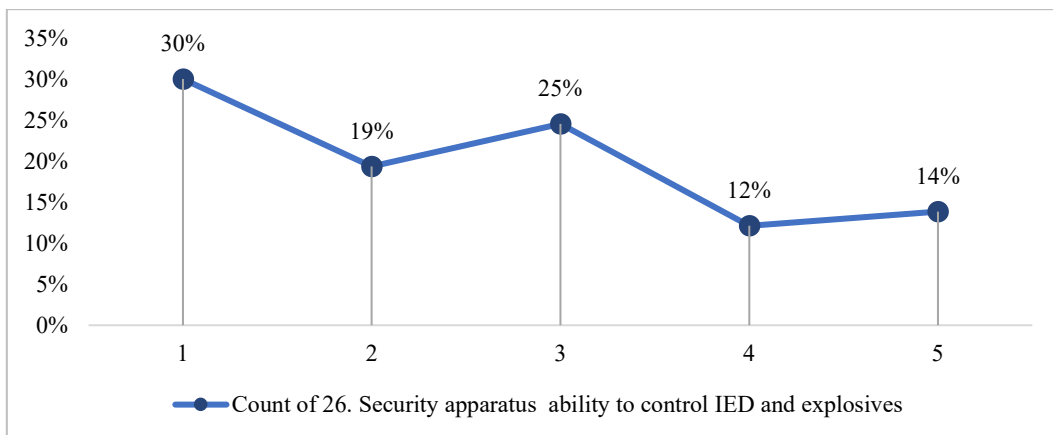


Figure 30: Security forces ability to control IEDs and explosions.



These results draw attention to the real need for reformation and rehabilitation of the current security bodies in northwest Syria.

5.2 Logistical Equipment and Technology

The advanced countries in the world are investing in high technology venues in all aspects of state administration, including the security sector. Logistics and security are aligned together for ensuring the safe management and movement of people, goods, information, and other resources between a specific point of origin and its final destination (Intesecurity, 2021). Generally, any institution's logistics and supply chain departments are divided into three main functions (Lojistik, 2021) - Procurement, Warehouse and storage, and fleet and transportation management. This same structure can be applied in a central management mechanism for the current security apparatus in the north of Syria.

The current security bodies in northwest Syria do not have a central supply chain or logistics unit within its structure since different Turkish coordinators administrate every area. Such decentralized administration makes it harder for a newly founded loose security force. The primary logistical and technology support that can be provided for the Free Syrian Police can include:

- Electronic sweeping and debugging
- Liaison and connection with other states (Turkey) and non-state actors
- Secure travels and transportations safety
- Surveillance and tracking systems
- Database analysis and information forensics
- Inventory to the assets existing in a central way
- Central system engineering and cybersecurity development.

There are other aspects of logistical and administrative support needed for the success of the performance of any security apparatus that includes; design and development, acquisition, construction, storage, movement, distribution, maintenance, evacuation, disposition of equipment, and the furnishing of services.

According to general Khaled Almutlek – a military and security expert – the security field is a standing science on its own, and technology is a crucial component in administrating this sector. The current logistical support to the police forces in north Syria is very basic related to cars, vans, and pickups (without armored vehicles), uniforms, munitions and arms, and some utilities for the police stations. Technology use, in general, is weak in the area, and it is not

standardized, so you would see different duty stations with other preparations and equipment depending on the efficiency of the officer in charge.

Currently, in certain advanced countries in the world, they are using:

- Robots
- Biometrics
- Video doorbells
- Shot spotter
- Thermal imagings
- Artificial intelligence
- Automatic vehicle plate recognition
- Drones
- GPS trackings and radars.

All these are considered needed enablers for any police apparatus in any state, which is the completeing part to the good human resources, i.e., having very high tech and advances equipment, and logistical support needs also well trained and aware teams to use it. According to the **H.D**, the military police Chief Officer in Azaz, he informed: “ *only a third of the whole police forces in all northwest areas of Syria, are equipped with arms, uniform, and can drive available vehicles.*” This declaration shows the poor preparations of the existing security apparatus, moreover, and most importantly is the payment of policemen salaries which is around 750 TL monthly.

5.3 Roadmap for the Future (Consideration for Reconstruction)

The national security of any country derives its theoretical and practical justifications from two main concepts that represent the core of the state’s existence. The first is sovereignty, which means that the state enjoys comprehensive jurisdiction over its territory independently of any other authority, unless this jurisdiction is restricted by international rules. The national security activity is a reflection of this sovereignty as an idea based on the legitimate right of the state to defend its entity and protect its security by taking the necessary measures to do so. The second: essential and vital interests of the state, which are among the floating concepts, which in essence aim at the necessity of giving priority to the interests of the state over any other considerations. Therefore, the state’s security is the sum of its vital interests. This led us to the idea of the emergence of a viable alternative to the Assad regime as a provider of basic services would weaken the regime's main claim that it holds legitimacy in the eyes of Syrians in both; the areas it controls and those in the grip of the opposition, as well as the international

community. To do such, well-qualified cadres and technocrats are needed to fill some posts in the governance institutions of the opposition in the northwest of Syria.

According to the challenges analyzed in this research, military leaders went to the point that the region needs to strengthen the communication between the Turkish side and the civilians present in the region while working to produce Syrian figures able to govern the region. The leaders also indicated a need to restructure the national army through dialogue with the military leaders of the corps and legions, and then work to take out the security and economic files from the military factions and to establish a unified security apparatus is worthy of managing various files for the region benefit as a whole. A local analyst S.A also went on to present an option for the Turkish government “ *to better govern the northern Syria, by limiting the authority of the military factions and deporting them outside civilian areas to military bases, and to control over the security bodies and placing them under the Turkish leadership to train and support them, with full support for the existing civil institutions such as the Interim Government.*”

Confirming the abovementioned statements, and in our interviews with the heads of the security bodies in northern Aleppo, when asked about the indiscriminate war led by several international and local parties against the Turkish presence in Syria, by focusing on the Kurdish militias and ISIS; They indicated that the success of the civil democratic experiment in northern Syria would be a political card in the hands of Syrians and Turks alike in the face of these parties, which are trying to sow discord between the Turkish and Syrian peoples.

This democratic experience to be better polished and sustained, it needs a group of strategic objectives for the future security sector, which we can summarize in the following:

First: Providing security and safety for the Syrian citizen. This is done through a set of procedures and policies that enhance the objective conditions for achieving stability, including:

- 1- Strengthening public order and the rule of law: through the development of a national strategy to deal with all security threats, in addition to strengthening the community's role in the building process and support in imposing order and the rule of law. This means also that there is a need for restoring Syrian sovereignty over all crossings, unifying the reference for the security sector, controlling the chaos of arms, strengthening civil peace programs, and strengthening the relevant legal system in conjunction with coherent media programs and plans which will constitute supportive steps to reset local and social security.
- 2- Reducing state security crimes (such as treason and espionage): resulting from the functional overlap of the security services, lack of legislation and laws, and the weak material, logistical, and armament capabilities to combat crimes against national security.

This reduction of state security crimes necessitates the separation of powers, fostering and maintenance of the security information bank, and the strengthening capacity-building function by training and rehabilitation programs.

- 3- Reducing favoritism and nepotism phenomena by enhancing national loyalty to clan, geographic, partisan, or ideological loyalty, and clarifying the bylaws, regulations, and instructions that regulate the internal relationship in the security apparatus. Moreover, security institutions need to ensure the integration of social diversity into their policies, plans, and budgets, in addition, to adopt evaluation and analysis, and complaints systems.
- 4- Adopting international humanitarian law and human rights principles in the security sector, through education and training programs, adoption of a security work manual that clarifies behaviors and consistency with human rights laws in cooperation with related partners. This requires strengthening relations between security sector institutions and civil society organizations, and media outlets.
- 5- Setting policies related to basic values in the security sector, which must consider harmony with the values and aspirations of the Syrian society, maintaining a new national identity, protecting the constitution, and observing the right of religious practice.

Second: Developing, organizing, and building the capabilities of the security sector, in order to improve security work, it can be through the following:

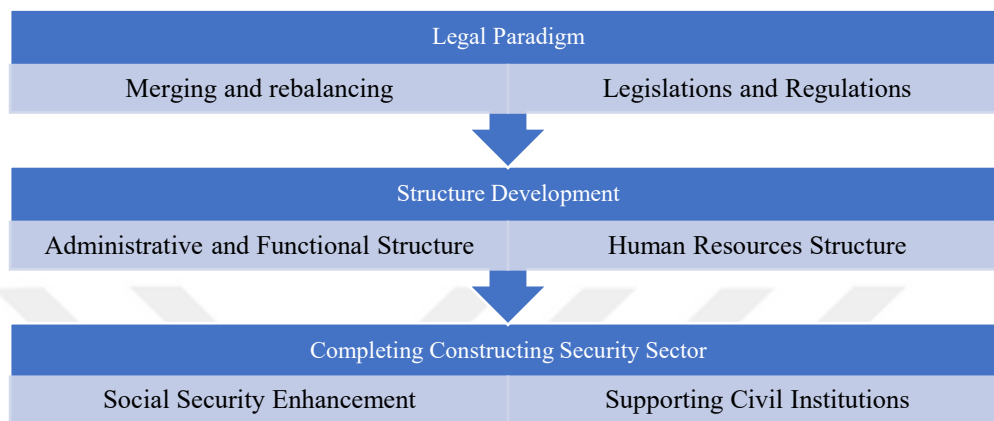
- 1) Strengthening the institutionalization by good governance, and provision of services effectively and fairly.
- 2) Integration of legislative structures regulating security work, issuing recruitment and employment laws in accordance with standards related to physical safety.
- 3) Develop a unified mechanism for information communication between security institutions and provide them with all logistical needs.
- 4) Creating financial management systems, that enhances planning and coordination methods, redistributes, and organizes available resources, and unifies support channels.
- 5) Building financial capabilities in the security sector in a manner consistent with the financial system in place of the Turkish institutions / Syrian Interim Government.

Third: Strengthening integration between security and justice sectors, which is one of the most important factors for success. The most important measures in this regard are:

1. Institutionalizing the relationship between the security and justice sectors and clarifying the powers and roles between them.
2. Build a protocol regulating the relationship between military and civil public prosecutions.
3. Judicial authorities supervising of all detention and rehabilitation centers.

5. Conducting a review of all existing MoUs between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior regarding the work of the judicial police.
6. Issuing a law on military justice issued by the legislative authority, which creates a legal framework regulating the work of criminal laboratories and amending the laws of the police and internal security forces and its executive regulations.

Figure 31: Expected restructuring for the security apparatus through different layers. source (Omran Center)

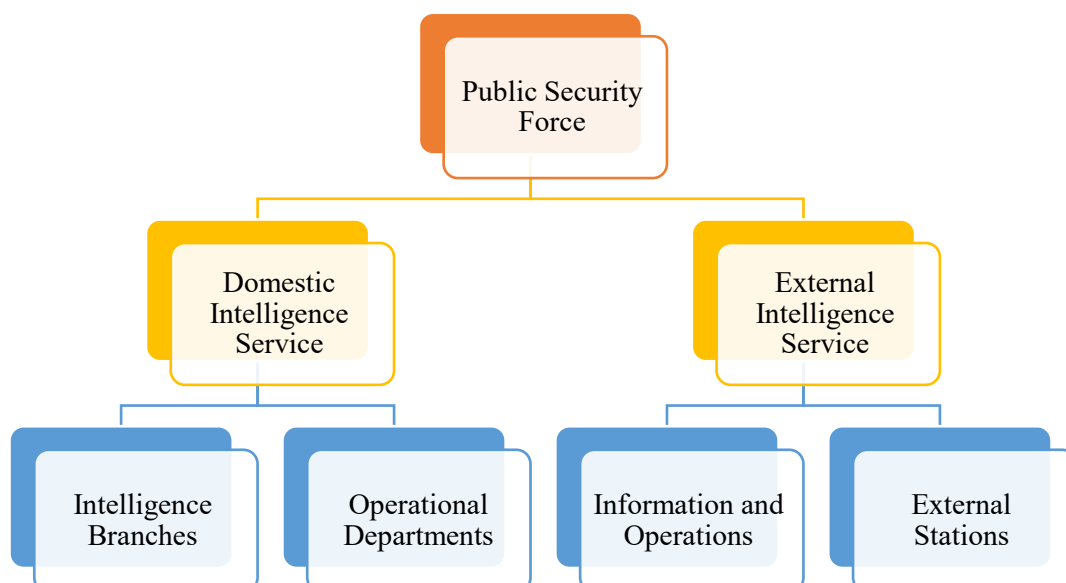


So, in brief, from the long list of steps that security apparatus needs to execute for reformation, we can summarize it in the following three stages:

- 1- Issuing a set of legislation and decrees related to restructuring.
- 2- Systematic start of the process of reforming the internal structure.
- 3- Building the remaining components of the sector and establishing integration between the security and civil sector.

As the needed steps and movements for the rehabilitation and reform are listed above, similarly below there is a drawn organigram for a suiting structure of the security forces.

Figure 32: Ideal security structure to northwest of Syria. (source: Contemporary Security Management)



First: Domestic intelligence agency that includes both intelligence and operational activities.

The intelligence activity is based on the following:

- Administrative Procedures: Follow up the implementation of orders and procedures related to tracking security plans, protecting secrets, and preventing penetration of information leakage.
- Legal procedures: all procedures that guarantee the protection of the law, in addition to submitting proposals and draft laws that help develop security work.
- Military measures: in sabotage acts or in a specific area or operations that threaten the security of the country, the use of military forces to counter these activities is needed.

As for the operational activity, it deals with matters of collecting information and managing resources. Operational activity is divided into the following:

- 1- Managing agents and sources: Its mission is to recruit, guide, train agents and sources, and follow up on their activities.
- 2- Technical Section: It includes managing technical and digital resources for gathering information, making some counterintelligence operations, and digital archiving.
- 3- Information Analysis: It is concerned with the processes of analyzing, evaluating information, directing, and investigating information.
- 4- Field Operations Section: monitoring, protection, communication, and the implementation of special operations and arrests based on judicial warrants.
- 5- Anti-Terrorism Section: It is concerned with collecting information on terrorist activities and movements and plan to respond.
- 6- Admin and Logistics Section: The implementation, follow-up, performance evaluation offices, development, and rehabilitation programs are the roles of this department.

Second: The Foreign Intelligence Agency

The task of this body is to protect and maintain the country's interests abroad, and it should consist of the following sections:

- 1- The Information Department: Its mission is to collect and analyze the information requested by the political leadership.
- 2- Foreign Operations Section: Monitoring cross-border terrorist or supervise groups' movements whose work may harm the country's interests abroad.
- 3- Operational Intelligence Section: Its mission is to collect, invest, direct information, and train intelligence officers.
- 4- The Technical Section: Its mission is to provide technical, logistical support for foreign operations and protect state institutions abroad from intrusion or electronic threat.

5- Logistics Department.

This step of restructuring National Police/Law Enforcement Agencies (Watan, 2021) is more needed than any time in the past. To address the weakness and marginalization that the security sector is suffering from, the Ministry of the Interior within the structure of the interim government needs to be advanced to a high rank in the security structure of the state. This step needs joint efforts from all (OAGs, Turkish government, Syrian Interim Government, and other supporting countries and actors). While on the field level, and to confront the above and address this situation, proposals were analyzed from the interviews of a wide range of Security Officers in the northwest of Syria who were interviewed and added these proposals to control security effectively through:

- First, the unification of the military factions in a formation that has a disciplined military structure and hierarchy led by defected officers with expertise and experience, effectively subordinate to, rather than formally, the ministry of defense in the Syrian Interim Government. There should be constitutionally stipulating principle of neutrality of the National Army and security services, and limiting their tasks and functions according to the rules in force in accordance with the rule of law, and this will require the rebuilding of the armed forces in a professional manner, and the dissolution of the security services before merging them into two agencies, one of which guarantees the internal security of citizens, while the other is concerned with military intelligence, and counter espionage. In this context, all forms of discrimination and political partisanship in the security sector must be abolished, a clear separation between the tasks assigned to each of them, and a guarantee of their subordination to civilian authority.
- Second, the formation of a single central security apparatus with great powers that includes all the liberated areas with expertise and competence from police and security officers who have defected from the regime under the ministry of interior and closing all security offices of the factions that depend on patronage at the expense of competencies.
- Third, the complete and absolute closure of the smuggling outlets with the SDF and the regime.
- Fourth, to re-pursue and prosecute suspects, former individuals with criminal records, and former members of ISIS and SDF in all regions.
- Fifth, intensifying security checks on residents of informal camps in northern Syria.
- Sixth, issuing strict judicial sentences against those involved in terrorist operations and those accused of working for the regime, SDF, and ISIS. This also includes prescribing

effective law mechanisms to monitor the performance of the security services and ensure accountability for violations, as well as activating the role of the Central Court in Al Rai (Team, Editing, 2018) restructuring the judiciary, and ensuring its independence, impartiality and integrity in a manner that also allows consideration of all unconstitutional laws and bills, especially those devoted to the immunity of the security services.

- Seventh, supplying the area with a wide network of surveillance cameras in the streets of cities, villages, and towns, in cooperation with local councils, to be connected to the information system of the security services.
- Eighth, intensifying joint military and civil police checkpoints and conducting night patrols to control security in all areas and provide them with trained security personnel.
- Ninth, full coordination between the ministries of the interim government concerned with the security file, especially defense, interior, and justice, under the direct supervision of the prime minister.
- Tenth, more inclusions of women in the police stations and police forces is not a very strong gender-balance space, which partially descends from cultural reasons in a conservative community like in northwest of Syria.
- Eleventh, enhancing respect for the provisions of international human rights conventions, especially by constitutionally recognizing the supremacy of international law over domestic law in case of conflict (Ford, 2017), as well as ensuring full openness to international mechanisms related to respect for human rights, such as accepting the competence of the Human Rights Committee (UNOHCHR, Human Rights Committee, 1996) and the Committee Against Torture (OMCT, 2006) to receive individual complaints, as well as ratification of all international human rights conventions, in particular the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (UNOHCHR, International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, 1992). This enhancement is needed to raise awareness of human rights standards in the security sector and its functional tasks of reassuring citizens, guaranteeing their freedoms and rights, strengthening the role and independence of civil society institutions, and involving them in educational and monitoring programs in the field of policy implementation
- Twelfth, taking the necessary measures for training which include a range of professional skills, such as criminal investigation and peaceful crowd control, as well as for instructions on human rights, the rule of law, accountability, and civil authority.

To be sure, reforming the Syrian security sector will be a long and complex process. The challenge associated with implantation is imposing a strong democratic law prevailing over the coming years, democratic culture in a military institution that benefits from the Turkish experience. It is confirmed that in the case of security sector reforms, which with dignity make a strong feeling for civilians, they will stick to the area they live in.

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

The results and the findings of this research are as follows:

Concept of return:

- 75% of the participants left Syria in the first five years of the conflict, but the departure decreased notably after the Turkish first military operation in north Syria which deterred any more mass influx of Syrian refugees.
- 85% of the participants left Syria for security and economic reasons, while the rest for educational, cultural, and health reasons. This result supports the fact that the majority of Syrians were forced to leave their country for lack of safety.
- 40% of the participants were NGOs, education, and health sectors employees, while the 60% left were other left careers. This result depicts the dependency of Syrians in the northwest of Syria and in Turkey on very restricted livelihood resources. At the same time, it shows how bad the refugees economy is in both areas.

Migration and return related findings:

- Around 56% of the participants left their homes for security reasons, while 30% left because of economic reasons, and the rest for other reasons. This justifies Syrians' departure from their country since safety is a legitimate demand to all humans. Antithetically, the same reason is related to the return of Syrian refugees.
- Half of the participants put the halt of prices increase and economic improvement as a condition for their return. In the second and third positions, security and education improvement by better performing institutions.
- For 83% of the participants in Syria and Turkey, cessation of hostilities and ending the war is a priority. The change of the political regime in Syria comes next, and all the other priorities follow.
- 66% of the participants follow the news daily through social media platforms. TV and Radio are the second sources for Syrians to follow the news about their country. An

ad-hoc segment of the Syrians' discussions and conversations covers political and field developments about their country.

- 66% of the Syrian refugees in Turkey wish to go back to Syria, while the rest do not.
- Their objectives, if they return, are related to contributing to their country's reconstruction, engaging in the political transition if a solution is charged, and dropping a permanent stay with their families in their home country.
- 47% of the returnees regret their return and wish to leave the country again if a chance is provided. The main reason for this result is the deteriorating security and livelihood conditions.
- 65% of the families state security as their main decision-making factor, and for those that intend to return, 15% state the need to re-possess property as the main reason.
- Newly displaced families are the most likely to express the intention to return, and vulnerable families are less likely to intend to return than non-vulnerable families.

Security situation related findings:

- 60% of the Syrian refugees in Turkey observe the security situation in the northwest of Syria as bad despite operating security and military institutions.
- 69% of Syrians do not fear arbitrary detention or bad treatment from security forces over checkpoints when moving. This shows a comfort by the people towards the security forces treatment, and they usually compare this to the government of Syria forces, so they find the difference vast.
- 70% of Syrian participants in the study area believe that continuous bombings and explosions do not help Syrians return.
- 76% of the participants see that factionalism impacts the area's security and the return movement.
- 71% of participants see that the security apparatus's structure, capacity, and composition are good.
- 59% of the participants are not satisfied with the security forces' ability to control smuggling to the area. Similarly, they are not content with the security forces' performance to prevent IEDs and explosives, random firing, bad treatment of soldiers with civilians, and borders management.
- There is an acceptance of the participants to the security forces' prisons management, behavior with prisoners, checkpoints management, traffic facilitation, and inspection operations.

- Weak coordination between different security forces departments in Azaz, Afrin, Albab, and Jarablus is noted due to the Turkish side's decentralized administration of the institutions. This is seen in the eyes of the interviewed security officials as a challenge for them.
- The logistical preparation for most of the security forces in the area is basic and needs to be developed more.
- Rehabilitation and restructure of the existing security apparatus is a pressing need, and this needs a collateral effort from the Syrian Interim Government, opposition armed groups, Turkish coordinators, and other stakeholders.
- A unique recommendation was found in this research from many security leaders, referring to separating the authority lines and inter-connectedness between the armed opposition groups and the security apparatus.
- The current judiciary and courts need to be much independent of armed groups and have a superiority as a civil power of military one.

6.1 Discussion

The long hosting of Syrian refugees “guests” in Turkey is lasting till a proper solution is applied. In the light of the current political measurements of the current status, the political solution for Syria is far, and a lot of stumbling is on the way. This deducts that Syrian refugees in Turkey will get back soon to their country after a decade of war. However, there is around 25% of Syrian refugees in Turkey who are from northwest Aleppo and Idleb – the areas that Turkey controls currently - can consider returning to Syria. According to Konda, a well-respected Turkish polls center that made a scan of Syrian refugees in Turkey and found that a quarter of these refugees comes from areas that Turkey controls. So, 25% of the Syrian refugees in Turkey can go back to their country within the current political status. Still, this return movement needs conditions to be achieved; otherwise, a return will be there soon. When asking the participants of the surveys and the key informants, the research found on top of these conditions is the improvement of the security situation there.

In theory, refugee-hosting countries fulfill a duty on behalf of the entire international community, but in reality, the rest of the world free-rides on their sacrifice. The nonrefoulement and enshrined in Article 33 of the Refugee Convention guarantees that no one should be returned to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and other irreparable harm.

When it comes to solving Turkey's refugee crisis, there are no good choices. The open-door policy opposition is one of the main themes in domestic politics, and it is likely to get worse if the fighting intensifies in Idlib. If Ankara is to act, this seems to be its only option, which is the worst except for all the others. No one knows what would happen if Assad tried to reclaim the territory or how long Turkey could afford to remain there. Ankara once welcomed millions of Syrians as "guests." Now, as anti-refugee sentiment rises and the change in strategy from the government to encourage more returns and decrease Syrians entrance to Turkey, the next step is to repair the "safe zone" that Turkey is managing.

In 2018, 254,000 refugees went to the Turkey-controlled and relatively stable Operation Euphrates Shield area next to the border of Turkey. However, around 164,000 of them returned to Turkey in the same year. When IOM field officer Manager **M.A** was interviewed for this research, he commented, "*It's not just return,*" he said. "*It's sustainable return.*" Given the scale of displacement, Syria's future demographics will be fundamentally different. Society may be increasingly segmented by class and sect and will likely be more urbanized. The surveys and some discussions with returnees found that often specific security incidents acted as the trigger for return or provided the final impetus in the decision to return. Stories of violence and the loss of family members were repeated in research discussions as having a significant impact on households choosing to return home.

Let us suppose that tomorrow, the security situation has settled down. There is no more news of violations or security incidents happening. Will all Syrian refugees the day after moving towards the northwest of Syria? Clearly, the answer is: no. The security stabilization of the area needs time to pass which is the trust condition that most refugees await before taking such a decision.

By discussing the data collected, it is evident that some solutions may help govern the region effectively. Most of the participants stressed the role of the Turkish side in presenting a real initiative to help Syrians in governing their area, given that Turkey is the only guarantor for the Syrian people. There should be a definition of the powers of every authority, and for security apparatus, it needs to be limited to the executive authority. Also, insurance of not interfering in the work of the legislative and judicial authorities by the armed groups and security forces should be worked on. This helps in stipulating the principle of separation of powers and the principle of rotation of power and limiting the holding of the commandship of the security bodies to two terms, and each term for a period of two years at most. A commander in the Military Police in Azaz **H.D** stressed, "*there is a need to adopt comprehensive administrative reform through local elections, and there is a necessity of*

involving IDPs in governing the region, to avoid falling into tensions and sensitivities between the segments of society.”

These existing practices invoke serious questions, in the case of Turkey-led repatriation to the Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, and Peace Spring areas about who would return where, and by whom and how the process would be overseen so that at the minimum safety of returnees and voluntariness of the return are ensured. It means a set of necessary procedures and measures as main steps to pave the way for the transition to a less fluid and more disciplined security environment through a central security strategy.

A researcher talked about the existence of a state of tension between the different entities based on a challenge on a regional basis. This necessitates reconsideration and amendment of administrative laws to guarantee all rights and create some form of representation for the IDPs in the local administration.

A set of constitutional principles that define the new security doctrine in accordance with the principles of administrative decentralization should be linked to the compass of the homeland and the citizen and limit the interventions of the security services in political life. The connection of the opposition armed groups is something negatively affecting the security forces' performance. Still, from the armed groups' point of view, they are introducing generous support for the security forces, and their support is positively looked to by them. Both points need resettlement by gathering them under one central civil government with the upper word over all institutions. A commander of the Military Police in Afrin demanded the interim government and the emerging administration to enter the region and support the civilians through various forms of civic engagement by support from the National Army and the military leadership in general.

Again, let us assume that the security situation is improved. The borders with bordering areas are well controlled. No more IEDs or VBIEDs attacks are reported, and no more security breaches are reported from outside the area. Will the area stabilize? Clearly, therapies are an internal challenge for security ill performance. The current government has internal weaknesses. As the military factions are the ones on top of the power structure, there will be supremacy to the military groups, not a civil government. So, these internal security challenges will continue without a strong empower of the Syrian Interim Government to control the factions all in a unified military structure under centralized command of the ministry of defense. The main arrangements for building an integrated security sector should be aligned with parallel leverage in all aspects of state administration and governance. Here a question is raised about the HTS-controlled Idleb, which is an area under partial Turkish control but only

in military means with absence from all civil administration views, unlike northern area, what is the future of the coordination between the Syrian Interim Government and the Salvation Government – HTS civil government in Idleb – on several levels including security and intelligence. Some analysts see a necessity for merging the two governments, which are not easily doable with the current inputs and field conditions – which looks a bit idealistic. But later in the far future, this step can be engineered by Turkey to ensure centralized control over the area when there is an international will for this recipe.

One unique part of the research recommendations discuss the shortages in resources, logistical support, and technological preparations. There is an acceptable level of preparations for the security apparatus, including a fleet of cars, police station centers, enough human resources. But this is not enough for the area since there is a lot of things that can be done for better performance.

The current fleet includes minivans and small cars, while the heavy armored vehicles are missing and existing only in armed groups' hands. The technological infrastructure is weak since there is no central system for security that can be used by all devices of the police to search and manage civilians' profiles. No central archiving system or central database for saving information rather, they are separately saved in different branches. In general, CCTV cameras systems, X-rays inspection devices, and demining preparations are so weak and restricted to certain areas only.

In the end, someone would say that this research is touching on the gloomy side of the security situation, portraying the area to unlivable space. The research shows the recommendation for having a better security apparatus that would help facilitate more return movement of refugees. At the same time, also states that the challenges facing the northwest of Syria internally and externally are huge and complex. Also, within the atmosphere of these challenges and the current performance of these security forces, the study shows the turmoil excreted by these forces which is appreciated in some places.

6.2 Conclusion

Through the last decade, the Syrian crisis produced over 9 million of refugees and IDPs in Turkey and northwest of Syria (which is an area under Turkish administration), which is around 40% of the total Syrian population. After many Turkish military operations, the area in the northwest was more stable, and development efforts of the area made it a more livable space, but still, there are internal security breaches that made the internal security deteriorate. In this research, a discussion about the possibilities of return for Syrian refugees in Turkey to

the northwest of Syria if the security situation improves and how these refugees, along with already returned refugees, absorb their willingness to return in relation to their assessment of the security conditions in their home country.

The research focused on Syrian refugees in Turkey mostly and assessed their willingness to return in relation to the security situation, with a parallel assessment of the already returned satisfaction of security performance, but there is a major theme that was not covered and would be recommended for following researchers to focus on which is the relation of the refugees' situation in Turkey as a pushing factor to return to the northwest of Syria. In which, a focus on the hosting country management of refugees profile's impact on Syrian refugees decision of return.

According to the research, a safe environment can be achieved with the strong security apparatus and its security services, with better funding for reconstruction, with a vision, which is completely in line with Turkey's strategies. It is noted that the requirements of enabling environment for the return of refugees in the plan are limited to the humanitarian aspect related to the situation and living conditions and to the security aspect related to stopping the violations. Most importantly and urgently to be done by Turkish state responsible for the Syrian areas administration is the set a reformation plan for the security apparatus and to rehabilitate and support it with all possible means to ensure better safety is there and by which a quicker tendency for Syrian refugees to return will be noted.

Eventually, it is concluded that the return of the Syrian refugees in Turkey is closely linked to the improvement of the security situation in northwest of Syria for those Syrians who came originality from the northern areas, while the refugees who came from areas that are now under the government of Syria's control are not willing to return until a political solution is in place. Also, this research gave a group of reformation, rehabilitation, and recommendations for the Syrian security institutions to help them improve their performance. Generally, the juxtaposition of security improvement and and Syrian refugees returnis very valid fact in this research and it recommend other researchers to dig deeper in this venue.

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Annex-1: Free Syrian Army's Main Groups and Their Security Services Structure.



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NATIONAL ARMY

4-7. Legion are organized by the National Liberation Front.

1ST LEGION

11.Division

-  111.Brigade (*Liwa al Shamal*)
-  112.Brigade (*Jaysh al Ahfad*)
-  113.Brigade (*Jaysh al Ahfad*)

12.Division

-  121.Brigade (*Liwa Samarkand*)
-  122.Brigade (*Liwa Muntassir Billah*)
-  123.Brigade (*Ahrar al Sharqiyyah*)

13.Division

-  131.Brigade (*Sultan Mehmed Fatih*)
-  132.Brigade (*Kaided al Gazil*)
-  133.Brigade (*Liwa al Wakkas*)

14.Division

-  141.Brigade (*Faylaq al Sham*)
-  142.Brigade (*Sultan Sulaiman Shah*)
-  143.Brigade (*9th Division*)
-  144.Brigade (*20th Division*)
-  145.Brigade (*Jaysh al Nukhba*)
-  146.Brigade (*Jaysh al Sharqiyyah*)

2ND LEGION

-  21.Division (*Firka Sultan Murad*)
-  22.Division (*Firka Hamza*)
-  Liwa Suqour al Shimal
-  23.Division (*Firka Muttasim*)
-  Rejal al Harb
-  24.Division (*Firka Sultan Murad*)
-  25.Division (*Jaysh al Islam*)
-  26.Division (*Faylaq al Rahman*)

3RD LEGION

-  31.Division (*Jabhat Shamiyah*)
-  32.Division (*Jabhat Shamiyah*)
-  32.Division (*Suqour al Sham*)
-  33.Division (*Jabhat Shamiyah*)
-  34.Division (*51st Division*)
-  Sultan Osman
-  Fawc al Mustafa
-  Thuwwar al Jazira
-  Fawc el Awwal
-  34.Division (*Liwa al Salam*)
-  Firka 23
-  Fawc al Hamis
-  35.Division (*Faylaq al Majd*)

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Annex-3: Survey Questions Form 1, 2, and Key Informants Interview Questions Form.

Survey 1:

<https://forms.gle/UaQ9g4Yf3xKyYjML8>

Survey 2:

<https://forms.gle/LKGAHrRjvGzb95DS6>

Key Informant Interview with Security Officers in Northwest of Syria area.

1. What is your name, position, how many people you are heading, and the geographical zone of your mission?
2. How would you describe the general security landscape in your area? What are the most important security threats in your area and how are they addressed by security agencies?
3. How do security agencies deal with returnees to these areas from inside Syria and abroad? Do you make statistics or studies on these returnees and any services you provide to them if any? How many returnees roughly are you studying or keeping records on?
4. Is your area prepared for the return of refugees and IDPs? What are the most prominent challenges? What are the 3 main challenges that you and your team face in your work?
5. How can better encourage the Syrian fellow citizens refuging abroad to come back to your area in northwest of Syria? Through a more disciplined security apparatus via better Detection and investigation, through better database and central system, better trained personnel over checkpoints, linking ID numbers with research on system?
6. How do you evaluate the relationship between armed and security forces and civilians? How do you view the future of such a relationship?
7. From 100, what is the percentage of bringing wanted people to your service center that you bring them based on arrest warrant?
8. What are your suggested reformations for improving the security performance of the security apparatus in the northwest of Syria?

- 1- **A.H:** Head of the military court in the national army.
- 2- **M. R:** Head of the 1st legion in the SNA.
- 3- **H.D:** head of military police in Azaz.
- 4- **R.A:** head of military police in Afrin.
- 5- **M.M:** head of Azaz Intelligence Services.

- 6- **LA:** head of the police in Mare.
- 7- **Abu Husein:** head of the police in Jarabuls.
- 8- **F.S:** Colonel & former leader of Idleb Free Police
- 9- **M.S:** Defected colonel from Police and founder of the Internal Security Forces Committee that is working directly with Turkey.

Key Informant Interview with Turkish deputy governor coordinators in NW of Syria area.

1. Name, occupation, and related works on the Syria desk before the current post?
2. Do you see any change in the future towards the Syrian refugees under Turkish temporary protection status, which may continue, or they may resettle in a third country or return to Syria?
3. What challenges are you facing in validating and enforcing security in the north of Syria areas?
4. In safe areas, to improve the security situation which facilitates the return of Syrian refugees in Turkey, how do you see the connection between both?
5. What are the tendencies for Syrian refugees to return to their homeland? Considering the current returnees, what are their expectation, in your opinion?
6. How do you assess the security administration of Syrian Security Forces and their capacity? What, additionally, can be improved and developed?

- 1- Türkiye 4 milyonun üzerinde Suriyeli mülteciye ev sahipliği yapmaktadır ve son askeri operasyonlardan sonra Türkiye'nin topraklarındaki Suriyelilere karşı siyasi tutumu onları güvenli bölgeye geri döndürmek yöneliktir, Türkiye bunu ne kadar başardı ?
- 2- Bu alanlarda güvenliği sağlama ve uygulama konusunda (Türk hükümetinin resmi temsilcisi olarak) karşılaştığınız zorluklar nelerdir ?
- 3- Suriye'nin kuzeybatısına geri dönmeye karar veren Suriyeli mülteciler için Türk hükümetinin uyguladığı kolaylaştırma ve prosedürler nelerdir ?
- 4- Türkiye'deki Suriyeli mültecilerin geleceğini nasıl görüyorsunuz ve Kuzey Suriye'de güvenliğin iyileştirilmesi ile geri dönüş kavramı arasındaki bağlantıyı nasıl görüyorsunuz ?
- 5- Türkiye'nin bölgeyi kontrolünden sonra bölgeye kaç Suriyeli mültecinin geri döndüğüne dair kesin bir istatistik var mı? Sizce geri dönenlerin motivasyonları nelerdir

- 6- Güvenlik açısından bölgenin geleceğini nasıl görüyorsunuz ve bu statükonun oradaki yönetişimi nasıl etkilemektedir?
- 7- Türkiye'nin güvenlik idaresini, kendi idare bölgenizdeki Suriye polisi, güvenlik ve istihbarat güçlerini nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz? Neler değiştirilip geliştirilebilir ?
- 8- Genel olarak, mevcut kötü güvenlik durumu, işsizlik, tahrip olmuş altyapı, parçalanmış toplum, yoksulluk ve savaşla ilgili diğer sonuçlarda bölgeye geri dönen Suriyelilerin gelecekteki hareketinin artacağını veya azalacağını düşünüyor musunuz ?

- 1- Deputy governor of Kilis, responsible security coordinator in Euphrates Shield area (Kilis Part).
- 2- Deputy governor of Hatay, general coordinator of Olive Branch area, including security.
- 3- Deputy Governor of Gaziantep, responsible coordinator of Olive Branch area (Jarablus and Albab part).

Interview Questions with migration studies scholars and think tanks researchers in this field.

- 1- Name, occupation, and related works on return if Syrian refugees in the migration field.
- 2- What are the pull factors for the Syrian refugees living in Turkey to return to the northwest of Syria areas controlled by Turkey? Is security in Turkish-controlled areas in north Syria is a major pull factor for the return?
- 3- As a scholar, do you see a unique relation between the security environment improvement and stability to the return of Syrian refugees settled in Turkey, back to the northwest of Syria?
- 4- In total, how do you see the Turkish military intervention in the north of Syria? Has it securitized the area and stabilized it? Is it affecting the Syrian refugees' community in Turkey and abroad to return?
- 5- How much do you see the scientific literature on returning of Syrian refugees in Turkey to north Syria in general, and do you have recommendations for researchers?
- 6- To which limit do you see the scholars in migration and political science are influencing the decision-makers on the return of the Syrian refugees? If yes, to what extent?
- 7- In the long run, and if the situation in Syria stabilizes according to your research, the majority of Syrian refugees would think of what, in the coming two years?
 - Changing their mind on their current decision and return to Syria.

- Go to Syria to work for a period and return to settle in Turkey.
- Visit Syria from time to time
- Syria doesn't mean anything to them.

- 1- **A.I:** MIRKOC migration research center
- 2- **S.M:** UNHCR Egypt coordinator and fellow researcher in Oxford Migration Center and to help me with Oxford migration-center professors on returning.
- 3- **Salman:** TRC on Syrian migrations.
- 4- **UNHCR** Ankara Office.
- 5- **A.K:** Omran center.
- 6- **M.A:** HNAP and IOM general manager in Gaziantep.



Annex-5: Military Ranks of the Syrian Army

Badge	الرتبة	Rank in English
	جندي أول	Seaman
	عريف	Petty officer 3rd class
	رقيب	Petty officer 2nd class
	رقيب أول	Chief petty officer
	مساعد	Warrant officer 3rd class
	مساعد ثاني	Warrant officer 2nd class
	مساعد أول	Warrant officer 1st class
	ملازم	3rd Lieutenant
	ملازم أول	2nd Lieutenant
	نقيب	1st Lieutenant
	رائد	Lieutenant commander
	مقدم	Commander
	عقيد	Captain
	عميد	Commodore
	لواء	Rear admiral
	عماد	Vice Admiral

Syrian Armed Forces size during the Civil War

Year	Army personnel	Air Force Personnel	Total Force
2011	220,000	100,000	320,000
2014	110,000	63,000	173,000

Annex-6: Family Reunification to Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Aile birleşimi

MADDE 49- (1) Bu Yönetmelik kapsamındaki yabancılar, başka bir ülkede bulunan eşi, ergin olmayan çocukları ve bağımlı ergin çocukları ile Türkiye’de bir araya gelmek üzere aile birleşimi talebinde ulunabilir. Bu başvurular, Genel Müdürlükçe değerlendirilir ve ilgili kamu kurum ve kuruluşları, uluslararası kuruluşlar ve sivil toplum kuruluşlarıyla işbirliği halinde gerekli çalışmalar yapılabilir.

(2) Refakatsiz olduğu tespit edilen çocuklarla ilgili olarak çocukların talebi beklenmeksizin aile birleşimine ilişkin işlemler derhal başlatılır.

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