
Turkey's Security Dilemma on the Border With Syria: Situation Assessment and Perspectives of the Intervention

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Abstract

Employing the concept of the security dilemma, the article aims to assess the situation on the Turkey-Syria border and discusses perspectives of Turkey's humanitarian intervention in northern Syria. In the first section of the article an analysis of Turkey's foreign policy and its implications on Syria's crisis is provided. The second section deals with arguments for and against the intervention. Later on, international law and military provisions are discussed as well as the possible implications of an intervention. The main thesis of this article is that if Turkey chose to solve its security dilemma by means of a humanitarian intervention, the UN Security Council's approval would greatly enhance the chances of its success. Otherwise, unilateral intervention could even further diminish the possibility of finding a faster solution to the Syrian crisis and regional peace and stability in general.

Keywords: Turkey, military intervention, safe zone, buffer zone, Syrian civil war, Turkey – Iran relations

Introduction

On the 20th of July in Suruç, a border town near Syria, ISIS conducted a terror act against Kurdish political activists who intended to help rebuild the city of Kobani that was in ruins in Syria. Soon after, PKK (kur. *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, eng. Kurdistan's Workers Party) committed revenge killings against the Turkish police because they perceived Turkey as an ISIS supporter. After these events, Turkey started an active anti-terror campaign in two fronts: against ISIS and the PKK. There have been reports in the media that as a response, the PKK cancelled the peace process with Turkey. A domestic political level is also important in this violent escalation: after the elections on June 7, the ruling AKP party (tur.

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Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, eng. Justice and Development Party) lost its majority in the parliament. Therefore, during the military operations there is still no new government, whereas snap elections seem very likely. Turkey yet again offered to create a “safe zone” near the border with Syria, but the US rejected this offer.

It is easy to notice that the ruling AKP party is trying to consolidate society for possible snap elections. For some time already Turkey has been deploying troops and equipment near the border with Syria. There is a possibility that these troops will cross the border with an objective to unilaterally create a “safe zone” in Syria in order to eliminate ISIS and to disrupt consolidation of YPG (kur. *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, eng. People's Protection Units) forces where Turkey sees the YPG as affiliates of PKK. In this paper, the main aim is to answer the question: under which circumstances would Turkey's military intervention in northern Syria be a promising idea? In order to answer this question, Turkey's foreign policy framework and its implications on the Syrian crisis are analysed. Second, arguments for the intervention and against it are weighed. Finally, the military and international law arrangements for the intervention and its possible implications are discussed.

In this article, official documents and the personal opinions of diplomats, media and experts are used. I analyse Turkey's foreign policy using the insights of Meliha B. Altanışık, Lenore G. Martin,¹ Pinar Bilgin,² Pavel Shlykov,³ Ioannis N. Grigoriadis⁴ and Bülent Aras⁵ as well as a structural overview given by Onur Gökçe⁶.

For a deeper comprehension of regional developments, I implement Idrees Mohammed's⁷ extensive analysis of Turkey-Iran competition for influence in Syria.

¹ Altunışık M. B., Lenore G. M., “Worldviews and Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East”, *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40, 2009, p. 169-192.

² Bilgin P., “Securing Turkey through Western-Oriented Foreign Policy”, *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40, 2009, p. 105-125.

³ Shlykov P., “European Perspectives of the ‘New Turkey’”, Carnegie Moscow Center, December 24, 2014, <<http://carnegie.ru/eurasiaoutlook/?fa=57599>>, 28 07 2015.

⁴ Grigoriadis I. N., “The Davutoğlu Doctrine and Turkish Foreign Policy”, Working Paper 8/2010, 2010 <http://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/%CE%9A%CE%95%CE%99%CE%9C%CE%95%CE%9D%CE%9F-%CE%95%CE%A1%CE%93%CE%91%CE%A3%CE%99%CE%91%CE%A3-8_2010_IoGrigoriadis1.pdf>, 30 07 2015.

⁵ Aras B., “Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy”, *Insight Turkey* 11(3), 2009, p. 127-142; Aras B., “Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy Revisited”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 16(4), 2014, p. 404-418.

⁶ Gökçe O., “The Dynamics of Turkey-Israel Relations”, *All Azimuth* 1(2), 2012, p. 55-68.

⁷ Mohammed I., “Turkey and Iran Rivalry on Syria”, *Alternatives Turkish Journal of International Relations* 10 (2-3), 2011, p. 66 -77.

The regional balance of threats is investigated in the article by three Islamic Azad University authors. Theoretical aspects of the security dilemma are presented in the book by Kenneth Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler.⁸ Turkey's plan for a humanitarian intervention in Syria is not a well-researched topic because the situation is novel and changing quickly. However, the topic is worthy of an analysis, as the humanitarian intervention might bring important changes in the Syrian crisis.

1. Turkey's foreign policy and its implications on the Syrian civil war

Systemic changes in international relations at the end of the Cold War stopped limiting Turkey's foreign policy and allowed the possibility for its reconsideration. New views resulted in pluralism and ambivalence over its foreign policy. Traditional Turkey's foreign policy view is based on the balance of power principles according to which the Middle East is seen as a source of threats. This view was supplemented by new perspectives such as liberal and constructivist thinking, both critical to a traditional realist understanding.⁹ According to critical views, the Middle East is not a source of threats but a source of possibilities. Different approaches also have a different take on Turkey's relationship with the West: according to the traditional view, Turkey is part of the West, while critical perspectives treat Turkey as an actor on its own. Therefore, its interests do not necessarily coincide with those of the West.

In this context, it is easier to understand the AKP's foreign policy. Together with such parties as ANAP (turk. *Anavatan Partisi*, eng. Motherland's Party) and DSP (turk. *Demokratik Sol Parti*, eng. Democratic Left Party), the AKP criticizes the traditional understanding of Turkey's foreign policy position. Among them, AKP (whose roots are in Turkey's Islamic movement)¹⁰ is characterized by an exceptional emphasis on historical and cultural identity.¹¹ This ideology was developed in great detail by the main architect of the AKP foreign policy and

⁸ Booth K., Wheeler N. J., *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation, and Trust in World Politics*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 1-41.

⁹ Altunışık and Lenore, (note 1) p. 172.

¹⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Justice and Development Party", Encyclopedia Britannica, June 10, 2015, <<http://global.britannica.com/topic/Justice-and-Development-Party-political-party-Turkey>>, 28 07 2015.

¹¹ Altunışık and Lenore, (note 1) p. 187.

current Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu. His “civilizational geopolitics” is characterized not by traditional insights on geopolitics, economic or power politics but on arguments grounded in the belief of historical and religious predestination.¹² Precisely because of these historical and cultural ties, Turkey’s historical, strategic and geographical “depth” is localised in the Middle East.¹³ The AKP party seeks active and autonomous participation in the region, not only to mirror Western interests. In other words, Turkey rejects the passive role of a “bridge between the Western and Islamic world” and seeks to occupy an active “central” state position.

Davutoğlu’s ideas also took shape in strategic documents. The foundations of Turkey’s foreign policy became the “Zero problems with neighbours” strategy, based on civilizational geopolitics, liberalism, soft power principles and the aspiration to have mutually beneficial relations with its neighbours. According to Davutoğlu, if Turkey wants to achieve its global strategic ambitions, first of all, it must solve its domestic problems with the Kurdish people and the conflict among Islamists and secularists. Meanwhile in the international sphere it must clear up all bilateral conflicts with its neighbours, which stand in the way of good mutual cooperation.¹⁴

In this article, we avoid lengthy discussions on whether a new direction in Turkey’s foreign policy caused the abandonment of its Western orientation or whether it was merely a diversification of its policy. Nevertheless, the end of Cold War is considered as the beginning of a tense relationship between Turkey and the West.¹⁵ That is especially obvious after the AKP came to power.¹⁶ However, Turkey’s foreign policy was generally thought to be successful both by foreign and internal observers, until the start of the Arab Spring.¹⁷ Unrest in the Arab states marked the beginning of Ankara’s problems. After the change in the regional *status quo*, Turkey’s position in conflicts and its abilities to mediate them has also changed.

Despite that, Turkey has retained its aspirations to be an important and influential country. It is reflected in bilateral relations with Syria. Turkey’s inclination to have good neighbourly relations in the Syrian case is realised

¹² Bilgin, (note 2) p. 106.

¹³ Altunışık and Lenore, (note 1) p. 188; Aras, 2009, (note 5) p. 127-142.

¹⁴ Grigoriadis, (note 4).

¹⁵ Bilgin, (note 2) p. 106.

¹⁶ Shlykov, (note 3), ; Altunışık M.B., Benli M., and Martin L.G., “Worldviews and Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East”, *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40, 2009, p. 169-192.

¹⁷ Zalewski Z., “How Turkey Went from Zero Problems to Zero Friends”, *Foreign Policy*, August 22, 2013, <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/22/how-turkey-went-from-zero-problems-to-zero-friends>>, 25 07 2015.

through the idea of changing leaders who have fallen out of favour. Before the beginning of the pro-democracy protests, Turkey tried to keep good relations with the Syrian regime. However, after a brutal crackdown on protesters, Turkey demanded that President Bashar al-Assad must step down. What's more, it started to actively support the political and militant Syrian opposition. By doing that, Turkey perceived two objectives: first, to overthrow the Syrian regime and second, to hinder the Kurdish aim of creating an independent Syrian opposition faction and fostering their efforts to fight the Syrian regime.¹⁸ Already in 2011 efforts were made to create a no-flight zone in Syria, as was done in Libya with the aim of protecting civilians (and also most likely to provide support for rebel forces). However, the plan failed because it was blocked by Russia and China.

So far Turkey has tried to avoid direct military participation. However, July 23, 2015 saw the first exchange of fire between Turkey's military and ISIS (counting from the very beginning of the Syrian crisis).¹⁹ Until then, Turkey's participation in the anti-ISIS coalition was sluggish and full of rumours about links between high-ranking Turkish officials and ISIS.²⁰ Nonetheless, after the Suruç terror attack the situation has changed and Turkey has started an active anti-terror campaign as well as deepened its cooperation with the US.

To sum up, Turkey's ambitions to be a "central state" and actively engage in the region have led to entanglement in the Syrian crisis. After the start of an active anti-terror campaign, Turkey's rigid position in the conflict has become even more visible. From the beginning of the Syrian civil war, Turkey pursued the idea of some kind of buffer/no-fly/safe zone in order to protect civilians and support anti-Assad rebels. In the following section, we look at the arguments for and against the possibility of Turkey's intervention.

¹⁸ Dali K., "Turkey and Military intervention in Syria", *Middle East Monitor*, July 3, 2015, <<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/europe/19635-turkey-and-military-intervention-in-syria%20>>, 21 07 2015.

¹⁹ Walker J.W., Bown A. J., "Erdogans's War", *Foreign Affairs*, July 29, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2015-07-29/erdogans-war?cid=nlc-twofa-20150730&sp_mid=49217809&sp_rid=c2ltb25hc2RAZ21haWwuY29tS0>, 31 07 2015.

²⁰ Bertrand N., "Senior Western official: Links between Turkey and ISIS are now 'undeniable'", *Business Insider*, DATA, <<http://www.businessinsider.com/links-between-turkey-and-isis-are-now-undeniable-2015-7>>, 03 08 2015.

2. The security dilemma on the border with Syria and the possibility of an intervention

Turkey perceives the situation on its southern border as a security dilemma. Booth and Wheeler describe the security dilemma as “a two-level strategic predicament in relations between states and other actors, with each level consisting of two related propositions that can be assumed to be valid, which force decision-makers to choose between them. The first and basic level consists of a dilemma of interpretation about the motives, intentions and capabilities of others; the second and derivative level consists of a dilemma of response about the most rational way of responding.”²¹

On the first level, Turkey could choose either to wait and hope that a solution to Syria's crisis would come without its interference or perceive ISIS and YPG as threats to its own security and act against them. YPG is thought to pose a threat to the ethnic composition in northern Syria. More, the victories of YPG could enhance consolidation of the Kurdish territories that might lead to creation of a “Kurdish corridor”²² or some other kind of Kurdish polity. Such a development is greatly unwanted by Turkey, as it might facilitate Turkey's Kurds' aspirations of seeking independence. For a while, it seemed that Turkey had chosen the first option, but now the situation has clearly changed. The Suruç attack worked as a wake-up call for Turkey's decision makers to take action and both ISIS as well as Syrian Kurds are perceived as a threat. As the dilemma of interpretation has been settled, Turkey faces the dilemma of response. Turkey has started an active anti-terror campaign against both ISIS and PKK. Now the question that looms is how far will this campaign go? Will Turkey create a buffer zone in northern Syria? We evaluate this option in light of both Turkey's domestic political structure as well as international constraints.

2.1. Arguments for the intervention

Probably the most important factor, which tells us about the possibility of an intervention, is the active promotion of this idea by the AKP leaders. It is reflected

²¹ Booth K., Wheeler N. J., *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation, and Trust in World Politics*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 4.

²² Tastekin F., “Kurds eye new corridor to Mediterranean”, *Al-Monitor*, June 22, 2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/turkey-syria-kurdish-corridor-in-the-making-kobane.html>>, 03 08 2015.

in such martial rhetoric as “to bring back Ottoman order and justice”²³ and to not allow creation of a Kurdish state near the southern border.²⁴ Already in 2014 leaked information appeared about the possible intervention plans.²⁵ Recently, new data provided clues about high-level meetings on the question of a potential intervention.²⁶ What’s more, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is organising a World Humanitarian Summit under the auspices of the UN General Secretary in 2016. The president himself recently declared that besides humanitarian support, discussions would be held about humanitarian intervention too.²⁷ Recently some enthusiastic announcements were made that Turkey and the US. had agreed to establish a safe zone but the US. rejected that information.²⁸ Nevertheless, in a recent interview the Prime Minister repeated that “we will try” to establish a safe zone.²⁹

Turkey’s military holds the traditional view of avoiding active participation in regional developments and the Syrian crisis is no exception³⁰ (what’s more, during this period the military is waiting for the formation of a new government).

²³ “Turkish PM promises to bring ‘Ottoman order, justice’”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, July 17, 2015, <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-pm-promises-to-bring-ottoman-order-justice.aspx?PageID=238&NID=85581&NewsCatID=338>>, 01 08 2015.

²⁴ “Erdogan says Turkey not to allow Kurdish State in Northern Syria”, *Today’s Zaman*, June 27, 2015, <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-pm-promises-to-bring-ottoman-order-justice.aspx?PageID=238&NID=85581&NewsCatID=338>>, 01 08 2015.

²⁵ MISH’s Global Economic Trend Analysis, “Turkey Plans Military Intervention in Syria, Bans YouTube for Leaked Reporting”, *Global Economic Analysis*, March 27, 2014, <<http://globeconomicanalysis.blogspot.com.tr/2014/03/turkey-plans-military-intervention-in.html>>, 02 08 2015.

²⁶ “Military bolsters presence on border as commanders summoned to Ankara”, *Today’s Zaman*, July 5, 2015, <http://www.todayszaman.com/latest-news_military-bolsters-presence-on-border-as-commanders-summoned-to-ankara_392902.html>, 02 08 2015.

²⁷ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “World Humanitarian Summit”, <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/world-humanitarian-summit.en.mfa>>, 03 08 2015.

²⁸ “No ‘safe zone’ on Turkish-Syrian border, US says”, *Today’s Zaman*, July 29, 2015, <http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_no-safe-zone-on-turkish-syrian-border-us-says_394953.html>, 03 08 2015; Solaken G., “U.S. denies reaching agreement with Turkey on Syria ‘safe zone’”, *Reuters*, August 11, 2015, <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/08/11/uk-mideast-crisis-turkey-usa-idUKKCN0QG1UC20150811>>, 15 08 2015.

²⁹ “Turkey PM: Syria no-fly zone needed”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 12, 2015, <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-pm-syria-no-fly-zone-needed.aspx?pageID=238&nID=86826&NewsCatID=359>>, 13 08 2015.

³⁰ Gurcan M., “Turkish military edges closer to Syria intervention”, *Al-Monitor*, July 1, 2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/turkey-syria-military-intervention-countdown-army-objective.html>>, 02 08 2015.

But despite this long-held position of non-interference, the situation is changing because of new factors. First, the HDP (tur. *Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, eng. People's Democratic Party) was elected to parliament and the military perceives it as an extension of PKK. Second, the military regards PYD as an affiliate of PKK in Syria. Third, after the Suruç terror act, the ISIS threat is even more obvious. Mainly these three factors have weakened the military's opposition towards an intervention.³¹

Another incentive for the intervention is the possibility of the formation of a Kurdish state. It is hard to predict how likely this could be. Nevertheless, the reality is that Kurdish forces are successfully fighting against ISIS both in Iraq and Syria together with Western allies. They are very pro-Western, which makes the Kurds quite unique in the Middle East. They have also long cherished the dream of establishing Kurdistan and the confrontation with ISIS provides the possibility of achieving it. Some sources claim that they have so much determination to form a state that the Kurds would go for it "whether the US likes it, or not."³² Turkey perceives this situation as a threat, which enhances Turkey's Kurdish separatism. However, the US traditionally retains its influence on the Kurds. If Ankara would like to suppress Kurdish national aspirations, it would expect help from Washington in order to stabilise the situation. If Washington could and would help Turkey on this matter, then Turkey should repay the favour with even bigger support in the fight against ISIS (which is at least partly happening right now, with permission for the US to use the Incirlik air base). Without the US's help against the formation of a Kurdish state, Turkey would have to risk unilateral intervention if such a situation would appear.³³

Turkey and the Western states together are experiencing the consequences of a humanitarian catastrophe in Syria and Iraq. If Turkey were to persist with its intervention plans to create a safe zone inside of Syria, it might help to stabilize the situation. This kind of idea is vivid in the Turkish media, some UN officials also promised help if a safe zone were to be created.³⁴ It is important to note that

³¹ "Kurdish gains stimulate Turkish military intervention in Syria", *Ara News*, June 30, 2015, <<http://aranews.net/2015/06/kurdish-gains-stimulate-turkish-military-intervention-in-syria>>, 02 08 2015.

³² Hously A., "Kurds intent on carving new state out of Iraq after ISIS fight 'whether the US likes it or not'", *Fox News*, July 2, 2015, <<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2015/07/02/kurds-intent-on-carving-new-state-out-iraq-after-isis-fight-whether-us-likes-it>>, 12 08 2015.

³³ Friedman G., "The Turkish Enigma", *Stratfor*, July 21, 2015, <<https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/turkish-enigma>>, 22 07 2015.

³⁴ Hogg J., "UN would offer humanitarian support in Syria safe zones: Amos", *Reuters*, October 20, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/20/us-mideast-crisis-syria-un-idUSKCN0I91O7_20141020>, 03 08 2015.

in the UN framework, a humanitarian intervention was already discussed in 2012. At that time, not only Turkey but also France and Britain reminded Assad about such a possibility.³⁵

Turkey is not the only country that has been deliberating on the creation of a safe zone in Syria. Such plans have also been discussed in Jordan. It has plans to create a safe zone in the south of Syria with the aim to block the ISIS advance and to create “a buffer zone” for Syrian rebels and refugees. The safe zone could be created in the Daraa and Suwayda provinces (including Deraa city, the birthplace of the Syrian rebellion). Assad’s regime would be alerted not to attack the area from the air, otherwise it would suffer retaliation.³⁶ According to a report by O’Hanlon from the Brookings Institute, the US and the coalition’s partners should create one or two buffer zones in relatively promising areas such as the Kurdish northeast or maybe in the Syrian south near Jordan.³⁷

History shows that the idea of intervention in Turkey has been pretty much alive during the 20th century (acquisition of the Hatay province in 1937 and 1998). Last and not least, a very old threat was made in 1998, also on the grounds of the Kurdish problem. The Syrian regime was fostering PKK in the Syrian north. At that time, threats were enough and Syria stopped its support for PKK. Now there is no regime that could overthrow YGP’s forces. During Turkey’s anti-terror campaign, there already have been some reports that YGP forces have sometimes been targeted.

To sum up, there are many arguments for the intervention. AKP determination, diminishing army’s resistance, fear of the establishment of a Kurdish state, humanitarian arguments, similar (maybe combined?) plans in Jordan and the relatively fresh threat in 1998 to intervene on the grounds of the Kurdish problem. However, there are also some strong arguments against the intervention and we will discuss them in the following section.

³⁵ “UN: Syria buffer zone plan raises questions”, *The Jerusalem Post*, August 31, 2015, <<http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/UN-Syria-buffer-zone-plan-raises-questions>>, 03 08 2015.

³⁶ Jones S., Khala R., Solomon E., “Jordan to set up buffer zone in southern Syria”, *The Financial Times*, June, 29, 2015, <<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/ead1961a-1e38-11e5-ab0f-6bb9974f25d0.html#axzz3hkVRxTKd>>, 03 08 2015.

³⁷ O’Hanlon M. E., “Deconstructing Syria: Towards a regionalized strategy for a confederate country”, *Brookings Institute*, June 23, 2015, <<http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2015/06/23-syria-strategy-ohanlon?cid=00900015020089101US0001-06291>>, 03 08 2015.

2.2 Arguments against the intervention

Despite all the arguments for the intervention, there are solid contra arguments too. First of all, Turkey has a large army but it lacks battle experience (despite the fight against the PKK). This fact raises doubts about Turkey's abilities to successfully create a buffer zone on its own. Even the US army has suffered setbacks during conventional military interventions in the Middle East. Therefore, Turkey's military reluctance to intervene is understandable.

Probably the most important argument against the buffer zone is US disagreement and its support for the Kurds. Turkey's confrontation with Syrian Kurds would create problems in bilateral relations with the US. Recently there was some tension between Washington and Ankara but it was most likely diminished by the US envoy General Allen's visit to Ankara. During it negotiations were held and soon after followed a talk between the US and Turkish presidents via phone.³⁸ According to *Al-Monitor*, one of the biggest sources of anxiety for Turkey is the transfer of ISIS territories to the YPG.³⁹ Yet, it would be against the declared US support for Syrian territorial integrity.⁴⁰ In the Incirlik air base accord, the US is reported to have agreed for partial creation of a no-fly zone above the Turkey-Syria border. In that zone, Assad's aviation would not be permitted. The zone would not be directly against the YPG, but there is a possibility of retaliation if the YPG would pose a threat to Turkey's border.⁴¹ However, the ambivalent US position does not allow the formation of a clear opinion about the US's plans.

Turkey has tried to obtain support for the intervention not only from the international community but also from its own citizens. This is because of an internal struggle between the Islamist and secular parts of Turkey's society. Secularists suspect that Islamists are secretly united with radical Islam, therefore AKP's initiatives are perceived with scepticism. Intervention would not receive united support from the party either because some party members think that

³⁸ Talk between Ambassador of Lithuania in Turkey A. Brüzga and U.S. Ambassador in Ankara John R. Bass, August, 2015.

³⁹ "Turkish military wary of Erdogan plan for Syrian buffer zone", *Al-Monitor*, July 5, 2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/turkish-military-wary-erdogan-buffer-zone-syria-no-fly.html>>, 02 08 2015.

⁴⁰ "US tells PYD to respect territorial integrity of Syria", *TRT World*, July 2, 2015, <<http://beta.trtworld.com/turkey/us-tells-pyd-respect-territorial-integrity-syria-4056>>, 03 08 2015.

⁴¹ Ergan U., "Partial no-fly zone included in US-Turkey consensus: Turkish sources", *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 11, 2015, <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/partial-no-fly-zone-included-in-us-turkey-consensus.aspx?pageID=238&nID=85850&NewsCatID=510>>, 02 08 2015.

intervention would have negative consequences for AKP's chances to remain in power.⁴²

In this respect, religious and historical arguments are also important. An attack on one Sunni group could have negative outcomes for relations with other, more moderate Sunni groups (for example, al-Sham legion). After all, as Friedman notes, invasion into a state which less than 100 years ago was part of the Ottoman Empire could raise anti-Turkish feelings.⁴³

To conclude, the most prominent arguments against the intervention are a lack of battle experience in the Turkish army, the US's rejection of this idea (so far) and its support to the Kurds, and no backing from the secular part of society, as well as from some AKP members. There are also some regional structural constraints, such as the Sunni-Shia divide and the historical Ottoman legacy.

3. Arrangements of military and international law and possible implications of the intervention

Turkey's military intervention might have an important impact on Syria's civil war. In this section, we present a possible military plan for the intervention and analyse its potential implications.

As reported by the pro-government press, the aim of the intervention is to create a safe zone (or "buffer zone") in the area connecting the Kobani and Afrin cantons, to the north of Aleppo, between the cities of Jarablus and Azaz (in some sources – between Karkamis and Oncupinar).⁴⁴ Official objectives are the creation of a safe zone for refugees and the Syrian opposition. However, not only ISIS would be targeted there, but also the Kurds.

In order to intervene and create a safe zone Turkey is planning to use its Special Forces Command, the 5th Armoured Brigade at Gaziantep, the 20th Armoured Brigade at Urfa and the 2nd Tactical Air Force at Diyarbakir, which would spearhead a possible Syrian operation. In total that would be about 18 thousand troops.⁴⁵ The fact that Turkey is capable of taking initiative on its own is reflected

⁴² Friedman, (note 33).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "Turkey 'preparing' for military intervention in Syria", al-Araby, June 29, 2015, <<http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/News/2015/6/29/Turkey-preparing-for-military-intervention-in-Syria>>, 25 07 2015.

⁴⁵ Gurcan M, "Turkish military edges closer to Syria intervention", *Al-Monitor*, July 1, 2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/turkey-syria-military-intervention-countdown-army-objective.html>>, 02 08 2015.

in the precedent of Suleyman Shah tomb when Turkey organised an expedition deep into the territory of Syria and successfully transferred the tomb to safety.⁴⁶ Turkey has enough military capabilities to achieve this goal; however it would be hard to maintain the security of this zone. According to information from locals who live near the border, even now Kurdish and ISIS supporters are plotting to take advantage of open borders in order to send militants and weapons.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, for the international community, Turkey probably would try to present the intervention as an application of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle. For this reason, Turkey would have to request the UN Security Council's permission for the intervention apparently pointing at previous precedents, for example, the 2011 Libyan case. In support of this appeal, Turkey could argue that it actively participated in solving Syria's humanitarian catastrophe. What is more, information about the actions of Assad's forces could be described as war crimes and crimes against humanity, therefore the last option of R2P could be used – military intervention. Of course, Turkey could employ other arguments such as the fight against international terrorism and self-defence.

Despite that, the possibility of acquiring the support of the Security Council is very low because Assad is backed by China and Russia (nevertheless, as Russia-Turkey relations are improving, Russia states that it is open to dialogue with the anti-ISIS Syrian opposition⁴⁸ and Erdogan thinks that the Russian position to support Assad could change too⁴⁹). According to R2P, military actions without the approval of the Security Council are against international law. Nonetheless, Turkey's intervention could get support from the UN. According to Valerie Amos, a high-ranking UN official, the UN would provide humanitarian help in the safe zone.⁵⁰ That could at least partly legitimate the intervention. This could also change NATO's position and the buffer zone could become part of the anti-ISIS coalition's

⁴⁶ Orucoglu, (note 46).

⁴⁷ Banco E. "Turkish Military Intervention In Syria Threatens Border Region", *International Business Times*, June 29, 2015, <<http://www.ibtimes.com/turkish-military-intervention-syria-threatens-border-region-stability-1988502>>, 21 07 2015.

⁴⁸ Unal A., "Moscow open to dialogue with anti-ISIS Syrian opposition, says Russian envoy", *Daily Sabah*, July 19, 2015, <<http://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2015/07/19/moscow-open-to-dialogue-with-anti-isis-syrian-opposition-says-russian-envoy>>, 21 07 2015.

⁴⁹ Özer V., "Erdogan believes Putin 'may give up on' Syria's Bashar al-Assad", *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 3, 2015, <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-believes-putin-may-give-up-on-syrias-bashar-al-assad.aspx?pageID=238&nID=86320&NewsCatID=352>>, 03 08 2015.

⁵⁰ Hogg J., "U.N. would offer humanitarian support in Syria safe zones: Amos", *Reuters*, October 20, 2014, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/20/us-mideast-crisis-syria-un-idUSKCN01910720141020>>, 03 08 2015.

endeavours. Turkey could also support the intervention using the precedents of Kosovo in 1999 and Israel's fight against Hezbollah. According to the Turkish press, if Turkey were unable to achieve diplomatic backing it would implement "plan B – the model of southern Lebanon". In this case, Turkey's troops would stay in the buffer zone for a shorter period of time with the aim to train and equip the Free Syrian Army.⁵¹

As the Syrian regime would hardly be inclined to grant permission for the intervention, it would interpret it as aggression and violation of its sovereignty. Nonetheless, it is likely that no military action would be taken, as happened in Suleyman Shah tomb's case.⁵² This argument is supported by the worsening military situation of Assad's forces.⁵³ But in any case, the situation in that territory is beyond the Syrian regime's control. It is unknown how the intervention would be perceived by the other immediate fighting factions. Recent military attacks were supported by the YPG,⁵⁴ however, some information appeared that Turkey also attacked Syrian Kurds.⁵⁵ The opposition supported by Turkey welcomes such a plan because the battle against ISIS has become even tougher than the fight against Assad.

Looking at the conflict from a broader regional perspective, we can notice competition between Turkey and Iran for influence in Syria. If Assad would be removed from power, it would be a harsh blow for Iranian interests. Syria is important to Iran because it is Iran's closest ally in the region and a link to terror groups that fight against Israel. Therefore, it is important for Iran to maintain the Syrian *status quo* while Turkey's end point is to remove Assad from power.⁵⁶ Growing military and economic power (after the removal of sanctions), its geographic proximity, offensive capabilities and an Iran-Syria mutual defence

⁵¹ "Turkey 'preparing' for military intervention in Syria", *al-Araby*, June 29, 2015, <<http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/News/2015/6/29/Turkey-preparing-for-military-intervention-in-Syria>>, 22 07 2015.

⁵² Orucoglu, (note 46).

⁵³ Mohney G., "Assad Admits Syrian Army's 'Shortage of Manpower' — But Vows to Win Bloody Conflict", *Vice News*, July 26, 2015, <<https://news.vice.com/article/assad-admits-syrian-armys-shortage-of-manpower-but-vows-to-win-bloody-conflict>>, 03 08 2015.

⁵⁴ "PYD thanks Turkey for support against ISIS", *Daily Sabah*, July 26, 2015, <<http://www.dailysabah.com/nation/2015/07/26/pyd-thanks-turkey-for-support-against-isis>>, 03 08 2015.

⁵⁵ "Analysis: US-Turkey deal on Syria a big gamble", *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 3, 2015, <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/analysis-us-turkey-deal-on-syria-a-big-gamble.aspx?pageID=238&nID=86340&NewsCatID=510>>, 03 08 2015.

⁵⁶ Mohammed I., "Turkey and Iran Rivalry on Syria", *Alternatives Turkish Journal of International Relations* 10 (2-3), 2011, p. 66.

pact⁵⁷ pose a threat to Turkey and its interest in Syria. Despite that, it is unlikely that a limited intervention could lead Iran to attack Turkey. However, if Turkey was to choose to cross the limited scope of the intervention and entangle itself with Assad's forces, military response from Iran is a likely option.

All things considered, Turkey's intervention looks like a promising idea only if it has support from the UN Security Council. As we have seen, without it the principle of R2P could not be implemented. What's more, it could possibly escalate the conflict to an even higher level, as confrontation with prominent Syrian regime supporters seems likely. And in any case, it is unclear how successfully humanitarian help could be provided in a unilateral intervention.

However, if the intervention gained support from the Security Council then Turkey together with the international community could bring much-needed help in this humanitarian catastrophe. It might ease the humanitarian situation in Syria and diminish the flow of immigrants to Turkey and the EU. The intervention could be even more effective if it would be conducted in cooperation with an intervention by Jordan. This coordinated action with Jordan could be a blow to ISIS, which is already losing ground (although slowly).⁵⁸ It would also provide support for the so far not very successful moderate Syrian opposition. If Turkey could obtain support from the Security Council, Iran might be forestalled to act against it.

All in all, Turkey has enough military capabilities and a plan of how to proceed with the intervention. Turkey is likely to justify its intervention on the principle of R2P and such arguments as the fight against international terrorism and the right to self-defence. It also could go ahead with the intervention even without the approval of the Security Council, while pointing at existing precedents. Jordan is also considering an intervention and there might be cooperation between the two countries. Looking from the regional perspective, it is important to note the competition between Turkey and Iran for influence in Syria and the fact that Syria and Iran have signed a mutual defence pact. In order to receive successful outcomes from the intervention, the Security Council's support would be greatly beneficial.

⁵⁷ "Iran, Syria sign defense agreement", *Ynew News*, June 16, 2015, <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3263739,00.html>>, 03 08 2015.

⁵⁸ Beauchamp Z., "Map: ISIS has lost 9.4 percent of its territory this year", *Vox World*, July 30, 2015, <<http://www.vox.com/2015/7/30/9069705/isis-map-10-percent>>, 16 08 2015.

Conclusions

The foreign policy of the ruling AKP is critical of traditional Turkey's non-interference to Middle Eastern matters and seeks active engagement in the region. This view is based on "civilizational geopolitics", which is in turn grounded not on traditional geopolitical, economic or power politics insights but rather on historical and religious arguments, neo-Ottomanism and Islam. AKP describes this new approach as diversification of foreign policy and stresses that Turkey is an independent actor whose interests do not necessarily coincide with the West's position. It is on these grounds that the "Zero problems with neighbours" strategy is based, and it was functioning well until the start of Arab protests.

Turkey's ambitions to be a "central state" and actively engage in the region led to entanglement in the Syrian crisis. After the start of the active anti-terror campaign, Turkey's rigid position in the conflict is even more visible. From the beginning of the Syrian civil war, Turkey pursued the idea of a buffer/no-fly/safe zone in order to protect civilians and support anti-Assad rebels. However, right now in the anti-terror campaign not only an answer to threats is visible but also the AKP party's ambitions to get more support in possible snap elections. Turkey is aiming not only to fight against ISIS but also to disrupt consolidation of Syria's Kurdish territories. Establishment of the buffer zone would help to achieve those aims and also likely to help solve the humanitarian crisis.

While there are many arguments for and against the intervention, the most prominent are the AKP leaders' push for it and weakening Turkish military resistance to the idea. The precarious humanitarian situation also works as an incentive in this regard. The main contra argument is US rejection of an intervention and its support for the Syrian Kurds fighting against ISIS. However, the US position could change as the situation is constantly in flux.

As this article was being written (in the middle of August, 2015) the possibility of Turkey's intervention is a little less than medium. Nevertheless, it rests heavily on the quickly changing circumstances and especially on the US position about Syria's territorial integrity. If tactical firing in Syria's territory and punishing measures for PKK would not be enough for Turkey, it would probably ask for a sitting of the UN Security Council in order to discuss threats emanating from Syria and the legitimization of its humanitarian and defensive actions. The possibility of the UN Security Council's permission for the intervention is small, but Turkey has its own capabilities to conduct a unilateral intervention. Later on it could be justified on humanitarian grounds and existing precedents.

The Syrian regime would condemn the intervention, but it is likely that no military action would be taken against Turkey. If the intervention would be limited in its scope then it is unlikely that Iran would employ its military in order to protect its ally. It is also possible to observe some changes in Russia's position to support Assad.

The UN Security Council's approval would greatly enhance the chances of the intervention to be successful. Double intervention in cooperation with Jordan could be even more successful. Interventions could provide a blow to ISIS positions and might eventually bring nearer the end of the Syrian crisis. However, without the approval of the Security Council, the intervention could even further reduce stability in the region.