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Sway on a Tightrope: The Development of a Mutualistic Relationship between Turkey and DAESH

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ABSTRACT

The Arab revolts have changed the regional balances. Syria is one of the particular examples of these changes. The shifting balances also presented ideal ground for the identities that have been suppressed throughout years. In addition to Al-Qaeda, new version of jihadism appeared at the stage which is known as Daesh. In this research, one intends to comprehend Turkey's interaction with Daesh in the context of Syrian Civil War to shed light on the evolution of the global jihadism. Ankara has perceived Syria problem at first an opportunity to establish its domination over Syria later it turned into the web of entanglement relations which has changed Turkey's a century long standing policy in the Middle East and initiated sets of reactive policies to handle the short term problems. The US and Russia agreed to suppress Daesh with the collaboration of various local groups. However, Daesh is far beyond being just a terrorist organization but a new version of the jihadist ideology which holds the remanences of prior jihadist groups.

Keywords: Daesh, Turkey, ISIS, ISIL, Jihadism, Kurds, Terrorism, Radicalization, Networks

İp Üstünde Cambazlık: Türkiye ve DAESH İlişkisinin Gelişimi

ÖZET

Arap isyanlarıyla birlikte bölgesel dengeler değişti. Suriye bu değişimlerin özel örneklerinden birisidir. Değişen dengeler yıllar boyunca bastırılan kimliklerin kendini gösterebilmesi için ideal bir zemin oluşturdu. El Kaide'ye ek olarak, cihatçılığın yeni versiyonu Daeş sahnede yerini aldı. Bu araştırma Türkiye'nin Suriye iç savaşı bağlamında Daeş ile etkileşimini anlamayı hedefliyor. Bu etkileşim de küresel cihadın ne yöne evrildiğini anlamamıza yardımcı edecektir. Ankara başta durumu Suriye üzerinde hâkimiyet kurma fırsatı olarak okudu. Sonrasında, Suriye'deki durum Türkiye'nin uzun yıllardır devam eden Ortadoğu politikasını değiştiren karmaşık ilişkiler ağına dönüştü ve Ankara kısa vadeli sorunların üstesinden gelmek için bir dizi reaktif politikalar başlattı. ABD ve Rusya, çeşitli yerel gruplarla işbirliği yaparak Daeş'i bastırmayı kabul etti. Bununla birlikte, Daeş bir terör örgütü olmanın ötesinde, önceki mücahit grupların ideallerini de sürdüren cihatçı ideolojinin yeni bir versiyonudur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: DAESH, Türkiye, ISIS, ISIL, Cihatçılık, Kürtler, Terörizm, Radikalleşme, Ağlar

This paper¹ presents the historical timeline to understand the emergence of *Daesh* and its interaction with Turkey in the context of the Syrian Civil War. A thorough understanding of the war is veiled behind the chaotic relations among the actors and their alliances. The literature on *Daesh* presents it with no account of its history and of its position with the alliances on the ground. Even though the organization has been suppressed by several militaries and militias, its continuing presence and the new phase of the jihadist ideology suggest that future manifestations with similar inspirations will continue to affect the global scene. To recapitulate the events pivoting around the interaction between Turkey and *Daesh* would assist us to better understand such global implications.

The Syrian Civil War and continuing conundrum affected not only the Middle East but also other regions. In the early days of the Syrian Civil war, the global community was unsure how to handle the clash among different ethnic groups. As the calamities and problems in Libya and the results of the U.S. incursion into Iraq continued, power broker states were reluctant to take a position in the Syrian conflict. In the International Relations literature, ongoing interventions and their results had already initiated intellectual discussions on the liberty-security equilibrium and on whether the international system would choose between chaos and a corrupted order.

Another problem was the unique position of Syria. In a country ruled by an Alawite minority for decades despite the Sunni majority population, the Syrian power elite historically supported Iranian policies in the Middle East. As the self-declared protector of the Shiite community in Syria, Iran was involved in the Syrian civil war early on. Turkey acted as another key actor, which had considered Syria as a threat during the Cold War but dramatically changed its position by late 1990's. Some researchers interpreted this shift as a 'desecuritization' process but the brief honeymoon would end in disgrace.

After the Arab Springs, a new form of terrorism, which was supported by the masses and held a *sui generis* ideology following the collapse of nation-states, was introduced to the international system. The international interventions to these sporadic movements catalyzed the metamorphosis of new terror groups. Ordinary, righteous and democratic public protests evolved into civil wars with no sure prediction on they would end or into which form they would transform. These social quagmire occasions provoked the Cold War rulers who were equipped with power and technological capabilities and maintained the illusion of shifting the events in the direction of their aspirations.

In the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, two major parties, one led by Bashar Al-Assad representing the *Ba'ath* regime and its sub-national interest groups, and the other by the opposition formed by Syrian civilians, existed. The initial prediction was that the power superiority and capacity of the regime would suppress the uprising of Syrian civilians. The war, as proved later, would have varied effects on different actors, such as Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, the Kurds, *Hizballah* in the region; and on the U.S., Russia, China, Germany, France and Britain, at the global level. Each actor promoted its own agenda by maximizing its own power. Thus, each moved to control the outcome to its advantage. One of the well-known moves was to carry different grade weapons into the conflict region to challenge the power balances at the local level and

1 I greatly appreciate to Sevinç Rende and Teoman Türeli for reading versions of this paper.

to form an organized resistance movement and debilitate the capability of the Assad regime. Students of International Relations observed similar strategies in different conflicts, such as in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya, and Iraq.

Yet, the *Al-Qaeda* offshoot organizations, *Al-Nusra* and *Ahrar al-Sham*, emerged in Syria quicker than expected as the products of unpredictable components. All states with connections to the Jihadi networks knew that these fighters would join any conflict as long as it was ideologically fitting. It was the appearance of *Daesh* in the middle of the Syrian Civil War, and its challenging of the world order and the nation-state concept, that upended the established balances in the region.

Unlike Turkey, most of the involved states and actors do not share a long border with Syria. Therefore, Turkey witnessed all the problems of proximity and involvement, as Pakistan did during the Afghan war. With this background, this research aims to examine Turkey's interaction with *Daesh* and its policy towards the organization through the series of events and within the tangled relationships of several actors in the context of the Syrian Civil War. What were the consequences of this mutual relationship? More specifically, how did the interaction between Turkey and *Daesh* change during the sequence of events in the Syrian Civil war? Finally, in what ways would the emergence of *Daesh* help us to understand the future of terror organizations?

Globalization of Jihad

The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan had caused the emergence of an experienced jihadist culture. When the conflict ended, some fighters returned to their prior life in their home countries. Other fighters stayed behind, because either their adaptation would not be possible or their names appeared in the terrorist lists. Following the Afghan war, those who never returned, fought in Chechnya, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Iraq and Libya. With each conflict, these jihadists accumulated experience with improved levels of sophistication, such as expertise in finance, forging documents, counterfeit currency, hiding places, means of secret communication, information and its technology, arms and ammunition and transportation.²

The emergence of *Al-Qaeda* was the most remarkable development following the Afghan war. Its Salafi oriented jihadi culture, multinational membership and eclectic strategic mindset became evident after 9/11. Today a vast literature exists on *Al-Qaeda* and its operational code. The U.S. incursion into Iraq in 2003 was another milestone in the popularization of jihadi culture. The jihadi networks in Iraq, thus, emerged with a new syncretic formulation in the Middle East regional security complex.

Spread of the Arab Spring to Syria and Turkey

Before the end of the U.S. intervention in Iraq, the Middle East and North Africa witnessed the self-immolation of Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi to protest the economic situation which initiated a series of uprisings. Marc Lynch's article in *Foreign Policy* coined the term 'Arab Spring' for these

2 See, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/terrorism/alqaida_manual/ (Accessed on 23 January 2017).

movements which have been extensively discussed in the literature.³ In the Turkish public and academic discourse, the Arab Spring was seen as a movement limited in North Africa. Following the heydays of the uprisings, Erdogan even visited the post Arab Spring states, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. The media interpreted his visits as “Ankara is seeking to consolidate its growing influence in a region shaken by the Arab Spring.”⁴ The visits enabled the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government to cultivate relations with the new actors in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in North Africa. Turkey’s eagerness to lead an order-establisher role in the region beyond its capacity was already in motion.⁵

At the beginning of the Syrian Civil war, it was not clear on whether the protests were minor clashes against the Assad regime or an extension of the Arab Spring. The mixed reports blinded the international and regional actors who would later become involved in the conflict and provide various types of assistance to the groups on the ground. Ankara too had limited foresight that the spark of the Arab Spring would flare up close to its borders. The initial impression in Ankara was that of modest public protests against the Assad regime. However, Ankara’s neutral stance quickly turned into support for the protestors. In the early days of the events in Syria, Erdogan said that Turkey had waited for a long time to see a change but its patience ended, adding “in addition to our cultural, historical and kinship ties, we share an 850 km physical border with Syria; therefore, what is happening there does not permit us to just observe (follow).”⁶ This approach expedited Turkey’s involvement in the Syrian civil war against the Assad regime.

Formation of a Jihadist Culture

During the Cold war, Islam was utilized to slow down the expansion of communism. In the Middle East, Shiite groups were seen as the main supporters of the leftist ideology. The rise of a socialist movement in Iran was prevented through coup attempts. The rise of socialist movements in Pakistan, where the second largest Shiite population in the world resides, alarmed Washington in the 1970’s. To counteract these movements, the U.S. motivated its allies to promote the Sunnification activities. Saudi Arabia sponsored and supported Zia ul-Haq who “integrated and prioritized Hanafi *fiqh* in the constitution, which mobilized Shia resistance in Pakistan.”⁷ Pakistani authorities formed a protective belt against the Shiite Pan-Islamist expansion by building Sunni mosques and madrassahs along the Iranian border. The mainly Saudi-backed *Deobandi* madrassahs,

3 March Lynch, “Obama’s Arab Spring?,” Foreign Policy, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/01/06/obamas-arab-spring/> (Accessed on 2 September 2016).

4 “Erdogan due in Egypt for ‘Arab Spring’ tour”, Al-Jazeera, 12 September 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/09/201191243431508181.html> (Accessed on 23 September 2016).

5 Osman Bahadır Dinçer and Mustafa Kutlay, *Turkey’s Power Capacity in the Middle East*, International Strategic Research Organization, Ankara, 2012.

6 Can İzbul, “Erdogan Suriye iç meselemiz gereğini yapmak durumundayız”, VOA, 7 August 2011, <https://www.amerikaninsesi.com/a/erdogan-suriye-ic-meselemiz-gereğini-yapmak-durumundayiz-127078293/898713.html> (Accessed on 3 September 2017); Hasan Ay, “Erdogan: Suriye’de sabrın sonuna geldik”, Sabah, 7 August 2011, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2011/08/07/erdogan-suriyede-sabrin-sonuna-geldik> (Accessed on 3 September 2017).

7 Thomas K. Gugler, “From Kalashnikov to keyboard: Pakistan’s Jihadiscapes and the Transformation of Lashkar-e Tayba”, Rüdiger Lohker (ed.) *New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism: Online and Offline*, Vienna University Press, 2012, p.39. For further information on the Deobandi madrassahs, see Masooda Bano, “Beyond Politics: the Reality of a Deobandi Madrasa in Pakistan”, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol.18, No.1, 2007, p.43-68.

leading a reformed Islam in Pakistan, were chosen as pivot actors⁸. The *Deobandi* madrassahs sent mullahs to Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Kuwait to train scholars and turned Pakistan into a cradle of the jihadi ideology.

By early 1980s, another proxy war, the Soviet-Afghan war, helped to legitimize the culture of Sunni fighters and enabled Zia ul-Haq to transform Pakistan into a center of U.S.-funded Sunni Islamism which represented a religious nationalism. As the *Deoband* madrassahs cultivated the Sunni jihadism of Afghan mujahedeen, the long-lasting war popularized jihadi culture. Countries sent fighters to help in the Soviet-Afghan war, which was perceived as the fight of Muslims against the Communist Russia.

From the Culture of Global Jihadism to the Emergence of *Daesh*

One of the most intriguing questions on the Syrian Civil War is how the jihadist groups emerged so quickly. The U.S. incursion into Iraq in 2003 was instrumental in awakening the Salafi jihadist channels and connections in Syria. In those years, President Bush's policy, with the 'Axis of Evil' rhetoric, underlined a possible expansion of the U.S. military actions. The military campaign that began in Afghanistan extended to Iraq. The impression was that the campaign would eventually move to Syria and Iran, targeting Tehran's sovereignty. Iran already had the channels to rattle the nerves of the military coalition in Afghanistan, but the 2003 Iraq incursion was different. As the cradle of Shiite theology with its *hawzas*, Iraq was a critical component of Iranian politics. Iran thus enlisted Syria to help in transiting the *mujahedeen* from Afghanistan to Iraq who would fight against the U.S. military, while Washington pressured Iran on its nuclear enrichment plans. The quick emergence of *Al-Nusrah* and *Ahrar al-Sham* first in Iraq and then in Syria was a consequence of Iran's strategy.

Daesh

The organization which later named itself as *Daesh* (*Dawlat al-Islamiyya fi Iraq vash Sham*) was the product of the jihadist networks in Iraq. It emerged as an extension of *Al-Qaeda*, only later to evolve into a unique organization. The background of *Daesh* goes back to "*Jamaat al-Tawhid wal Jihad*", an organization under the command of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi⁹ who was associated with *Al-Qaeda* operatives in Afghanistan in 1999. In October 2004, the group reemerged in Iraq under another name '*Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn*'. Even though the groups changed names, the leadership of al-Zarqawi was common in all Iraqi insurgency groups. Al-Zarqawi unified the Sunni groups by establishing a *Mujahideen Shura Council* (MSC) in January 2006. After he died, the MSC announced the formation of the *Al-dawla al-Islamiyya fi al-'Iraq* (Islamic State in Iraq, ISI) under the leadership of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir in October 2006. ISI was an active insurgency group in Iraq until the U.S. withdrawal in 2011. Within this period, Syria helped the jihadist groups in Iraq which resisted the U.S. military.

8 Muhammad Moj, *The Deoband Madrassah movement*, Anthem Press, 2015, p.104–111.

9 Jean-Charles Brisard, *Zarqawi: The new face of Al-Qaeda*, Polity, 2005, p.97-202.

After the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, a group of ISI fighters moved to Syria to fight under the banner of *Jabhat an-Nusra*. Their support for Sunni groups in Syria continued until the union of the jihadist groups. In May 2013, the ISI merged with *Jabhat al-Nusra*, and changed its name to *Al-dawla al-Islamiyya fi al-'Iraq wal-Sham* (*Daesh*-Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, ISIS). The name represented the group's shorthand for itself— 'the Islamic State' (*al-Dawla al-Islamiyya*), or merely "the State" (*al-Dawla*).

In 2013, *Al-Qaeda*'s General Command released a message to disown *Daesh* that "[it] is not a branch of the al-Qaeda group... does not have an organizational relationship with [al-Qaeda] and [al-Qaeda] is not responsible for their actions."¹⁰ For the first time, the *Al-Qaeda* leadership formally repudiated an affiliate. In July 2014, *Daesh* declared Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to be the caliph and the "leader for Muslims everywhere."¹¹ With this move, the organization declared its characteristics and goals which distinguished it from its predecessors. *Daesh* emerged as a hybrid and syncretic jihadist construction to establish a "lasting and expanding" caliphate with a territorial claim.¹² It would manipulate ethno-sectarian fissures at the regional level in order to rule at a larger scale. The organization aimed to create chaos, and fed on chaos, as a weapon to dismantle the regional nation-states. This chaotic environment promoted the group's identity and attracted members from around the globe.

In the early days of the Syrian Civil War, the ISI invited Uzbeks, Chechens, Uyghurs and other *jihadi* groups to Syria. These *mujahideen* groups and individuals who had never been exposed to jihadism until their exposure on social media channels would first appear at the *Dawah* (Islamic preaching) offices in different cities. This was a *modus operandi* of *Daesh* to expand its structure without facing open resistance. In 2012, these offices coordinated non-Iraqi members of ISI in Syria. As such, the human resource of *Daesh* constituted two major groups; former *mujahedeen* (fighters) who were experienced in conflicts all over the world and the curious and enthusiastic *muhajirun* (immigrants) from different countries with no experience. According to the UN estimations, at least 22,000 foreign fighters from 100 countries, including approximately 4,000 from Western Europe, traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight for *Daesh* and other groups. A major challenge for the organization was to harmonize these groups and create a self-sustaining society. Children under age 15 would be educated under a special curriculum, and males older than age 15 would be trained in military camps. The new generation would be transnational and more talented in utilizing terror techniques and tools than the previous generation.

To achieve its geographical expansion *Daesh* developed a strategic outlook in three categories:

- 1- Inner zone to defend and expand the territories: included local perspectives in Iraq and Syria and control in nearby areas,

10 Liz Sly, "Al-Qaeda disavows any ties with radical Islamist ISIS group in Syria, Iraq", *Washington Post*, 3 February 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/al-qaeda-disavows-any-ties-with-radical-islamist-isis-group-in-syria-iraq/2014/02/03/2c9afc3a-8cef-11e3-98ab-fe5228217bd1_story.html?utm_term=.af526801c080 (Accessed on 12 January 2017).

11 "ISIS rebels declare Islamic State in Iraq and Syria", *BBC News*, 30 June 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28082962> (Accessed on 30 October 2015).

12 Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery (Idarat al-Tavhish): The Most Critical Stage through Which the Umma Will Pass*, William McCants (trans.), the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, 23 May 2006.

- 2- Vicinity zone to establish emirates: included a regional perspective in the Middle East and Africa while cultivating a chaotic environment,
- 3- Extended periphery zone to polarize the political setting and to attack civilians: included a global perspective in Europe, America and Asia¹³ exploiting possible vulnerabilities.

Daesh operated in the inner zone and quickly spread to vicinity and extended periphery zones. Today, even though *Daesh* rules a limited territory, its footprints are observed in several spots across the globe.

The Rise of *Daesh*

The rise of *Daesh* was intertwined with the environment created by the U.S. withdrawal in Iraq. The sectarian policies of Maliki frustrated the Sunni population in Iraq where the presence of *Al-Qaeda* was instrumental in the emergence of *Daesh*. As one researcher stated; “Many of the tribes in the province are repulsed by the radical organizations, but at the same time, they do not trust the Iraqi government and security forces, which are largely Shiite. The fact that the ISIS is able to pay salaries – even if minimal – to local residents leads many to join its ranks.”¹⁴ By manipulating this anger to increase its manpower, *Daesh* initiated more aggressive attacks.¹⁵ Between July 2012 and July 2013, *Daesh* led a campaign of ‘breaking the walls’ with 24 major VBIEDs and 8 Prison attacks in Iraq.¹⁶ These series of attacks corrupted the stability in Iraq and helped the organization to harvest the necessary manpower. When the campaign ended, *Daesh* amassed a significant power to fight on different fronts.¹⁷ About six months later, *Daesh* would control first Fallujah on 4 January 2014, then Raqqa on 14 January 2014.

In this period, *Daesh*’s expansion into Syrian territory disturbed *Jabhat al-Nusra* (also *Al-Qaeda*). The leader of *al-Nusra*, Abu Mohammad Al-Julani, renounced their connection to *Daesh*. On the surface, this was interpreted as a personality issue between Baghdadi and Al-Julani, but in fact *Al-Nusra* attempted to differentiate itself from a popular jihadist movement bearing little dignity. The populism however captured other *Al-Qaeda* affiliated organizations around the world as they sought to connect with *Daesh*. Meanwhile, within its eclectic structure, *Daesh* established a system in Raqqa and Aleppo to assimilate the new recruits. Careful observers noted that *Daesh* expanded by establishing three different zones in Syria and Iraq; its control zones, attack zones and support zones. During the expansion, *Daesh* fought and/or cooperated with different actors in the field. These major actors were the tribal gunmen that cooperated with the Iraqi government, miscellaneous armed groups which fought against the U.S. forces and the Salafi organizations that were forming various alliances.

13 Aaron Y. Zelin, “The Islamic State’s Territorial Methodology”, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2016, No.29, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote29-Zelin.pdf> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

14 Erez Striem - Yoel Guzansky, “The Battle for Anbar, the war for Iraq”, *INSS Insight*, No.506, 13 January 2014, p.2

15 For the expansion of *Daesh*, see; <https://youtu.be/EyY1Bgst07U> (Accessed on 21 September 2017).

16 Aki Peritz, “The Great Iraqi Jail Break”, *Foreign Policy*, 26 June 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/26/the-great-iraqi-jail-break/> (Accessed on 5 March 2016).

17 Jessica D. Lewis, “Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent. The Breaking the Walls Campaign”, Institute for the Study of War, 2013, p.13.

Early Days of Syria

In the early days of the Syrian conflict, there was a chaotic, unclear situation and an irrational expectation for the quick removal of the Assad regime. Yet, early on, Ankara had lost its desire for cooperating with the Syrian regime for a peaceful transition. The AKP government had its own reasons to take this position. In one of the intergroup meetings of the AKP, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Davutoglu told the audience that he had paid 61 visits to Syria and stated that he had warned the regime that “Turkey will not be allied with any country that is persecuting its own people.” He added, “... we warned the Syria[n regime] and had a consensus on a 14-article road map. They were going to move ahead on these subjects to facilitate (reinforce) the exercise of fundamental freedoms, to implement free elections, and to accept the Kurdish identity. However they have not done so yet. Although, Syria is a Muslim country, we showed the same reaction to the demolition of the mosques in Syria, as we had when the Serbs destroyed the mosques in Bosnia, and Israel destroyed the mosques in Palestine.”¹⁸ This speech indicated that Turkey had set its position against the Assad regime.

According to Davutoglu, after 61 visits to Damascus to convince Assad to take action towards a democratic transition, no option was left but to support the alternative formations such as the Syrian National Council (*Al-Majlis al-Watani al-Suri*), which was an umbrella organization aiming to unite the Syrian opposition in 2011.

In the early stages of the confrontation, the Jihadist groups in Syria claimed that they had to use primitive weapons, such as homemade bows and arrows, crossbows, advanced slingshots, Molotov cocktails, air rifles and pellet guns with metal pellets¹⁹, to fight against the Syrian regime. Their limited weapon capacity was not enough to resist the Syrian regime forces which used modern military resources. Campaigns over social media covering the regime attacks against the civilians shifted Ankara’s support into a belligerent mode which aligned with Turkey’s claim to being the protector in the Middle East. Summarizing Turkey’s prompt intervention in the conflict on its border, Ruthven observed that “The intensity of the media war was increased by events such as the slaughter in Houla, northeast of Homs, in May 2012, which was widely blamed on the regime’s *Shabiha* thugs. Support for the rebels with arms and money, provided by the Gulf states and Turkey, accelerated the “sectarianization” of the conflict.”²⁰ Thus, the conflict exploded after Iran positioned with the Assad regime and the Sunni alignment supported the opposition groups on the ground.

Obama Administration

The Obama administration was unclear about how to deal with the problem in Syria but acted decisive about not sending the U.S. military to another Middle Eastern country. The Obama administration had discussed even “what is actually at stake in Syria.”²¹ One tactic of the U.S. administration was to

18 “Davutoğlu: Esad’a 61 kez gittim sözünü tutmadı”, *Ensonhaber*, 17 October 2011, <http://www.ensonhaber.com/davutoglu-esada-61-kez-gittim-sozunu-tutmadi-2011-10-17.html> (Accessed on 12 January 2017).

19 For further details, see *Daesh* online publication: *How to survive in the West: A Mujahid Guide*, 2015, p.23.

20 Malise Ruthven, “How to understand ISIS”, *New York Review of Books*, 23 June 2016, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/06/23/how-to-understand-isis/> (Accessed on 27 September 2016); Fawaz A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History*, Princeton University Press, 2016, p.411–484.

21 “INSIGHT - military intervention in Syria, post withdrawal status of forces”, released on 2012-03-06 07:00 GMT” <https://search.wikileaks.org/gifiles/emailid/1671459> (Accessed on 21 August 2017).

finance and arm the rebel groups as they had done in Afghanistan. Thus a consensus among Obama administration and Ankara was “to finance and arm the so-called moderate rebel groups” without any consideration of their extremism.²² In time, this policy shifted to the provision of technical arms and logistical programs for all of the opposition including *Jabhat al-Nusra* and the groups which would form *Daesh*. The desire to topple the Assad regime eventually led the U.S. and Turkey to cooperate even with known jihadist groups.

Ankara tried to learn from the Libyan intervention which had destroyed the social structure as, after the removal of Qaddafi, tribal rivalry had created a failed state. Ankara did not want to let Syria dissolve as was the case in Libya. The Syria Civil War also reminded of the Iraq experience when Ankara had a limited influence on the ground and implemented a reactive policy which had barely changed the sequence of the events. Turkey had to take a position on Syria because of the geographical proximity and the 911 km long common border.

The shift in the Obama administration’s stance completely altered Turkey’s relations and decisions in the Syrian conflict. The capricious decision of the U.S. to send troops to Syria pushed Turkey to find solutions on its own, without support. The vital pillars constituted Ankara’s plans in Syria: to topple down the Assad regime, to stop Syrian Kurds from forming a political setting and to fight against *Daesh*. However, each item entailed different consequences as the events developed at an unexpected pace.

The leader of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) Colonel Hussein Mustapha Harmush’s abduction was one of the early remarkable cases in Ankara’s involvement. On 9 June 2011, Colonel Harmush was placed in the Altınözü shelter in Hatay, Turkey. After the Syrian army announced the prize of 100.000 USD on Harmush, the Turkish authorities noticed the disappearance of Harmush. When a Syrian TV channel broadcasted Harmush’s apologetic interview, it was clear that Harmush was abducted and delivered to the Syrian Army by several members of the Turkish Intelligence Services for the bounty²³.

The case compelled Ankara to consider that the geographical proximity might harm Turkey more than they had expected. As a result, the Turkish government and intelligence apparatus aimed to form a moderate opposition to fight against the Assad regime. While doing so, however, Turkey heeded few rules and ethical values other than gaining victory in the field. In this new strategy Turkey was hardly alone, and not the only decision-maker in the Syrian conflict. The U.S., Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, *Hizballah* and Israel were involved as well. But it was Turkey that during its interaction with *Daesh* changed or was forced to change its position in response to the strategies of the secondary and tertiary actors.

The Reyhanlı Attack

One of the first attacks toward Turkey on its border was the Reyhanlı attack. On 11 May 2013, two bomb-loaded cars 600 meters apart exploded within 2 minutes in Reyhanlı, Hatay, a town near the

22 Seymour M. Hersh, “Military to Military: US intelligence sharing in the Syrian war”, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n01/seymour-m-hersh/military-to-military> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

23 “Suriyeli Albayı kaçırma planı”, *Haber7*, 21 February 2012, <http://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/847189-suriyeli-albaya-kacirma-plani> (Accessed on 4 April 2017).

Syrian border. The explosions killed 53 people. These attacks were perceived a continuation of the previous attack at the Cilvegözü customs point. On 11 February 2013, in the buffer zone in Cilvegözü, a bomb loaded car had exploded and killed 24 people. The Turkish law enforcement authorities concluded that the *muhabbarat* (military intelligence) of the Syrian regime had planned the Cilvegözü attack.²⁴ The Reyhanlı attack was denounced as a regime plot too. Later, this conclusion was revised when a leftist hacker group, RedHack, released documents claiming that the intelligence services had intel on the possible vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED) pointing to the *Al-Nusra* organization²⁵. On 18 September 2013, *Daesh* took control of A'zaz from the FSA and became a counterpart at the Turkish - Syrian border. After the victory, *Daesh* claimed responsibility for the bombing in Reyhanlı and threatened Erdoğan with further "series of suicide attacks (*istishhadiya*)" if the government did not open the border gates in Bab al-Hawa (Cilvegözü) and Bab al-Salameh (Öncüpınar).²⁶

After the Cilvegözü and Reyhanlı attacks, the government elevated the security measures at these border crossings. The devastating Reyhanlı attack stimulated discussions in Turkey on whether to add *Daesh* to the list of terrorist organizations. Yet, the comments and speeches by the politicians displayed confusion if not sympathy towards the organization.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council (UNSC) decided in accordance with resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) to impose a series of sanctions to prevent the growth of *Daesh*. These sanctions primarily regulated financing, mobilization (human resources) and the war capacity of terror organizations and aimed to paralyze *Daesh*, *Al-Nusra*, *Ahrar al-Sham*, and similar organizations in Syria. The financial sources of terrorist organizations have been one of the major discussion points in the international counter-terrorism strategies. The UNSC ordered its members to freeze the assets of persons and companies connected in any way to the activities of terror organizations. The UNSC sanction also required the members to ban the travels into or transits through their territories to Syria to stop new recruitments. The last sanction targeted the firepower of *Daesh* by imposing an embargo on the direct or indirect supply, sale and transfer of arms or related material of all types, spare parts, and technical advice, assistance or training related to military activities.²⁷

On 30 September 2013, the Council of Ministers in Ankara endorsed the first sanction of the UNSC.²⁸ With this decision, Ankara added *Daesh* in the list of terrorist organizations.²⁹ Actually, in the list, *Daesh* was named under the *Al-Qaeda* in Iraq and other variations such 'Islamic State of Iraq'

24 "Cilvegözü Saldırısı soruşturması tamamlandı", *Radikal*, 06 August 2013, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/cilvegozu-saldirisi-sorusturmasi-tamamlandi-1145151/> (Accessed on 02 August 2017).

25 "Redhack belgelerine göre Reyhanlı'da El Nusra parmağı var", *T24*, 22 May 2013, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/redhack-belgelerine-gore-reyhanlidada-el-nusra-parmagi-var,230442> (Accessed on 18 April 2015).

26 "Dawlat al-Islam fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham tatabanna tafjirat al-Rihaniya wa tahdid Erdogan bi silsilah min hajamat al-istishhadiya", *Radio Nawa*, 30 September 2013, <http://ar.radionawa.comDetail.aspx?id=78234&LinkID=63&Aspx>.

27 Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999) 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Isil (Da'esh) Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals Groups Undertakings and Entities, <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1267> (Accessed on 9 May 2016).

28 "Bakanlar Kurulu Kararı 2013/5428", *Resmi Gazete*, 10 October 2013, No 28791, <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2013/10/20131010-1.htm> (Accessed on 21 June 2017).

29 To understand the volatile environment of the armed groups, see <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/maps/view/syria>.

but not with its full name as the 'Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant' (*Ad dawla al-Islamiyah fi'l Iraq wa'sh Sham*). *Jabhat al-Nusra* also appeared in the list.³⁰ The decision targeted only the freezing of the assets of the terrorist organizations including *Daesh* to comply with Turkish Law No. 6415 on the Prevention of the Financing of Terrorism. Ankara ignored the other two sanctions that the UNSC had underlined.

Weeks after Ankara's approval of the first sanction, a reporter for a Turkish national newspaper reported several claims of trafficking weapons and materials to Syria which could be used in explosive devices.³¹ Similar claims were repeated in one of the reports of the Conflict Armament Research center.³² Following these claims, Osman Korutürk, an MP of the Republican People's Party (CHP) presented written Parliamentary Questions to validate these claims.³³ The response of the relevant public offices repeated the previously circulated and vague press releases.³⁴ To defend Turkey, the Minister of Defense claimed that the materials transferred would support sports activities in Syria.

In addition to the arms issue, other issues were the travel bans and security at the borders. Turkey was a transit country as most of the foreign fighters arrived by air and crossed to Syria by land. To prevent the entry of the fighters to Turkey, Ankara established Risk Assessment teams at the Atatürk and Sabiha Gökçen Airports in early 2014. In principle, the teams assessed the passengers fitting in a foreign fighter stereotype. The teams in some cases returned suspected passengers to their originating country on the same plane they had arrived. In several incidents, the suspected passengers allowed entry but tailed by the police.

The second point was the Syrian border. The 907 km border was ineffective to prevent illegal entry from and to Syria. More than the ordinary smugglers, professional organizations aided by the meticulous planning of *Daesh* cells in Turkey intensified the problem.³⁵ To facilitate border crossing, *Daesh* even prepared a book, titled 'Hijrah to the Islamic State', and described the ways and means of travelling into Syria. The book stated that traveling to Syria from Turkey was trouble free between 2012 and 2014. Between 2014 and late 2015, the recruits traveling to Turkey would contact their Twitter friend;³⁶ who would accompany them to the Akçakale (Tal Abyad) border crossing point. The book instructed the crossing to Syria as "There is no border crossing here, but there may be guards on the long border. Travelers must look around and if the coast is clear, run

30 <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2013/10/20131010-1-1.pdf>.

31 Tolga Tanış, "Deaş'ın Türk Malı Potasyum Nitratları", *Hürriyet*, 18 December 2016, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/tolga-tanis/deasin-turk-mali-potasyum-nitratlari-40310131>; Tolga Tanış, "Silah Ustası Türkiye", *Hürriyet*, 12 January 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/silah-ustasi-turkiye-25550887>; Tolga Tanış, "Suriye'ye Silahın Belgesi", *Hürriyet*, 15 Aralık 2013, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/suriye-ye-silahin-belgesi-25361801>; "O Tırlarda un değil silah vardı", *Aydınlık*, 11 May 2014, <http://www.aydinlikgazete.com/mansetler/o-tirlarda-un-degil-silah-vardi-h40238.html> (Accessed on 21 May 2017).

32 *Conflict Armament Research, Tracing of the supply of components used in Islamic State IED's*, London, 2016.

33 Osman Korutürk Soru Yönergesi, No.266141, 6 January 2014, <http://www2.tbmm.gov.tr/d24/7/7-36004sgc.pdf> (Accessed on 23 December 2017).

34 Bülent Sarıoğlu, "Suriye'ye giden silahlar spor amaçlı", *Hürriyet*, 17 December 2013, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/suriye-ye-giden-silahlar-spor-amacli-25379566> (Accessed on 12 November 2017).

35 There are several indictments presented to Turkish courts give details of these trips. For further information see, İsmail Saymaz, *Türkiye'de IŞİD*, İstanbul, İletişim, 2017, p.75-136.

36 *Hijrah to Islamic State*, Islamic State, 2015, p.47.

into Syria as fast as they can, then get into the car of a friend to go to Raqqa". In the interviews, *Daesh* members claimed that border officials who organized smuggling also assisted or at least did little to prevent the new members crossing into Syria.³⁷ Several reports underlined that preventive measures at Elbeyli and Oğuzeli borders were inadequate. In 2015, *Daesh* members could travel with recruits, and transferred goods like pistachios, livestock, tea, diesel and narcotics through Elbeyli, a town near Kilis.³⁸ Consequently Ankara intensified control at these illegal crossing points.³⁹ In an interview, a *Daesh* member confessed their shock when, during a crossing, the law enforcement stopped and detained them.⁴⁰ After 2016, *Daesh* not only scheduled the crossings at night and escorted the recruits but required *tazkiyah*⁴¹ before assisting at the *madrassah al-hudud* (Office of Border). After 2015, to stop the uncontrolled border activity, Ankara started placing 3 meters high, 2 meters thick, 7 tons of cement blocks. As of today, about two-thirds, 688 km, of the total border is blocked by the border wall.

After the Reyhanlı Attack

Even after improved border security, *Daesh* continued its attacks at the crossing points. After Reyhanlı, a VBIED exploded at Bab al-Salam (Syrian side of the Öncüpınar border gate) which the FSA controlled then. The workers of Turkish charity organizations present at the Bab al-Salam had left the attack site minutes ago. The attack killed 26 people and injured 44 people. As one of the first signs of expansion of *Daesh* to the north, the attack indicated the future confrontations with Kurdish resistance groups, especially the PYD. The attack also signaled of the coming attacks in Turkey,⁴² which would render Ankara's efforts to deal with *Daesh* terror through proxies ineffective.

A routine check along the Niğde-Adana highway on 20 March 2014 was indicative of these coming attacks. Three *Daesh* members who had hired a taxi on their way to Istanbul were stopped by the gendarme at a checkpoint, subsequently responded with fire, killing two officers. The jihadists were captured at a health center where they received treatment. Benjamin Xu, Çendrim Ramadani, Muhammad Bakiri held German passports and later declared that their mission was to organize a large scale terrorist act in Istanbul. After the attack, the officials and Erdoğan called the event as a terrorist

37 "Bir cihatçının itirafları: IŞİD Türkiye sınırında çok rahat biçimde hareket ediyor", *Birgün*, 08 July 2015, <https://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/bir-cihatcinin-itiraflari-isid-turkiye-sinirinda-cok-rahat-bicimde-hareket-ediyor-84332.html> (Accessed on 17 October 2017).

38 Doğu Eroğlu, "Sınır IŞİD'e açık Suriyeli'ye kapalı", *Birgün*, 05 Mayıs 2015, <https://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/sinir-isid-e-acik-suriyeli-ye-kapali-78383.html> (Accessed on 21 September 2017).

39 Murat Yeşiltaş, Ömer Behram Özdemir, Rıfat Öncel, Sibel Düz, Bilgehan Öztürk, *Sınırdaki Düşman Türkiye'nin Daiş ile Mücadelesi*, SETA, İstanbul, 2016, p.49, 57; Hikmet Duygu, "Gaziantep'te Devlet Hastanesinde IŞİD üyeleri tedavi ediliyor", *Sputnik*, 13 May 2016, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/columnists/201605131022730576-gaziantep-hastanesinde-isid-tedavi/> (Accessed on 9 November 2017).

40 Doğu Eroğlu, "Yakalanan IŞİD'liler serbest", *Birgün*, 07 June 2015, <https://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/yakalanan-isid-liler-serbest-84255.html> (Accessed on 11 October 2016).

41 Letter of recommendation either a reputable *Daesh* sympathizer from your origin country or a fighter from *Daesh*.

42 "26 kişinin öldüğü ve 44 kişinin yaralandığı Bombalı saldırının ardından", *Mynet Haber*, 21 February 2014, <http://yurthaber.mynet.com/kilis-haberleri/26-kisinin-oldugu-44-kisinin-yaralandigi-bombali-saldirinin-ardindan-1290489> (Accessed on 21 May 2016).

attack but did not mention the affiliations of the terrorists.⁴³ The attention of domestic political actors and audiences on *Daesh* intensified during the judicial processing of these *Daesh* members. The photo Benjamin Xu especially became a symbol of *Daesh*.

On 16 April 2014, social media and newspapers published a photo that showed the treatment of a *Daesh* commander, Mazen Abu Muhammad, in a Hatay hospital.⁴⁴ The photo hinted clues to the address of the treatment center. Further speculations revealed that on the same day 27 injured people were transferred to the Public and Private Hospitals in Hatay from Syria. Further inspections uncovered an extensive history of similar anonymous treatments of *Daesh* members at the Mustafa Kemal University Research Hospital.⁴⁵ *Daesh* members claimed that this type of medical practices had been continuing for some time.⁴⁶ However, Ankara deliberately avoided the discussions of the Syria conflict and its spillovers prior to the coming local elections in Turkey.

Süleyman Şah Tomb

One of the first signs of the changing dynamics between *Daesh* and Turkey were the threats against the tomb of Süleyman Şah in Karakozak village in Syria. The tomb stood on the land declared as Turkish property under article 9 of the Franco-Turkish Agreement signed in Ankara in 1921.⁴⁷ A squadron of Turkish soldiers from the 2nd Border Brigade guarded the particular spot. On 30 June 2012, Ankara had reorganized the protection plans and increased the number of soldiers guarding the tomb. Amid the rising tension, a minute long video clip of *Daesh* appeared on YouTube in which three fighters, who identified themselves as members of the North command of the Mumbuc region, threatened Turkey and asserted that Turkey was not a Muslim state, therefore had to evacuate the brigade at the Süleyman Şah tomb within three days.

Prime Minister Erdoğan stated that “such an attack on the tomb would be perceived as an attack on Turkish territory”.⁴⁸ Ankara fielded eight F-16 jets to protect the tomb in case of an attack.⁴⁹ In domestic politics, the threat initiated discussions on possible actions against an attack, and whether the attack would be a *casus belli* for Turkey to fight against *Daesh*, thus to join the Syrian civil war. The coming local elections in Turkey casted a shadow in the discussions. Davutoğlu claimed that

43 “Başbakan Erdoğan: Niğde Saldırısı alçakca bir terör eylemi”, 20 March 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jhh6cSUM08s> (Accessed on 23 March 2016).

44 “İşid Komutanı Hatay’da tedavi edildi iddiası”, *Milliyet*, 13 June 2014, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/isid-komutani-hatay-da-tedavi-gundem-1896545/> (Accessed on 6 July 2016).

45 Ömer Koç, “İşid Komutanı iddiasında tedavi var isim yok”, *Hürriyet*, 13 June 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/isid-komutani-iddiasinda-tedavi-var-isim-yok-26608757> (Accessed on 17 May 2016).

46 Anthony Faiola - Souad Mekhmet, “In Turkey: a late crackdown an Islamist fighter”, *The Washington Post*, 12 August 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/how-turkey-became-the-shopping-mall-for-the-islamic-state/2014/08/12/5eff70bf-a38a-4334-9aa9-ae3fc1714c4b_story.html?utm_term=.23b91fb61e3b (Accessed on 21 May 2016).

47 ARTICLE 9 in “Franco-Turkish Agreement Signed at Angora on October 20, 1921”, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol.17, No.1, Jan., 1923, p.48-51.

48 “Süleyman Şah Türbesi Türkiye için neden önemli?”, İHA, 22 February 2015, <http://www.ih.com.tr/haber-suleyman-sah-turbesi-turkiye-icin-neden-onemli-440890/> (Accessed on 2 September 2016).

49 “F-16’lar Süleyman Şah için hazır bekliyor”, *Haber7*, 23 March 2014, <http://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/1139796-f-16lar-suleyman-sah-icin-hazir-bekliyor> (Accessed on 23 May 2016); Regarding to other discussion in Turkish politics, see “Süleyman Şah şoku”, *Hürriyet*, 28 March 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/suleyman-sah-soku-26099475> (Accessed on 12 May 2016).

associating the *Daesh* threat to the tomb with the coming elections would be improvident and would suggest an ulterior motive.⁵⁰ But the Süleyman Şah tomb was a vulnerability for Turkey. *Daesh* cleverly utilized and tried to transform this vulnerability into a liability.

The Mosul Shock and *Daesh* Captures the Turkish Consulate

Daesh continued SVBIED attacks on targets in Fallujah, Ramadi and Mosul and reset the security parameters in these cities. On 4 June 2014, *Daesh* started a campaign, *Gazavat al-Asadullah Al-Bilawi* (The Battle of the lion of God Al-Bilawi), at one front from Samarra to Tikrit, another from Bartella to Al-Yarmouk, and one attacking Mosul, with the ultimate goal of capturing Baghdad. With the campaign, *Daesh* planned to expand its territory to the north and south of Iraq, where the Sunni population was expected not to resist. The persistent attacks strategically aimed to encircle Mosul from different directions. On 6 June Atheel al-Nujaifi, the governor of Mosul, called Karem Sinjari, the interior minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq to relay his worries that *Daesh* was about to take over the city. Sinjari shared the message with Nachervan Barzani and requested the support of Turkey to prevent possible *Daesh* advances into the Kurdish part of Iraq.

The Turkish Consulate General in Mosul was in danger, yet Ankara was reluctant to evacuate the staff of the Consulate General. On 8 June 2014, Faruk Deniz, the Deputy Consul General in Mosul tweeted that “deadly clashes in Mosul are continuing especially in the west of the city.” On 9 June, the *Daesh* forces captured the Nineveh Government Offices. Al-Nujaifi declared *levee en masse* to fight back against *Daesh*. The next day, *Daesh* detained 31 Turkish truck drivers.

A day before the attack, Davutoğlu, while visiting Serbia, stated that the conditions around the consulate building remained stable and informed about the kidnapped truck drivers following his phone conversation with the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs Hoshyar Zebari. On 11 June 2014, the deputy consul general Deniz informed the consul general that armed men with heavy weaponry who identified themselves as *Daesh* had circled the compound. The group had locked down three doors of the compound with VBIED. After a short phone conversation between the consul general and Ankara, the guards at the Consulate opened doors and surrendered their weapons to *Daesh* members.⁵¹ In an interview after the incident, the then Turkish Consul General of Mosul would mention the staff had shredded all critical documents several days before the attack.⁵²

Following the surrender, a *Daesh* members said, “We are not going to return you quickly to Turkey. First, we have to make a deal on some issues” according to the Special Forces Police in the consulate.⁵³ After the incident, Davutoğlu repeated, “do not test Turkey’s patience.” But this statement

50 “Davutoğlu’ndan Süleyman Şah Açıklaması”, *Akşam*, 25 March 2014, <http://www.aksam.com.tr/siyaset/davutoglundan-suleyman-sah-aciklamasi/haber-294609> (Accessed on 11 May 2016).

51 From another perspective to see the perimeter security of Turkey’s Consulate General Compoun in Mosul, see Cansu Çamlıbel and Sebati Karakurt, “İŞİD tarafından ele geçirilen Türkiye’nin Mosul Başkonsolosluğu” *Ensonhaber*, 2010, <http://www.ensonhaber.com/galeri/isid-tarafindan-ele-gecirilen-turkiyenin-musul-baskonsoloslugu> (Accessed on 4 April 2016).

52 “Musul Başkonsolosu 101 günlük İŞİD esaretini anlattı”, *Cumhuriyet*, 21 February 2015, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/218453/Musul_Baskonsolosu_101_gunluk_ISID_esaretini_anlatti.html (Accessed on 21 June 2016).

53 “Musul rehinesi: İŞİD MİT’e haber vermediği için dört saat sınırdaki bekledik”, *Diken*, 24 September 2014, <http://www.diken.com.tr/musul-rehinesi-ozel-harekatci-isid-kapimiza-500-kilo-patlayiciyla-3-kamyonet-dayadi/> (Accessed on 6

evidently did not deter the *Daesh* militia to abduct the Turkish diplomatic corps members in Mosul to an unknown location for a period of 110 days of captivity. In the beginning, the group asked only for cash and arms in exchange. Later *Daesh* added to their demands of the evacuation of the Süleyman Şah tomb. The last demand ignited nationalistic discussions in the media.⁵⁴

Daesh had the tomb under siege since March 2014. The random and persistent threats to bomb the tomb was a nightmare for Ankara. The abduction of the Consulate General of Turkey in Mosul by *Daesh* proved that, to reach its goals, the organization would target the reputation of Ankara. In addition to this risk, a potential Kurdish advance to the tomb would create unexpected consequences.

On the night of 21 February 2015, the Turkish Armed Forces initiated the operation to bring back the soldiers at the site and relocate the tomb in Eshme, a village about 200 meters inside the Turkish border with Syria. After the operation Prime Minister Davutoğlu explained the operation with these lines:

The operation to evacuate the Suleiman Shah tomb and the post started around 9 PM last night (21 February 2015). Our forces crossed the Syria border in two different directions. One of the forces went directly to the Tomb of Suleiman Shah which is 33 kilometers away from the Turkish border and the other force took control of the space in Eshme village by the Turkish border, and hoisted the Turkish flag.⁵⁵ I followed all preparations at the Chief of Staff headquarters with the commanders. A total of 100 vehicles, 39 tanks and 57 armored vehicles, in addition to 572 personnel entered Syria. The first force reached the Suleiman Shah post at 00:30 AM. A religious ceremony was performed during the exhumation. All items of sentimental value were moved to the new location in Turkey. Our soldiers left the outpost and our flag was removed from the post at 04:45 AM.⁵⁶

Locating the tomb to a site near the border meant that Ankara reduced its vulnerability. The operational terrain contained many risks for such a large convoy. In his statement, Davutoğlu added that Turkey had not asked any country (presumably Syria) for permission to launch the operation and informed only the American-led anti-*Daesh* coalition. The US CENTCOM had destroyed three large and 20 comparatively minor *Daesh* tactical units, 40 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL staging areas, two ISIL tanks and four ISIL vehicles near Kobane just before and after the Operation Shah Euphrates. The operation was in the heydays of *Daesh* attacks on Kobane, and it was strategically stressful for the convoy to move at night without guidance. Thus the Turkish army relied on the “personnel of the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) to assist in securing the route through Kobane and after.” The regional actors, while surprised with the cooperation, understood the assistance as a payback for permission given by Turkey for outside support to Kobane.

October 2016).

54 “Süleyman Şah Türbesi fidye iddiası”, *Sözcü*, 21 Ağustos 2014, <http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2014/gundem/suleyman-sah-turbesi-fidye-iddiasi-582339/>.

55 Metin Gürcan, “Türk Askeri Süleyman Şah Türbesini Tahliye için Suriye’ye Girdi”, *Al-Monitor*, 22 February 2015, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/contents/articles/originals/2015/02/turkish-army-enters-syria-tomb.html> (Accessed on 02 October 2017).

56 “Başbakan Ahmet Davutoğlu’ndan Operasyon Açıklaması”, *Hürriyet*, 22 February 2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/basbakan-ahmet-davutoglundan-operasyon-aciklamasi-28266804> (Accessed on 5 March 2016).

Another unanswered question is the reaction of *Daesh* during the operation. An analysis of the conflict maps reveals that *Daesh* occupied the operation territory.⁵⁷ However, no clash was reported by any source. This leads us to conclude that *Daesh* had been informed about the operation, and within its own strategic calculations, refrained from interfering.

Meanwhile a court in Turkey banned the news about the siege of the Turkish consulate in Mosul, citing the need to protect the essential security of the consul general and his staff, and to stop false news exposing the vulnerabilities of the state.⁵⁸ Following the incident, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement, “Our Consulate General in Mosul pursued the task with mission consciousness. We ordered the evacuation but, the information given to us pointed at the expected escalation of clashes, thus the risks of evacuation without the necessary security settings would have been higher than the risks of staying in the compound.”⁵⁹ Ankara claimed that they had used drones to follow the staff of the consulate. After the incident, the then Consul General in an interview claimed that he had sent 16 encrypted messages to Ankara on the advance of *Daesh* groups and suggested the evacuation of the Consulate.⁶⁰

While the Turkish side insisted that no deal had been made with the organization, the Special Forces Police noted that the Emir of Mosul had claimed that a deal with Turkey had been made prior to their release to Turkey via Tal Abyad and Raqqah to the Akçakale border crossing.⁶¹ *Daesh* brought the captives to the border crossing and waited for four hours until the Turkish Intelligence officers took custody of the captives.

Clearly, the capture of the Consulate General of Turkey in Mosul was a milestone in Ankara’s understanding of the *Daesh* problem. How could the terrorist organization capture the Turkish diplomatic compound? There are two possible explanations; one lays the blame on Ankara’s overrating of its deterrence capacity along with its distorted image perception, the other points at the lack of coordination in communication channels in securing a time window for the evacuation. The evidence indicates that there was a miscommunication between Mosul and Ankara as well. The Mosul siege was a starting point of the new and more hostile relationship between Turkey and *Daesh*.

Turkey between *Daesh* and Kurds

Ankara had to deal with two major problems. First problem was the aggressive expansion of the *Daesh* along the Turkish border. After the organization attacked the Turkish Consulate General, Turkish

57 Erin Cunningham, “The Islamic State ‘caliphate’ is in danger of losing its main supply route”, *The Washington Post*, 19 February 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/the-islamic-state-caliphate-is-in-danger-of-losing-its-main-supply-route/2015/02/18/aaaabd5a-9045-11e4-a66f-0ca5037a597d_story.html?utm_term=.122c94fc26bb (Accessed on 13 May 2016).

58 “Konsolosluk Baskınına ve Rehinelere Yayın Yasağı” *Bianet*, 17 June 2014, <http://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/156509-konsolosluk-baskinina-ve-rehinelere-yayin-yasagi>; “İŞİD baskınına itiraf gibi yayın yasağı”, *Cumhuriyet*, 17 June 2014, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/83871/iSID_baskinina_itiraf_gibi_yayin_yasagi.html.

59 “Çankaya ve NATO’da gündem İŞİD”, *Bianet*, 11 June 2014, http://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/156368-disislerinden-musul-aciklamasi?bia_source=rss (Accessed on 4 February 2016).

60 “Eski Konsolos yeni CHP’li Öztürk Yılmaz’dan Davutoğlu’na ağır sözler”, *Super Haber*, 12 December 2016, <http://www.superhaber.tv/goksel-asan-yazdi-3b-bu-vatani-cocuklarimiza-birakacagiz-30727-haber> (Accessed on 5 November 2017).

61 “İŞİD’in rehlin aldığı özel hareketçi yaşadıklarını anlattı”, *Hürriyet*, 25 September 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/isidin-rehin-aldigi-ozel-harekatci-yasadiklarini-anlatti-27266344> (Accessed on 6 March 2016).

audience no longer bought into the “few angry men” rhetoric of the government.⁶² The second problem was the increasing anxiety among the Kurdish population following the *Daesh* advance to Kobane (Ain al-Arab) which was mostly inhabited by the Kurdish origin people. The attack would initiate a massive refugee influx, with numbers varying from 60.000 to 130.000, to the Turkish border.

The Kobane attack changed the dynamics of the conflict along the Turkish border. The first attack occurred on 13 September 2014. Between September 18 and September 22, the intensity of the attacks increased. Since the Kurds were one the most important allies of the coalition forces, the U.S. dropped weapons and medicines by air to the Kurdish fighters in Kobane. However, these strikes provided limited help to the Kobane resistance in which the leading actor was the PYD (Democratic Union Party).⁶³ The PYD’s militia, known as the YPG (People’s Protection Units), had maintained strong connections with the PKK⁶⁴. This connection altered the perspective of Turkey and its assessment of the *Daesh* attack on Kobane. The Kobane attack also affected the domestic politics, when the co-chair of the HDP (People’s Democratic Party) Selahattin Demirtaş expressed his worries about the fall of Kobane and called for assistance. He passed Salih Muslim’s request to Turkey to open a corridor for providing heavy weapon support to the region.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, volunteer groups willing to fight against *Daesh* were crossing from Suruç in Şanlıurfa to Kobane.⁶⁶

The siege of Kobane resembled the fall of Sinjar (Şengal) which was one of the first encounters between the YPG and *Daesh*. During that siege, some sources claimed that the KRG had asked from Turkey for ammunition. In response, Ankara had not only refused assistance but also warned its allies in the West to not support the KRG.⁶⁷ On 29 September 2014, protests for Kobane erupted in Taksim square in Istanbul and later protests of different scales spread to Diyarbakır, Şırnak, Cizre and Şanlıurfa. On 6 October, the HDP invited people to protest the policy of Turkey. Following this call, the protests further spread to Erzurum, Mardin, Van, Ankara, Bingöl, Bursa, Gaziantep, Iğdır, İzmir, Muş, Mersin and Siirt. In some places the protests turned into armed clashes with Islamist Kurdish groups under *HüdaPar* (Free Cause Party) and the ultra-nationalist groups. Turkey’s reluctance caused rumors that Turkey had exchanged Kobane to secure its abducted personnel.⁶⁸

Yet Ankara endorsed a bill authorizing military intervention in Iraq and Syria, which permitted foreign troops to launch attacks from the Turkish territory.⁶⁹ This endorsement meant that third-

62 “Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu NTV Special Interview”, *YouTube*, 7 August 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOzXWjp9F5c> (Accessed on 13 November 2016).

63 Matt Bradley and Joe Parkinson, “America’s Marxist Allies against ISIS”, *Wall Street Journal*, 24 July 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/americas-marxist-allies-against-isis-1437747949> (Accessed on 12 June 2016).

64 Aaron Steinand Michelle Foley, “The YPG - PKK connection”, *Atlantic Council*, 26 January 2016, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-ypg-pkk-connection> (Accessed on 21 October 2017).

65 Tolga Tanış, “Türkiye ağır silah koridoru açsın”, *Hürriyet*, 27 September 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/turkiye-agir-silah-koridoru-acsin-27283662> (Accessed on 18 March 2016).

66 Gülden Aydın, “Beş dakikada IŞİD’e karşı cephe”, *Hürriyet*, 25 September 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/bes-dakikada-isid-e-karsi-cephede-27270544> (Accessed on 11 April 2016).

67 Çetin Çeko, “Barzani Peşmerge’nin Kobani’ye geçişi için Türkiye’den izin istedi mi?”, *T24*, 10 October 2014, <http://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/cetin-ceko/barzani-pesmergenin-kobaniye-gecisi-icin-turkiyeden-izin-istedi-mi,10357> (Accessed on 4 May 2016).

68 Fehim Taştekin, *Rojava Kürtlerin Zamanı*, İstanbul, p.226.

69 “Suriye-Irak tezkeresi TBMM’de kabul edildi”, *BBC*, 2 October 2017, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2014/10/141002_tezkere_canli; For the full text of the bill, see “İşte Irak ve Suriye Tezkeresinin tam metni”, *T24*, 2 October 2014, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/iste-irak-ve-suriye-tezkeresinin-tam-metni,272654> (Accessed on 2 February 2015).

party militaries could assist Kobane. In an interview, the co-president of the *Demokratik Toplum Kongresi* (Democratic Society Congress-DTK) claimed that the KRG had applied to Ankara for heavy weapon support to Kobane. Ankara however did not respond to this request. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu announced Ankara's approval for the passage of support from the KRG to Kobane in a press conference on 19 October 2014.⁷⁰ First the Syrian Kurds trained by the KRG were allowed to pass, then the Peshmerga forces supported by the U.S. air forces followed with heavy weaponry. On 22 October 2017, President Erdoğan announced that he had proposed to President Obama of sending the Peshmerga forces to Kobane. He added that the Peshmerga had rejected the proposal at first, and only later partially acquiesced. Erdoğan still criticized the U.S. air support with these sentences: "it is clear that what they have done is wrong. Some batches of weaponry have fallen into the hands of Daesh. To whom, to what are you giving support? Everything is clear." President Erdoğan stated that he had a hard time understanding the strategic position of Kobane.⁷¹ After Kobane in 2014, quite remarkable number of fighters would join the Kurdish groups to fight against the *Daesh*.⁷²

The Turkish military positioned on the border hills could observe the movements of the Kurdish and *Daesh* fighters. The struggle of Kurdish groups to sweep *Daesh* from Kobane continued for at least four months. The passage of the Peshmerga stopped the advancement of *Daesh* but could not prevent *Daesh* from capturing some parts of the Turkish-Syria border. In the end, Ankara would share a border with *Daesh*.

The relationship between the parties would change again by early 2015. *Daesh* militants took over a natural gas plant in Syria to use it as a base. Turkey created emplacements on its side of the border by excavating trenches with construction equipment. While security measures in the area were elevated to the highest level, soldiers kept fighting against illegal entries and exits. The border-crossing controls became stricter day by day, deterring the new members from traveling to the areas in Syria and Iraq under *Daesh* control. In one operation, 70 *Daesh* members attempting to cross the *Bab al-Salameh* (Öncüpınar) border gate were detained by the Turkish Security Forces.

In the first days of 2015, NOC Özgür Örs, who had participated in the capture of *Daesh* militants, was ambushed and abducted by *Daesh* when he was patrolling at the border to stop trespassers.⁷³ The Turkish authorities did not release an official statement on his status. However, a military official called the Örs family to inform about his health status and informed the family that the authorities would save their son. Four days later, *Daesh* militants handed over NOC Örs to the Turkish Intelligence officers.⁷⁴

The following day, a suicide bomber attack on the Tourism Police Station in Sultanahmet, Istanbul shocked Turkey. The story behind the attack symbolized the interaction between Turkey and *Daesh*. A Chechen-origin Norwegian citizen, Abu Aluevitsj Edelbijev, who had immigrated to

70 "Çavuşoğlu: Peşmerge'nin Kobani'ye geçişine yardımcı oluyoruz", *Al-Jazeera*, 20 October 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/cavusoglu-pesmergenin-kobaniye-gecisine-yardimci-oluyoruz> (Accessed on 21 March 2015).

71 "Erdoğan: Peşmerge'nin Kobani'ye geçişini biz teklif ettik", *BBC Türkçe*, 22 October 2014, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2014/10/141022_erdogan_abd_kobani (Accessed on 6 June 2016).

72 For further details, see Haldun Yalçınkaya, "İŞİD'in Yabancı Savaşçıları ve Yarattığı Tehdit: Türkiye'nin Tecrübeleri (2014-2016)", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol.14, No.53, 2017, s.23-43.

73 İpek İzci, "Kafama silah dayadılar, o an "ne yaptım ben!", *Hürriyet*, 29 July 2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kafama-silah-dayadilar-o-an-ne-yaptim-ben-dedim-29641825> (Accessed on 11 October 2017).

74 "Astsubay Özgür Örs'ü İŞİD mi kaçırdı?", *Haberlerwebte*, 05 January 2015, <http://www.haberlerwebte.com/astsubay-ozgur-orsu-isid-mi-kacirdi-470h.htm> (Accessed on 10 October 2017).

Norway as a 12 years-old with his family, had met Diana Ramazonova on a social media platform. The couple decided to meet in Istanbul in May 2014. Ramazonova entered to Turkey with a visa but no record existed for Edelbijeve's entrance. The couple lived in an apartment in Başakşehir, Istanbul for three months until they moved to Syria to join Daesh as fighters. When Edelbijeve died in an assault in December 2014, Ramazonova illegally crossed back to Turkey. She traveled first to Gaziantep, then to Istanbul. She stayed with the relatives of Edelbijeve in Fatih, then in Başakşehir before executing the attack with two grenades. The striking point is that they could live in Istanbul without a valid residential permit for three months before moving to Syria, and then back unnoticed. This proved that Turkish authorities had scant information on the travels of *Daesh* militants of various nationalities. The incident is revelatory in that, if the international *Daesh* members could easily move into and out of Turkey, little could obstruct its local sympathizers.

A climate of volatility and tension reigned before the elections as support for the AKP fluctuated and increased for the People's Democratic Party (HDP) and the Republican Party in the polls.⁷⁵ While the decline in support was irritating the AKP ruling elite, the rising support for the HDP and its uniting tone presented a risk against the AKP.⁷⁶ The bomb attacks on the HDP offices in Adana and in Mersin⁷⁷ on 18 May 2015 further fueled the tension. On the eve of the election, the HDP organized a major meeting in Diyarbakır on 5 June 2015. A militant called Orhan Gnder placed a bomb in the venue for the meeting, killing 4 people and wounding another 414. Gnder was later caught in Gaziantep. After his identification, it was reported that his family had petitioned the Chief Public Prosecutor of Adıyaman in 2014 asking for help in finding their son and stating that they suspected him of traveling to Syria. At that time, the office of the Prosecutor investigated Gnder and listed him as a 'missing person with suspected terror relations' in the wanted list. But the name in the list was not that of the attacker but of his elder brother, the person who had signed the petition.⁷⁸

The Suru Attack

Compounding the tense mood, the drastic drop in the support for AKP affected the political climate. Without enough MPs to form the government, AKP sought coalition alternatives. During this period, the escalating terrorist attacks reminded the voters of the old days, remembered as a time of anarchy. Between the two elections, Turkey would witness 45 terrorist attacks, recording one of the highest attacks in the Global Terrorism Database.

Daesh was responsible for five attacks, two of which left the public in shock. On 20 July 2015, a suicide bombing connected to the Kobane (Ayn al-Arab) attack of *Daesh* occurred in Suru, a town

75 "Konda 7 Haziran seimleri iin son arařtırmasını duyurdu, iřte sonular", *T24*, 4 June 2015, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/konda-genele-secimleri-icin-tahminlerini-acikladi-iste-sonuclar,298677> (Accessed on 7 Austos 2017).

76 Deniz Gk, "Akdoan HDP'nin barajı gemesi tehlikeli bir durum", *Onedio*, 15 May 2015, <https://onedio.com/haber/akdogan-hdp-nin-baraji-gecmesi-tehlikeli-bir-durum--508390> (Accessed on 25 September 2017); Nebi Miř, Ufuk Ulutař, Murat Yeřiltař, Cem Duran Uzun, Sadık nay, Zafer elik, İsmail alar, *2015'te Trkiye*, Ankara, SETA, 2015, p.64

77 "Mersin ve Adana HDP binasında patlama", *Hrriyet*, 15 May 2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/mersin-ve-adana-hdp-binasinda-patlama-29034476> (Accessed on 25 September 2017).

78 İdris Emen, "Diyarbakır Bombacıları terr nitelikli kayıp řahıs olarak aranıyor", *Radikal*, 06 June 2015, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/diyarbakir-bombacisi-teror-nitelikli-kayip-sahis-olarak-araniyordu-1391663/> (Accessed on 11 Austos 2017).

in Şanlıurfa, then was considered as one of the major illegal crossing points. The Syrian war highly affected the town, especially with the expansion of *Daesh* to the Turkish border. To help rebuild war-torn Kobane, the Federation of Socialist Youth Association (SGDF) was leading a summer program in Suruç at the Amara Culture Center. The Suruç municipality run the Center and hosted journalists, reporters and volunteers who worked with the refugees from Kobane. On the day of the attack, the SGDF planned a massive charity campaign as well as a press release on its activities. About 300 supporters met in the garden of the Center just before noon.⁷⁹ During the press statement, a sudden blast killed 34 people and injured 101.⁸⁰ An initial investigation revealed that the suicide bomber had used a vest loaded with iron marbles to increase the number of casualties. The courts immediately banned the distribution and broadcasting of audio-visual material of the attack. The attacker was identified as Şeyh Abdurrahman Alagöz from Adıyaman. The police had information that the attacker had illegally crossed the Syrian border to fight in Syria with *Daesh*. After the Suruç bombing, more than 500 people were detained on the suspicion of working with *Daesh* as the police tried to incapacitate the recruitment networks in various parts of Turkey.

Following the request of the main Turkish opposition party CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu, the CHP MPs who had visited Suruç released a report on the suicide bombing and possible negligence before and after the explosion raising key questions on the security measures. After two years, the report would claim that the Intelligence department of the Turkish Police had been following the suicide bomber. But somehow the unit failed to disseminate the information. Furthermore, the call of a Turkish Intelligence Service operative to alert about a possible suicide bomber in Suruç was ignored prior to the attack.⁸¹

Two days after the bombing, on 22 July 2015 two police officers were assassinated in Ceylanpınar town in Urfa. A PKK related fraction claimed the responsibility.⁸² The Turkish government took this attack as the end of Turkey's Kurdish Resolution process. Demirtaş, leader of the HDP, stated that the attack "smelled a dirty provocation".⁸³ Several days later, Prime Minister Davutoğlu called that "Turkey is under the attack of terrorist organizations". He underlined that 281 terrorist attacks had taken place after the 7 June elections [up to the statement day].⁸⁴ The attacks became a pivot in the repeat election in which the AKP intended to be the first party to form the government. The general manager of KONDA, a well-known research center, evaluated the environment to be one where security concerns pushed people to select safe alternatives just as in previous election periods when Turkish voters had similar security concerns.⁸⁵

79 "20 Temmuz 2015 Suruç Katliamı ve Işid Tehdidi Hakkında Değerlendime Raporu", *CHP*, 2015, p.5-7.

80 140 Journos account gives present a detailed video of the attack, for further details see <https://twitter.com/140journos/status/623112460594249728> (Accessed on 17 September 2017); "Şanlıurfa Suruç'ta büyük patlama" *Hürriyet*, 20 July 2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/sanliurfa-suruca-buyuk-patlama-29591017> (Accessed on 21 August 2017).

81 Tolga Şardan, "Suruç Saldırısının 2. Yılı", *Milliyet*, 24 July 2017, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/tolga-sardan/suruc-saldirisinin-2-yili-2489781/> (Accessed on 21 August 2017).

82 "2 Polisin şehit edilmesini PKK üstlendi", *Mynet*, 22 July 2015, <http://www.mynet.com/haber/yasam/2-polisin-sehit-edilmesini-pkk-ustlendi-1931294-1> (Accessed on 21 August 2017); also see, "PKK yöneticisi Karayılan: Ceylanpınar'daki iki polis resmi birimlerimizce öldürülmedi", *Diken*, 6 August 2015, <http://www.diken.com.tr/pkk-yoneticisi-karayilan-ceylanpinardaki-iki-polis-resmi-birimlerimizce-oldurulmedi/> (Accessed on 21 August 2017).

83 Alev Scott, "Kurdish Leader Selahattin Demirtaş defiant in face for threats", *Financial Times*, 4 August 2015, <https://www.ft.com/content/0d15713c-39fb-11e5-bbd1-b37bc06f590c> (Accessed on 21 August 2017).

84 "Davutoğlu'ndan önemli çözüm süreci açıklaması", *Sabah*, 25 July 2015, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2015/07/25/davutoglundan-onemli-cozum-sureci-aciklamasi> (Accessed on 25 August 2017).

85 Hazal Özvarış, "Bekir Ağırdir: Seçmen PKK'nın faturasını HDP'ye kesmeyecek, beyaz Türk oyları artabilir", *T24*, 15 September 2015, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/bekir-agirdir-secmen-pkknin-faturasini-hdpye-kesmeyecek-beyaz-turk>

Ankara Train Station Attack

A few weeks before the repeated Parliamentary election, on 10 October 2015, various NGO's organized a 'Labor, Peace and Democracy' rally in Ankara to prevent another conflict following the end of the Kurdish resolution process. At the beginning of the rally, two explosions followed one another. As part of well-known suicide attack tactics, two attackers blew themselves up within few minutes. Yunus Emre Alagöz, who was the elder brother of the Suruç bombing suicide bomber, and Abu Usama from Syria were identified as the bombers.

After the explosion, Davutoğlu released a press statement in which he underlined the necessity for unity prior to the coming election. He confirmed the intelligence of the possibility of suicide bombings.⁸⁶ A court in Ankara would impose media blackout on the news.⁸⁷ The follow-up inspections identified the itinerary of the suicide bombers, who had traveled from Syria to Ankara, via Gaziantep, Osmaniye, Adana and Aksaray, with no ID checks. It would also turn out that the Konya II. Assize Court had released Tuncay Kaya with a judicial control condition days before. Kaya was an expert at making bombs from household ingredients.⁸⁸

Much later, a police raid on a *Daesh* cell in Gaziantep would discover a report written by Yunus Durmaz (aka Sarı) who was identified as one of the Emirs in Turkey. In the document Durmaz had proposed different spots for a possible attack to the high-level decision makers in Raqqah, who selected the Ankara Train Station. Durmaz received the decision in Raqqah from Abu Talha (aka Erman Ekinici) and then assigned the task to Abu Bera (aka Halil İbrahim Durgun), Kundi (Yakup Şahin) and Davut (Hakan Şahin). In the report, the pitfalls they had witnessed during the attack had been listed in detail.⁸⁹ His computer revealed a video in which *Daesh* members cavalcaded with cars and motorcycles in Gaziantep and that about 150 *Daesh* members lived in the city.⁹⁰

During the trial, an intelligence report on the possibility of a suicide bomb attack was divulged.⁹¹ The note elucidated that the senior management of *Daesh* had decided to act against the parties close to the Kurdish groups in Turkey. The police intelligence had identified and followed Yunus Emre Alagöz, the elder brother of the Suruç suicide bomber, and the other perpetrator Ömer Deniz Dündar for 4 months. The photographs and identity information of both attackers were listed in the 'suicide bomber active list' of 16 people, and were disseminated to all relevant security units after the Suruç attack. Three days before the train station attack in

oylari-artabilir,309673 (Accessed on 12 August 2017).

86 Anadolu Ajansı, "Başbakan Davutoğlu'dan Ankara'daki patlamaya ilişkin açıklama", *NTV*, 10 October 2015, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/basbakan-davutoglugudan-ankaradaki-patlamaya-iliskin-aciklama,GpJPYDjMhk6fw6mPIUKNzA> (Accessed on 02 December 2017).

87 "Ankara katliamında her türlü yayın yasak", *Hürriyet*, 15 October 2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/ankara-katliaminda-her-turlu-yayin-yasak-30314293> (Accessed on 10 September 2017).

88 Cem Gurbetoğlu, "İŞİD'li uzman bombacıyı 10 Ekim öncesi salmışlar", *Evrensel*, 15 April 2016, <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/277609/isisli-uzman-bombaciyi-10-ekim-oncesi-salmislar> (Accessed on 21 September 2017).

89 İdris Emen, "O terörist Ankara Gar saldırısı için rapor yazmış", *Hürriyet*, 12 October 2016, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/deas-ankara-gar-saldirisi-icin-rapor-yazmis-40247058> (Accessed on 21 September 2017).

90 "Deaş'ın Gaziantep Turu", *Hürriyet*, 17 November 2016, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/deasin-gaziantep-turu-40280104> (Accessed on 21 September 2017).

91 Alican Uludağ, "MIT saldırıyı bekliyormuş: Katliamdan iki ay önce Emniyet'e gönderilen rapor ortaya çıktı", *Cumhuriyet*, 02 March 2018, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/936850/MiT_saldiriyi_bekliyoruz_Katliamindan_iki_ay_once_Emniyet_e_gonderilen_rapor_ortaya_cikti.html (Accessed on 02 March 2018).

Ankara, another intelligence report would circulate among the security units about a possible suicide bomber or bomb attack, and that it would probably be carried out by one of the 16 list members, including Alagöz and Dündar.⁹²

The evidence of mismanagement and flimsy decisions later raised questions as to why the law enforcement agencies did not act vigilant to prevent the Ankara train attack. When the media restrictions ended, it was reported that inter alia the law enforcement agencies had concentrated on possible violent attacks by the protestors but ignored a possible suicide attack targeting the protestors.⁹³ The video clips of the witnesses would later reveal that, after the bombers created a bloody carnage in the area, the police intervened at the explosion site with pepper gas and targeted the civilians who were running away to save their lives.

A major question remained: why did *Daesh* not claim responsibility for this attack? Tim Eaton, an expert from Chatham House underlined that *Daesh* targeted the Kurdish groups in Turkey to increase tension. Another expert Ali Nihat Özcan claimed that the main intention of *Daesh* was to respond to the PKK in the context of their rivalry in Syria.⁹⁴ He emphasized that Turkey was being used as an extension of the war zone which was a predictable outcome of its involvement in the Syrian conflict.

After Ankara Train Station Attack

The Ankara Train Station attack was a wakeup call on the dimensions of the *Daesh* terror and its proximity to the capital city. Evidently, the law enforcement lacked the capacity to surveil the movements of the group. Different sources had identified extensive networks in Samanpazarı and Hacıbayram in Ankara⁹⁵. Even though it seemed as if the law enforcement agencies disregarded the formation of the organization in these places, followers of *Daesh* activities noticed that in fact the police had monitored the communication among these groups, or had to do so, mostly because of the families submitting petitions to the Police to find missing family members.

As the Turkish media criticized the weakness of security precautions, the Security Forces initiated a series of raids on *Daesh* cell houses in different cities, such as Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep and Kahramanmaraş. The Counter-terrorism team had started to follow a lead and had raided a house at Kayapınar in Diyarbakır on 26 October 2015. The trapped bombers in the house killed two police officers and wounded another five during the armed clashes. In the operation, seven *Daesh* members were killed and others were detained. After the operation, propaganda materials and various amounts of TNT, RDX, C4 and A4 explosives were found in the house.⁹⁶

92 “Canlı Bombalar Ankara’da geze geze katliama gitmiş”, *Radikal*, 16 October 2015, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/canli-bombalar-ankarada-geze-geze-katliama-gitmis-1452837/> (Accessed on 02 December 2017).

93 Kemal Göktaş, “Emniyet kitleyi değil polisi uyardı”, *Cumhuriyet*, 13 April 2016, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/515254/Emniyet_kitleyi_degil_polisi_uyardi_Canli_bomba_var_kendinizi_koruyun.html (Accessed on 15 August 2017).

94 Rengin Aslan, “Türkiye’deki saldırılardan sonra IŞİD neden sessiz kalıyor?”, *BBC Türkçe*, 16 October 2015, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/10/151016_isid_turkiye_saldiri_ustlenme (Accessed on 16 October 2017).

95 Doğu Eroğlu, *Türkiye’de Radikalleşme, Örgütlenme, Lojistik İşid Ağları*, İstanbul, İletişim, 2018, p.22-60.

96 “Diyarbakır’da öldürülen 5 İşid’li bakın kimmiş?”, 28 October 2015, <http://www.internethaber.com/diyarbakirda-olddurulen-5-isidli-bakin-kimmis-1482062h.htm> (Accessed on 21 August 2017).

Following these raids, *Daesh* intensified its propaganda, among which a video on the historical changes in Turkey is noteworthy. The clip starts with the Islamization of Turkic groups. Later the video continues with the title ‘Turkey and the fire of racism’ (*Turkiya va nar al-qawmiyya*) with the subtitle, ‘What is Turanism?’ Turkish speaking *Daesh* fighters criticize Turkey for valuing race, but not Islam. The video goes on with the photos of Erdoğan with Obama, Putin, Ruhani, the Pope, and Ahmadinejad, claiming that Turkey cooperates with heretics. The clip then lists the reasons of the demise of the Ottoman Empire, ranging from modernization and secularism to racism and to the establishment of the new republic. Then the photos from Nasser and Hafez Assad to Yasser Arafat are shown to highlight the Arab nationalization in the Middle East. The video connects the loss of Sinai and other pieces of its territory to the nationalism of Nasser. Not to leave the Kurdish nationalism out, the video mentions Öcalan and Barzani under the title of *taghut*.⁹⁷ The video targets the AKP and Iran cooperation and Turkey and NATO in Afghanistan. The video ends with a Turkish speaking *Daesh* fighter who begs for support: “If you could help Islamic State with your property, help with your property. If you could help Islamic State with your physical power, help with your physical power. If you cannot help, support with your heart, then you will have an excuse to present to Allah on the Judgment day.”⁹⁸

The developments in the international arena helped further alignment of Turkey’s position and relationship with *Daesh*. On 13 November 2015, three simultaneous attacks in different parts of Paris caused 130 casualties and created an international reaction on the eve of the G20 meeting in Antalya, Turkey. A few days later, the U.S. president Obama and Erdogan met at the G20 meeting to discuss forming a no-fly zone or a terrorism free area inside the Syrian border. This demand of Turkey was most probably related to Ankara’s intention to carry out a trans-border operation in Syria.

Russian Confrontation and Being Close to the Fire

About ten days after the G20 meeting, on 24 November 2015, another event recharged the events in Syria. According to the Turkish narration, two Russian warplanes violated the Turkish national airspace and “flew 2.19km (1.36 miles) and 1.85km (1.15 miles) into Turkey for 17 seconds.”⁹⁹ The Turkish F-16s air combat patrols chased the warplanes. One of the Russian planes left the Turkish airspace. The other warplane ignored all warnings and kept flying within the Turkish national airspace, then shot down by the Turkish F-16s.

Immediately after the incident, Prime Minister Davutoglu penned an article in The Times of London addressing Russia¹⁰⁰. Davutoglu wrote that “we must not be distracted from the cause that

97 *Taghut* literally means ‘one who has crossed the limits’. It specifically used for the persons that worship or pray other than Allah.

98 “The Islamic State-Turkey and Fire of Nationalism”, 21 November 2015, https://videos.files.wordpress.com/G3jjjkH9/the-islamic-state-22turkey-and-the-fire-of-nationalism22_hd.mp4 (Accessed on 2 July 2017).

99 “Turkey’s downing of Russian warplane-what we know”, *BBC*, 1 December 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34912581> (Accessed on 18 May 2016).

100 Don Melvin, Elliot McLaughlin and Jethro Mullen, “Turkish Prime Minister strikes conciliatory tone after downing of Russian jet”, *CNN*, 27 November 2015, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/27/middleeast/syria-turkey-russia-warplane-shot-down/index.html> (Accessed on 24 May 2016).

unites us. The international community must not turn on itself. Otherwise the only victors will be *Daesh* (aka ISIS) and the Syrian regime. The symbolic relationship keeps both alive.”¹⁰¹ The message was not enough to placate Russia.

The Russian-Turkish friction constrained the Turkey’s use of Syrian airspace. Turkey’s attention thus focused on its military presence in the Bashiqa/Zelikan camps in the Northern part of Mosul where the *Hashd al-Watani* and *Peshmerga* groups were trained.¹⁰² Turkey had based its Military Forces in Bashiqa in August 2014, about a year before the Russian incident, in coordination with the U.S., Russia, UK, France and Iran, after the Northern Iraq administration and the governor of Mosul requested assistance against the *Daesh* advance. In the last quarter of 2015, the Turkish Military decided to replace the personnel, soldiers and military equipment in the camps. Davutoglu reminded that “this training operation has been coordinated with the Iraqi Defense Ministry on the requests of the Mosul governorate.” On 14 December 2015, a group of Turkish soldiers left the Bashiqa/Zelikan camp. The following day, the Baghdad administration under strong Iranian influence asked the Turkish military to leave Iraqi territory and even filed a complaint to the UN.¹⁰³ On 16 December 2015, the *Daesh* attack with Katyusha rockets against the Bashiqa camp legitimized the presence of Turkish troops.¹⁰⁴ After the attack, the Turkish MFA published a press release which repeated Ankara’s “support for Iraq’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and acknowledges the miscommunication with the Government of Iraq over the recent deployments of Turkish protection forces.” The release continued, “Turkey, in recognition of the Iraqi concerns and in accordance with the requirements of the fight against *Daesh*, is continuing to move military forces from Ninewa province which was the source of the miscommunication.”¹⁰⁵ On 8 January 2016, *Daesh* repeated its attack on the Turkish Protection Force unit. A senior Turkish government source stated that “there were exchanges of fire but the threat was repelled by Turkish troops.” Erdogan elaborated on the case in response to the question of a journalist; “18 *Daesh* gunmen were killed but no Turkish soldiers were harmed” adding that “Turkey’s decision to deploy troops there was justified.”¹⁰⁶

While Turkey’s focus was on the protection force in the Bashiqa/Zelinda camps in Iraq, inside Turkey another *Daesh* relevant discussion had started. Two editors of the opposition *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, Can Dündar and Erdem Gül, published news on allegations about Turkey’s Intelligence

101 Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Russia must focus on the common enemy”, *The Times*, 27 November 2015, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/russia-must-focus-on-the-common-enemy-p98n8cqqlr> (Accessed on 3 March 2016).

102 “Türk askeri Başika’da kaç kişiler? Neden geldiler?”, *Rudaw*, 5 December 2015, <http://www.rudaw.net/turkish/middleeast/051220151> (Accessed on 29 June 2017).

103 “Başika Kampı nedir? Türk askeri Musul’da ne yaptı?“, *Haberler.com*, 18 October 2016, [https://www.haberler.com/basika-kampi-nedir-turk-askeri-musul-da-ne-8870026-haberi/](https://www.haberler.com/basika-kampi-nedir-turk-askeri-musul-da-ne-yapti-8870026-haberi/) (Accessed on 4 July 2017).

104 “*Daesh* terrorists attack Bashiqa camp in Northern Iraq, injure 4 soldiers”, *Daily Sabah*, 16 December 2015, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2015/12/16/daesh-terrorists-attack-bashiqa-camp-in-northern-iraq-injure-4-turkish-soldiers> (Accessed on 11 August 2017).

105 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “No:313, 19 December 2015, Press Release regarding the Bashiqa/Zelikan Training Camp”, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-313_-19-december-2015_-press-release-regarding-the-bashiqa_zelikan-training-camp.en.mfa (Accessed on 17 July 2017).

106 AFP-Reuters. “Erdogan: Turkish troops needed in Iraq after attack”, *Al-Arabiya*, 8 January 2016, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/01/08/Turkish-troops-repel-ISIS-attack-on-Iraq-camp-source.html> (Accessed on 15 June 2017).

service (MIT) sending arms to *Daesh*.¹⁰⁷ Ankara vehemently denied the allegations and the president stated over a TV interview that the news targeted the defamation of Turkish Intelligence Services and amounted to espionage. He said “the reporter of this news will pay a heavy price, I will not easily let it go.”¹⁰⁸ He then claimed that the trucks transferred humanitarian aid to Bayırbucak Turcomans. The Guardian reported that Erdoğan personally filed a criminal complaint against Dündar, demanding the reporter serve multiple life sentences.¹⁰⁹ A court case was immediately brought against Dündar and Gül for “providing and divulging confidential state documents for political and military espionage purposes that should have been kept discreet, and deliberately helping the organization without being a member”¹¹⁰ On 27 November 2015, Dündar and Gül were imprisoned by court order. The progress of the truck case trials deserves academic attention and contains critical clues to understand Turkey’s position in the Syrian civil war.

New Strategy in the Attacks

With the beginning of 2016, *Daesh* attacks in Turkey evolved into a new phase with a series of suicide bombing attacks targeting the international audience. On 12 January 2016, Nabil Fadlı detonated a bomb nearby a tourist group at the Sultanahmet, a historical neighborhood in Istanbul. The explosion killed 11 persons and wounded 15 others. As clarified later, Nabil and his twin brother Ibrahim had received weapons and bomb-making training in Syria in 2012. Nabil, after his arrival in Istanbul, had applied for a temporary protection identification card. His fingerprints were in the records of the Migration Management Office, which expedited the identification of Nabil.

The Sultanahmet suicide bombing attack aimed both to disseminate *Daesh*’s message to an international audience and to warn the coalition against a massive operation against *Daesh*. The signs of a change in Turkey’s position were in the G20 meetings, the deployment of a Turkish protection force in Bashiqa/Zelikan camps, and the unofficial anti-*Daesh* capacity building efforts. As *Daesh* lost territory in Iraq and Syria, the pressure on Manbij narrowed its options further.

On 13 February 2016, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the minister of Foreign Affairs, announced Ankara’s ambition to launch an operation. He added that Turkey and Saudi Arabia would participate together in such an operation.¹¹¹ A few days later, İsmet Yılmaz, the minister of Defense claimed that no land operation plan was on the agenda.¹¹² In the following days, during a press meeting Çavuşoğlu reverted

107 “İşte MİT tirlarına baskın anı”, *Cumhuriyet*, 4 June 2015, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/video/video/291121/iste_MiT_TIR_larina_baskin_ani.html (Accessed on 23 April 2016); “O tirlarda un değil silah vardı”, *Aydınlık*, 11 May 2014, <http://www.aydinlikgazete.com/mansetler/o-tirlarda-un-degil-silah-vardi-h40238.html> (Accessed on 5 June 2016); “Cumhuriyet MİT Tirları operasyonundan fotoğraflar yayınladı: Devletin bittiği an!”, *T24*, 4 June 2015, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/cumhuriyet-mit-tirlari-operasyonundan-fotograf-lari-yayim-ladi-devletin-bittigi-an,298670> (Accessed on 16 April 2016).

108 “Erdoğan’dan Dündar’a: Bunun bedelini ağır ödeyecek, öyle bırakmam onu”, *Diken*, 31 May 2015, <http://www.diken.com.tr/erdogandan-can-dundara-bunun-bedelini-agir-odeyecek-oy-le-birakmam-onu/> (Accessed on 2 July 2017).

109 “Turkish journalists charged over claim that secret services armed Syrian rebels”, *The Guardian*, 27 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/27/turkish-journalists-charged-over-claim-that-secret-services-armed-syrian-rebels> (Accessed on 29 May 2017).

110 “Can Dündar v e Erdem Gül tutuklandı”, *Hürriyet*, 27 November 2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/can-dundar-ve-erdem-gul-tutuklandi-40019281> (Accessed on 29 May 2017).

111 “Çavuşoğlu: Kara operasyonu lazım” *Aljazeera Turk*, 13 February 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/cavusoglu-kara-operasyonu-lazim> (Accessed on 10 May 2017)

112 “Reuters: Türkiye kara operasyonunu koalisyonla görüşüyor”, *BBC*, 16 February 2016, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/02/160216_suriye_operasyon_koalisyon (Accessed on 12 May 2017).

this statement to “a land operation in Syria with Saudi Arabia was never discussed.”¹¹³ All these zigzags were indicators of Turkey’s strong desire to launch an operation especially against the growing Kurdish influence on its borders.

A month later, on 19 March 2016, Mehmet Öztürk whose name appeared in the suspected terrorists list exploded himself in front of a tourist group on İstiklal Street. The explosion killed three Israeli and one Iranian citizen at the scene and wounded 24 tourists and 15 local people. The petition that Öztürk’s parents had filled to alert about his absence expedited his identification.

Immediately after the blast, the İstiklal Street was evacuated, and the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) announced a temporary ban on any news coverage and media regarding the explosion. Davutoğlu released a written message describing the attack as “inhumane”¹¹⁴ adding “Turkey will continue its fight against terrorism.”¹¹⁵ The nationality of the victims drew international attention. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General Gold cancelled his planned visit to the U.S. to travel to Istanbul to visit Israeli citizens in the hospital. Later NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, European Parliament President Schulz and The White House’s National Security Council Spokesman Price expressed their condolences. But the attack had scarred the psychology of the public. Even after the street was opened to the public, people feared to mingle and walk around in the crowd.

Before the attack on 17 March 2016, the German embassy and its consulate generals kept their premises closed because of the possibility of an imminent attack. The following day, the German school and the Goethe Institute in Istanbul were shut. Istanbul’s governor accused the German authorities, as “some of the foreign representatives in our country are trying to develop security measures based on unconfirmed information without consulting the local authorities, in a way which have negative impacts on public opinion.”¹¹⁶ Berlin responded to the claims of the governor of Istanbul and the German Foreign Minister Steinmeier while answering questions of the journalists said “Yesterday evening, our security intelligence unit had intelligence on the preparations of attacks targeting our representatives in Turkey.”¹¹⁷

As in the previous attacks, it was found that the Police General Directorate had circulated among its branches a classified document on the possible effective attack plans of *Daesh* on 10 March 2016. The document noted that a *Daesh* member was planning a large scale attack either in the southern part of Gaziantep or in another spot against tourists or law enforcement members. It warned that a group of suspects had created a network with a remarkable ammunition supply. The possible targets were listed as “The United Nations Office in Gaziantep, shops owned by Kurdish

113 “Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu: Suudi Arabistan ile Suriye’ye kara operasyonu hiç günderme gelmedi”, *Habertürk*, 22 February 2016, <https://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/1199216-mevlut-cavusoglundan-kara-harekati-aciklamasi> (Accessed on 23 May 2017).

114 “Başbakan Davutoğlu’ndan saldırı açıklaması” *Hürriyet*, 19 March 2018, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/basbakan-davutoglundan-saldiri-aciklamasi-40072203> (Accessed on 27 Mart 2016).

115 Contanze Letsch, “Istanbul hit by suicide attack”, *The Guardian*, 19 March 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/19/istanbul-hit-by-deadly-bomb-attack> (Accessed on 27 April 2017).

116 “Almanya Türkiye’deki temsilciliklerini “tehdit nedeniyle” kapattı”, *BBC News Türkçe*, 17 March 2018, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/03/160317_almanya_temsilcilikler (Accessed on 27 April 2017).

117 “Almanya Türkiye’deki temsilciliklerini “tehdit nedeniyle” kapattı”, *BBC News Türkçe*, 17 March 2018, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/03/160317_almanya_temsilcilikler (Accessed on 27 April 2017).

citizens, the buildings of the security forces, the military base in Incirlik, touristic areas of cities such as Antalya, Istanbul and Ankara”¹¹⁸

On the day that the Consul Generals of 19 countries and some of the district mayors of Istanbul organized a parade for the victims of the suicide attack in Istanbul,¹¹⁹ the world was shocked by three coordinated suicide attacks in Brussels, Belgium. The Zaventem International airport was hit by two bombs, and the third attack was in the Maalbek metro station in central Brussels. The attacks killed 32 civilians and injured 300 civilians.¹²⁰ These attacks increased the pressure to carry out an operation against *Daesh*.

The security in the Southern Turkey was no better than the security measures in Istanbul.¹²¹ Since early 2016, mobile launchers at Bab in Syria constantly targeted the town Kilis by low precision rockets.¹²² The Kilis Governor, İsmail Çatakı, organized a press conference on the anniversary of the first rocket launch of *Daesh*. He stated that, between 18 January and 2 October 2016, Kilis was hit by a total of 95 rocket attack which killed 14 Turkish and 11 Syrian citizens, and damaged 367 buildings.¹²³

On 1 May 2016, İsmail Güneş, a *Daesh* member, came to the Gaziantep Police Headquarters in a bomb-loaded vehicle and exploded the car after a short fire exchange with the police. The blast killed 3 police officers and injured 34 people. Within the scope of the investigation, the police detained 110 people and 60 of the defendants were arrested by the court.¹²⁴ A week after the blast, the Police General Directorate released a classified note to its branches stating that series of attacks in the major cities were possible. According to the note, to avenge its losses in Northern Aleppo, *Daesh* had plans of attack. In batches of 10 people groups from Dayr az Zor, Syria, 300 Tunisian citizens aged between 12-17 trespassed the border to be suicide bombers in Turkey. The same note highlighted that another group of 30 persons would negotiate with the smugglers to cross the border under the cover of being refugees from A'zaz which was under the control of the FSA. According to this unconfirmed intelligence, these suicide bomber groups were planning to target major cities as well as Gaziantep, Kilis and Şanlıurfa. The note was cautiously distributed among the police forces in the Southeastern cities of Turkey.¹²⁵ It is important to note that even in 2016, the illegal border crossings under various covers were still common.

118 “İstanbul’daki bombayı da biliyorlarmış”, *Cumhuriyet*, 15 April 2016, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/516418/istanbul_daki_bombayi_da_biliyorlarmis.html (Accessed on 4 June 2017).

119 “Konsololar İstiklal’de kolkola yürüdü”, *Bianet*, 22 March 2016, <http://bianet.org/bianet/print/173247-konsololar-istiklal-de-kolkola-yurudu> (Accessed on 2 May 2017).

120 Jennifer Rankin and Jan Henley, “Islamic State claims attacks at Brussels airport and metro station”, *The Guardian*, 22 March 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/22/brussels-airport-explosions-heard> (Accessed on 2 May 2017).

121 For a different approach see Pınar Bilgin, “Sacralisation: Defying the Politicisation of Security in Turkey”, *European Review of International Studies*, 3-2018, p.94-114.

122 Uğur Ergan, “Kilis’te okula isabet etti: 1 ölü”, *Hürriyet*, 18 January 2016, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/kiliste-okula-roket-isabet-etti-1-olu-40041816> (Accessed on 1 June 2017).

123 Reşit Çelebioğlu, “Kilis’te DEAŞ roketlerinin bir yıllık bilançosu: 25 kişi öldü, 367 ev zarar gördü”, *Hürriyet*, 18 January 2017, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kiliste-deas-roketlerinin-bir-yillik-bilancosu-40339055> (Accessed on 30 May 2017).

124 “Deaş’lı canlı bombanın eşi kocamın öldüğüne üzülmedim”, *Hürriyet*, 22 November 2017, [http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/deasli-canli-bombanin-esi-kocamin-oldugune-uz-40654422](http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/deasli-canli-bombanin-esi-kocamin-oldugune-uzulmedim-uz-40654422) (Accessed on 02 February 2018).

125 Erk Acarer, “Emniyet Genel Müdürlüğü’nden canlı bomba uyarısı”, *Hürriyet*, 20 May 2016, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/emniyet-genel-mudurlugunden-canli-bomba-uyarisi,341361> (Accessed on 02 February 2017).

The pressure on Turkey increased following the Friday sermons of *Daesh* imams in Bab, Majib and Jarablus. The imams claimed Gaziantep, Nizip, Karkamış and Kilis (of Turkey) among the highest priority targets. The sermons announced that local people in these towns would soon be refugees and the war with Turkey would move to a new level.¹²⁶ On 21st of May, another intelligence note by the Kilis Police Directorate leaked to the media. The document had warned of five points:

- 1- *Daesh* was in the preparation stage of a VBIED to attack at the Kilis/Öncüpınar border gate.
- 2- The organization would increase its activity in Kilis and Gaziantep to conquer these cities.
- 3- In order to evacuate the settlements of the people living in Kilis, the organization would continue to send rockets from Syria. As soon as the local people abandoned their houses, members of the organization waiting at the border would leak into these premises.
- 4- *Daesh* had built a tunnel from Jarablus to Karkamış to access Kilis. The members of the organization who entered Kilis were ordered not to participate in any activity but to continue their presence as sleeping cells.
- 5- *Daesh* imams, during their Friday sermon, ordered its members to shoot Turkish authorities/soldiers.¹²⁷

The U.S. plan to contain and diminish *Daesh* had started with the capture of the Tishrin dam, since any explosion in the dam could easily flood Mosul.¹²⁸ The U.S. pressure on *Daesh* then focused on Manbij. The US Defense Secretary Carter announced that “We know that there is external plotting, from Manbij city against the homelands of Europe, Turkey - all good friends and allies of ours - and the U.S. as well. The US supported the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to strangle *Daesh*'s access to the world.”¹²⁹ However, Turkey's opposition to the SDF complicated Washington's desire to encircle the *Daesh* in Manbij. Turkey demanded that “Syrian Arab tribes leave Kurdish-led forces” in their fight against *Daesh* and asked “the US to increase its air support for groups that Turkey supports”.¹³⁰ This shift moved Turkey from its position of so called “precious loneliness” to one of engagement. On 31 May, 2016, the SDF started the Manbij operation with the US air support from Incirlik. Ankara's strategy failed when the U.S. military supported the SDF on the ground. To tilt the balance in the Middle East, first Turkey and Israel signed an agreement in Rome for the normalization of bilateral relations on 26 June 2016.¹³¹ Later, Putin accepted the apology

126 “İşid füzelerinin düştüğü Kilis ve üç kenti hutbeyle tehdit: En büyük hedeflerimiz”, *Diken*, 03 May 2016, <http://www.diken.com.tr/isid-fuzelerin-dustugu-kilis-ve-uc-kenti-hutbeyle-tehdit-etti-en-buyuk-hedeflerimiz/> (Accessed on 05 April 2017).

127 Alican Uludağ, “İşid tünelle fethi geldi”, *Cumhuriyet*, 3 June 2016, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/dunya/545398/ISiD_tunelle_fethi_geldi.html (Accessed on 7 April 2017).

128 Ibrahim Mazlum, “ISIS as an actor controlling water resources in Syria and Iraq”, O. Zeynep Oktav et. al. (eds.) *Violant Non-State Actors and the Syrian Civil War*, Springer, 2018, p.113.

129 “Carter says Islamic State used Manbij to plot against US, Europe, Turkey”, *Reuters*, 2 June 2016, <https://in.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-carter-idINKCNOYO1FO> (Accessed on 1 March 2017).

130 Tolga Tanış, “Turkey has two demands from us for support in Manbij operation: Sources”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 3 April 2016, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-has-two-demands-from-us-for-support-in-manbij-operation-sources--97246> (Accessed on 5 June 2017).

131 “Türkiye-İsrail ilişkilerinde yeni dönem”, *Sabah*, 16 Kasım 2016, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/dunya/2016/11/16/turkiye-israil-iliskilerinde-yeni-donem> (Accessed on 2 February 2017).

letter of Ankara which initiated a rapprochement process which then moved Turkey closer to the Russian position on 27 May 2016.¹³²

Following the Paris, Brussels and Sultanahmet and İstiklal attacks on tourists, *Daesh* had another opportunity to get international attention. On 28 June 2016, three *Daesh* gunmen arrived at the Ataturk International airport by taxi and each of them proceeded to different spots at the airport, following the plan developed during three reconnaissance trips.¹³³ Two of the attackers went to the main building and one headed to the car park. A few minutes after the first shots were fired, the gunmen completed their mission by exploding themselves. A witness claimed that the attack completed within a two minute interval. The blasts killed 46 people and injured 210 people. Immediately after the attack, the airport shut down and the Federal Aviation Administration banned all flights between Turkey and the US. The Turkish courts imposed a media blackout on the Ataturk International airport attack. While no organization claimed responsibility, the suspect was *Daesh*.¹³⁴ A counter-terrorism expert told the CNN that the Ataturk [airport] attack “fits the ISIS profile, not the PKK’s”.¹³⁵ The analysis was true. *Daesh* would later release a statement on YouTube during Ramadan which urged its supporters in Iraq and Syria to attack “infidels... in their homes, their markets, their roads and their forums... double your efforts and intensify your operations.”¹³⁶ The attack garnered the international attention *Daesh* sought, yet made the organization look desperate. In an international meeting at the Aspen Institute, the US Secretary of State Kerry stated, “now, yes, you can bomb an airport, you can blow yourself up. That’s the tragedy.” He continued, “and if you’re desperate and if you know you are losing, and you know you want to give up your life, then obviously you can do some harm.”¹³⁷

The attack on the Ataturk International Airport shows similarities to the Paris and Brussels attacks which distinguish themselves from previous attacks in the way they were executed. The previous attacks mostly involved the explosion of a suicide attacker. But the Paris and Brussels attacks were made up of two processes which were designed as a violence show in which the attacker survives as long as possible to extend the show time, and explodes the suicide vest to end the show. This new execution style extends the media coverage and builds a Bergerian way of seeing¹³⁸ which

132 Murat Yetkin, “Türk-Rus krizini bitiren gizli diplomasinin öyküsü”, *Hürriyet*, 18 August 2016, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/murat-yetkin/turk-rus-krizini-bitiren-gizli-diplomasinin-oykusu-40185705> (Accessed on 27 January 2017).

133 “Atatürk Havalimanı saldırısını yapan IŞİD’lilerin korkunç İstanbul planı”, *Mynet*, 22 February 2017, <https://www.mynet.com/ataturk-havalimani-saldirisini-yapan-isislilerden-korkunc-istanbul-plani-110102895186> (Accessed on 5 March 2017).

134 David Lawler, Harriet Alexander, Chiara Palazzo, “Istanbul airport attack: as it unfolded on Tuesday night”, *The Telegraph*, 28 June 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/28/istanbul-airport-attack-as-it-happened/> (Accessed on 3 March 2017).

135 Natasha Bertrand, “Why it’s unlikely that ISIS will claim responsibility for Istanbul Airport attack”, *Business Insider*, 29 June 2016, <https://www.businessinsider.com/isis-istanbul-airport-attack-2016-6> (Accessed on 2 March 2017).

136 Lizzie Dearden, “ISIS calls on supporters to wage all-out war on West during Ramadan with new terror attacks”, *Independent*, 26 May 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-ramadan-2017-all-out-war-west-new-terror-attacks-manchester-suicide-bombing-islamic-state-a7758121.html> (Accessed on 21 February 2017).

137 Clemence Michallon, “John Kerry says ISIS attacked Istanbul airport because they are ‘desperate’ and ‘know they are losing’”, *Mail online*, 29 June 2017, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3665334/John-Kerry-says-ISIS-attacked-Istanbul-airport-desperate-know-losing.html> (Accessed on 27 February 2017).

138 In his book *ways of seeing*, John Berger perceives seeing as a political act that is constructed historically and that will affect what and how we see. For further details see John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972.

exponentially increases the popularity and intimidation at the same time. The airport attack included two messages, one for Turkey not to launch a land operation, second to demonstrate to the coalition that *Daesh* could easily access to public spaces.

The coup attempt in Turkey on 15 June 2016 and the declaration of the state of emergency on 20 July 2016 changed the balances in the domestic politics. In the immediate aftermath of the coup attempt, Erdoğan made his first international visit to Russia on 9 August 2016.¹³⁹ On 12 August 2017, the US backed SDF captured Manbij and continued operations to sweep away the resisting *Daesh* militants.¹⁴⁰ The PKK again started its attacks in different spots in Turkey and these continued with various intensities.¹⁴¹

These chains of events were accompanied by a suicide attack on a wedding ceremony attended by families from Siirt, Şırnak and Urfa at Beybahçe in Gaziantep. The blast killed 56 people and wounded 94 people. The attacker was identified as a 22 years old male who had sought Kurdish males to cause more damage.¹⁴² According to the intelligence, the Police had learned that *Daesh* was planning to attack Alevis during the Ashura ceremonies. This lead started a series of raids against *Daesh* cells¹⁴³ which continued after the Operation Euphrates Shield.

Operation Euphrates Shield

The Turkish Military launched Operation Euphrates Shield on 24 August 2016 with the FSA and other coordinated groups. The major goal of Ankara was to set up a secure zone and clear its borders of *Daesh* elements. The operation was completed in 216 days and took place in three major stages.

- 1- The Turkish military took control of Jarablus and close villages which were deserted by *Daesh* militia. Later on the FSA and other militia groups took partial control of A'zaz and Al-Rai (Çobanbey). The Turkish military established humanitarian aid points for civilians.
- 2- The Turkish military extended its control to the west. All territory between Jarablus and A'zaz were brought under control and in this way *Daesh's* access to the Turkish border ended on 6 September 2016.
- 3- The last stage of the operation was the longest and hardest part involving the clashes between the warring parties. To capture Dabiq was one of the goals of the operation. The forces focused on stopping the logistic support of *Daesh* militants. The final target, Al-Bab, was under control on 23 February 2017. At the end of the operation, the Turkish

139 "Erdoğan 9 Ağustos'ta Rusya'ya gidecek", *BIANET*, 26 June 2016, <http://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/177179-erdogan-9-agustos-ta-rusya-ya-gidecek> (Accessed on 5 September 2016).

140 Suleiman Al-Khalidi and Lisa Barrington, "US-backed forces wrest control of Syria's Manbij from Islamic State", *Reuters*, 12 August 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-islamic-state-idUSKCN10N178> (Accessed on 14 January 2017).

141 Atakan Uslu, "Şırnak, Hakkari, Bitlis'te PKK Saldırıları", *Onedio*, 5 August 2016, <https://onedio.com/haber/sirnak-hakkari-ve-bitlis-te-pkk-saldirilari-5-sehit-9-yarali-724690> (Accessed on 4 January 2017).

142 "Valilik Erdoğan'ı yalanladı", *Cumhuriyet*, 27 October 2016, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/622323/Valilik_Erdogan_i_yalanladi__Cocuk_degilmis.html (Accessed on 7 January 2017).

143 "İşid'li terörist: Bize yeni bir Kürt düğünü bulun", *Cumhuriyet*, 26 October 2016, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/621833/ISid_li_terorist__Bize_yeni_bir_Kurt_dugunu_bulun.html (Accessed on 7 January 2017).

military and its allies destroyed “4 tanks, 29 artillery pieces, 97 vehicles, 621 buildings and 61 defensive positions, 28 command & control centers, 17 weapon storage sites, and 11 VBIEDs”.¹⁴⁴

Ankara had a moment of relief after preventing the potential merge of the west and east regions of the Euphrates under the Kurdish forces. In addition, the control from Jarablus to Al-Bab ended the rocket firing capacity of *Daesh* and secured the Turkish border which would potentially prevent terrorist attacks towards Turkey. At the regional level, Ankara planned on its success in the operation to bring a leverage in negotiations for the future of Syria. On 17 October 2016, a speech by Abubakr Baghdadi urged his followers to attack Turkey.¹⁴⁵ Even though the veracity of the file was not confirmed, it created enough tension and increased expectations of further terrorist attacks.

On 22 December 2016, *Daesh* released a video in which two Turkish soldiers, who had kidnapped almost a year before were, burned alive.¹⁴⁶ The Turkish courts quickly banned access to the video. *The Konstantiniyye*, Turkish journal of *Daesh*, had published an interview with Sefer Taş in September 2016.¹⁴⁷ It was claimed that Sefer Taş and Fethi Şahin were the soldiers who had been burned in the footage.¹⁴⁸ The video and social media messages of *Daesh* increased the societal tensions and united the population with the stress of a possible terrorist attack which affected domestic politics.

At the end of December, the Turkish Police Directorate released a warning of possible attacks against the Jewish, Christian and *Ja'fari* locations.¹⁴⁹ The continuous threats materialized as an attack during the New Year celebrations. A gunman entered a well-known nightclub in Istanbul in the first hours of 2017. The attacker killed 39 people from different nationalities and 71 people were hospitalized after the incident. President Erdoğan condemned the terrorist attack and continued to state that “they were trying to demoralize our people and create chaos with abominable attacks which target civilians.”¹⁵⁰ President Obama and Putin called Ankara to express their condolences and offered appropriate assistance. After the attack, the Turkish courts quickly imposed a media blackout. *Daesh*, in addition to claiming responsibility, threatened Ankara with further attacks in response to its military operations in Syria.¹⁵¹

144 Can Kasapoğlu and Sinan Ülgen, “Operation Euphrates shield and the Al-Bab campaign: A strategic assessment”, *EDAM*, 2017/1, http://edam.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/elbab_eng.pdf (Accessed on 2 March 2017).

145 “Bağdadi’den yeni ses kaydı iddiası: Türkiye’yi işgal edin”, *Sputnik Türkiye*, 03 November 2016, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/ortadogu/201611031025613529-bagdadi-ses-kaydi-turkiye-issgal/> (Accessed on 23 January 2017).

146 Burcu Karakaş, “Bir ‘kayıp asker’ hikayesi: Sefer Taş’ın akıbeti”, *Diken*, 23 December 2016, <http://www.diken.com.tr/bir-kayip-asker-hikayesi-sefter-tasin-akibeti/> (Accessed on 4 January 2017).

147 Hikmet Durgu, “İşid kaçırıldığı Türk askeri ile yaptığı röportajı yayınladı”, *Sputnik*, 16 August 2016, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201608161024405695-isisid-sefter-tas-turkiye-erdogan/> (Accessed on 23 September 2016).

148 “İşid’in iki askeri yaktığını iddia ettiği video karşısında iktidar, TSK ve medya sessiz”, *Diken*, 23 December 2016, <http://www.diken.com.tr/isisid-iki-askeri-yaktigini-iddia-ettigi-video-karsısında-iktidar-tsk-ve-medya-sessiz/> (Accessed on 5 January 2017).

149 “Emniyetten yeni terör uyarısı”, *Sarızeybekhaber*, 8 December 2016, <https://sarizeybekhaber.com/emniyetten-yeni-teror-uyarisi/> (Accessed on 2 February 2017).

150 “Istanbul new year Reina nightclub attack leaves 39 dead”, *BBC*, 1 January 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38481521> (Accessed on 5 March 2017).

151 “150 people were killed and injured on an attack to nightclub during Christians’ Christmas celebrations in Istanbul”, https://twitter.com/antoguerrera/status/815833957438722048/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Eetweetembed&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fd-34581479703925281693.ampproject.net%2F1812131718380%2Fframe.html (Accessed on 5 March 2017).

The Turkish military swiftly responded to *Daesh* by bombing more than 100 targets in Syria.¹⁵² The investigation of the Turkish police expanded beyond İstanbul to Konya and İzmir. On 16 January 2017, Abdul Kadir Masharipov from Uzbekistan was detained at a Kyrgyz friend's house in Esenyurt, İstanbul.¹⁵³ It was revealed that Raqqah had ordered him to execute an attack in Taksim square. However, following the PKK-TAK attack in Beşiktaş the police had elevated the security measures in Taksim. Later the police released a video in which Masharipov had reconnoitered Taksim.¹⁵⁴ This attack was the last major attack executed by *Daesh* as operation Euphrates Shield continued. Turkey decided to end the Euphrates Shield operation on 29 March 2017 after gaining control of Al-Bab and stabilizing its control of this territory.

Lastly, prior to the referendum on proposed constitutional changes in Turkey, *Daesh* warned voters not to go to the ballot box and threatened those taking part in the voting. On 6 April 2017, their Arabic newspaper *Al-Naba* invited their cells in Turkey to attack voting centers and voters. The newspaper urged the cells to “use the strongest tools in your capacity and create maximum catastrophe.”¹⁵⁵

Conclusion

The jihadist groups that had fought in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia Herzegovina and Iraq expanded their own networks and learned from other terrorist groups. With modern information and communication technologies, the jihadist network reached the global capacity to spread its cells and messages. The Arab Revolt and the failing states were perceived as an invitation to build a new Middle East. The *Al-Qaeda* offsprings in Iraq and the loss of authority in Syria prepared the stage for a reloaded version of the jihadist network. *Daesh* is this new version in a Deleuzian sense but with its own peculiarities that the world has not witnessed before. It developed as an organization carrying similarities to the *Al-Qaeda* structure but its characteristics as a non-state actor metamorphosed into a more pragmatic version. While the network exploited all possible communication tools to reach an international audience to circulate its message, they recruited people some of whom were not even ideologically affiliated with the movement.

In Syria, the Islamist groups, made up mostly of former mujahedeen, organized the initial resistance against the Assad regime. The U.S. escorted and distributed a remarkable number of Libyan weapons to the Syrian civilians to resist the Assad regime. On the ground, new groups quickly appeared following the presence of guns. However the Iraq experience had had a remarkable effect on the Obama administration. The U.S. preferred a swift, meticulous and precise end to the Syria Civil War but failed to envision the amok formation of Islamist groups. Even when the U.S. noticed such

152 Peter Walker, “Turkey strikes more than 100 ISIS targets in Syria after Istanbul nightclub attack”, *The Independent*, 2 January 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/istanbul-nightclub-attack-isis-claim-responsibility-new-years-eve-shooting-reina-a7505151.html> (Accessed on 11 March 2017).

153 Rengin Aslan, “Abdulkadir Masharipov: Who is Istanbul gun attack suspect?” *BBC News*, 17 January 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38648350> (Accessed on 11 March 2017); “Reina saldırısı zanlısı İstanbul’da yakalandı”, *BBC Türkçe*, 17 January 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-38636095> (Accessed on 11 March 2017).

154 “İstanbul Reina attacker ‘switched target’ after Raqqa order”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 18 January 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/istanbul-reina-attacker-switched-target-after-raqqa-order-108659> (Accessed on 09 April 2017).

155 “İşid’den Türkiye’de referandum sandıklarına saldırı çağırısı” *BBC Türkçe*, 7 April 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-39532296> (Access date 21 May 2017); *Rumiyah*, No.8, Turkish version.

formations, it was too focused to topple down the Assad regime. The operation, however, absorbed more effort and financial resources than the U.S. had expected. The U.S. decided to yield the operation gradually to Turkey. At least, these are the claims which are difficult to prove or neglect.

Daesh quickly filled the power vacuum and invaded vast territories in Syria and Iraq. The uncontrollable rise of *Daesh* was fueled with foreign fighters who wanted to immigrate (*hijrah*) to *ad-dawlah* (the state). First geographically, later as a facilitator, Turkey gradually increased its involvement with the hope of influencing the future of Syria. Ankara built its connections to the Islamist groups thanks to the established cooperation with *Ikhwan al-Muslimun*. At the beginning Ankara had the impression that they could deal with *Daesh* and manipulate the scene. Nevertheless, the core decision-makers of the operation were not always as consistent in keeping to their gentlemen's agreements and deals as Ankara had hoped. In 2014, the invasion of the Turkish Consulate General in Mosul showed how events could become complicated. The multilevel competition on the ground involved Kurdish groups in Syria. Ankara exploited the situation as an opportunity to solve its long-standing Kurdish issue within the Syrian civil war. From this perspective, *Daesh* could have presented an opportunity for Turkey even if it was not functioning as Ankara had hoped.

Throughout the process, Turkey served three functions for *Daesh*; it worked as a resource pool for fighters, a transition route for foreign fighters and a stage for the suicide bombing attacks to distribute its messages to a global audience. Until 2016, Ankara had pursued a reactive policy against the actions of *Daesh* and tried to utilize the organization as a leverage in the Kurdish issue. A remarkable number of Islamic – Salafi networks were hosted by Turkey, and this reinforced the impression that Turkey was closely involved with *Daesh*, but this is not completely true. Ankara's influence over the organization is limited, and this became clear after the siege of the Consulate. Most of the decisions were not made by Turkish amirs (*emir*) but came instead directly from Raqqa. Whatever relationship had existed, it ended with the second part of the Operation of Euphrates Shield when the Turkish military took Al-Bab from *Daesh*.

The major question was whether or not Turkey had an illicit relationship with *Daesh* to help manage its Kurdish problem. An answer to such a question from an academic perspective is not easy to give. The interactive relationship between the two actors shaped the conflicts both in Turkey and in Syria. Not only Ankara's capacity to manage the relationship has changed through the years, but the operation and the resignation of Davutoğlu changed the dynamics. After 2016, Turkey's *Daesh* policy evolved into a more rigid defensive strategy to protect its security status quo. The cement border blocks to prevent the infiltration of *Daesh* into Turkey are the result of this strategy. However, by then, the Islamic networks had already established and supplied the necessary footholds which *Daesh* required, as the example of the Reina attack in 2017 proved.

Both Ankara and Washington aspire to see *Daesh's* end. But the organization has reached another level in its history. The rhizomatic structure of *Daesh* introduced a new phase in the culture of global jihadism. Despite all of their precautions, in the coming days both states will have to be ready to face the consequences of the Syrian agony.