

TURKEY'S BORDER POLICIES, THE APPROACHES OF THE GOVERNMENT
AND SECURITY FORCES BETWEEN MARCH 2011 AND MARCH 2015 AND
THEIR IMPACTS ON RADICAL TURKS GOING TO SYRIA TO FIGHT

A Master's Project Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

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May 2015

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Throughout history, Turkish-Syrian relations have always been tense due to problems over Hatay, water issues, and the PKK (Kurdistan's Workers Party). The tensions between the two countries started normalizing in 2000. When the AKP (Justice and Development Party) was elected in 2002, it adopted a zero-problem policy with its geopolitical surrounding, and, as a result, the Turkish-Syrian relations entered a new era where Erdogan started calling Syrian President Assad his brother. However, with the start of the Syrian Conflict in 2011, the relations turned upside-down and Erdogan started calling Assad "a bloody handed dictator." After diplomatic initiations, the Turkish government began to help the Syrian opposition in its own territory, arming and supporting anyone who was against the regime in Syria. In this atmosphere, thousands of Turkish citizens were attracted to the idea of waging jihad in Syria, and they crossed the

border to join the radical groups. The purpose of this study is to examine whether or not these Turkish radicals felt encouraged and supported by the Turkish government between 2011 and March 2015.

In this study, two different groups of people were used to understand the government's support and encouragement. The first group consisted of politicians from the Turkish cities, such as Konya, Ankara, Hatay, and Gaziantep where radical groups recruit people and cross the border into Syria. The second group was ISIS, Al-Nusra, and Ahrar Sham members on Twitter. These people were interviewed to understand if they received any support from the Turkish government or if they felt encouraged by the government. Lastly, a person from Turkey was interviewed whose son-in-law went to Syria to fight for ISIS. In addition to the interviews, this study relies heavily on international media reports, news and statements.

The research concluded that the Turkish radicals were a hundred percent encouraged by their beliefs, but the government turned a blind eye to border crossings and radical operations until the end of 2014. Also, the findings demonstrated that even today, Turkish radicals find a way to cross the border into Syria, but they are afraid of the Turkish security forces whereas they were not afraid of them before.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to Turkey's bright secular future and to its people.

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CHAPTER 1

DEFINITIONS

Islamic Radicalism, Radical, Jihad, and Jihadist

Islamic Radicalism is not a new phenomenon in Turkey. Since its foundation in 1923 as a secular state, the majority of Turks have had a tendency for Islamist ideologies. In the 1990s, Turkey witnessed a rise in the number of violent Islamist groups, such as Turkish Hezbollah. Such Islamist and radical movements have started growing with the AKP rule in 2002. Although the Islamist party had a moderate agenda and stance, their toleration to Islamist people and organizations has paved the path for radicalism and radical operations within the country. Today around 12,000 Turkish people have crossed the border into Syria¹ to fight alongside radical terrorist organizations, such as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), Al-Nusra, Ahrar Sham, etc. According to a poll, only 70% of the Turks view ISIS as a terrorist organization.² According to a more recent poll, only 1.3% of the population sympathizes with ISIS³ and this percentage still accounts for one million people.

¹ The Former Head of the General Staff Ismail Hakki Pekin, interview by author, Ankara-Turkey. January 2015.

² Milliyet. "İşte Türkiye'deki IŞİD Algısı." 26 August 2014.
<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/iste-turkiye-deki-isis-algisi-gundem-1931135/>

³ Daloglu, Tulin. "Turks Rumored to be Joining the Islamic State." Al Monitor. October 2014.
<<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2014/10/turkey-syria-isis-coalition-polls.html>>

Islamic radicalism as a term in this paper means an ideology that aims to change and transform an existing system into an Islamic one through such means as fighting and killing. What I mean by radical in this paper is a person who joins the jihad and kills others or helps such people and terrorist organizations in the name of Islam. The terms radical and jihadist are used interchangeably in this paper.

Another term that was used many times during this research, jihad, means “struggle” in the Arabic language. According to Jon L. Esposito from Georgetown University, “jihad refers to the obligation incumbent on all Muslims, individuals and the community, to follow and realize God’s will; to lead a virtuous life and to extend the Islamic community through preaching, education, example, writing, etc. Jihad also includes the right, indeed the obligation, to defend Islam and the community from aggression”.⁴ As we see in the situation of Syria today, radicals and jihadists fulfil these obligations by inviting everyone to join the jihad, killing “infidels” and aiming at expanding the territory where people live by the rule of Allah. Therefore, what I mean by jihadist in this paper is someone who takes part in actions that include fighting for Islam, killing for Allah, and moving to a land where Allah’s rules are being carried out to fulfil these obligations.

⁴Esposito, John. “Jihad: Holy or Unholy War?”
<http://www.unaoc.org/repository/Esposito_Jihad_Holy_Unholy.pdf>

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study has sought to answer whether or not Turkish radicals who went to Syria to fight felt encouraged and supported by the Turkish government between 2011 and March 2015. While exploring Turkey's Syria policies that might have had an impact on Turkish radicals, it also became necessary to examine why Turkey-Syria relations changed after 2011; how the relations were before 2011; why the government might have helped the Syrian opposition, rebels, and radicals; and if the US as an ally has had any impact on Turkey's Syria policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Christopher Phillips's article, "Into the Quagmire: Turkey's Frustrated Syria Policy," provided me with background information on Turkey-Syria relations until 2002 when the AKP government was elected in Turkey. Phillips discussed in his article how and why Turkey and Syria had problems over Hatay, water problems over the Euphrates River,

and the PKK in the past. Also, the article gave details about how the relations started normalizing “once Syria had agreed to cease its support for the PKK.”⁵

“Turkish-Syrian Relations: From Friend ‘Esad’ to Enemy ‘Esed,’ by Birgul Demirtas also gave me background information about how the relations between the two countries improved at the end of the 1990s. The author argued that “the ground was already laid for the improvement of Turkey’s relations with its immediate neighbors”⁶ as well as with Syria. The author then discussed what changes the AKP government made in regards to Turkish foreign policy when they got elected. Demirtas gave details about Davutoglu’s new neo-Ottomanist policies and how the AKP government put Syria “at the center” of its neo-Ottomanist foreign policy. The article also traces back the improvements until 2011 between the two countries, such as a joint-cabinet meeting, lifting visa requirements, seeking economic integration, etc.

“Policy of Zero Problems with Our Neighbors,” an article on Turkey’s Foreign Ministry’s official webpage also detailed AKP’s biggest slogan about the “zero-problem policy.” The article argued how “Turkey wants to eliminate all the problems from her relations with neighbors or at least to minimize them as much as possible.”⁷ This

⁵ Phillips, Christopher. “Into the Quagmire: Turkey’s Frustrated Syria Policy.” Chatham House Briefing Paper. 1 December 2012.
<http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Middle%20East/1212bp_phillips.pdf>

⁶ Demirtas, Birgul. “Turkish-Syrian Relations: From Friend "Esad" to Enemy "Esed"." Middle East Policy Council. Spring 2013.
<<http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/turkish-syrian-relations-friend-esad-enemy-esed>>

⁷ Turkish Foreign Ministry’s Official Website. “Policy of Zero Problems with Our Neighbors.”
<<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa>>

explanation of the AKP's foreign policy also helped me understand why the AKP government attached importance to Turkey-Syria relations between 2002 and 2011.

The article, "Turkey's Role in Syria," by Tony Badran offered a different and interesting perspective on why the AKP government adopted a zero-problem policy in regards to the Turkey-Syria relations after 2002 and why the relations between the two states got better. The author did not oppose the idea that Turkey adopted a zero-problem policy, but he argued that the US has a "vision for an Islamist yet docile Middle East" and Turkey was given a leadership role in this context. The article also suggests that "the White House saw Turkey as a mediator for the Middle East, and President Barack Obama initially looked to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the leader who could help him reduce the US footprint in the Middle East, engage Iran and Syria, broker a peace agreement between Israel and Syria, and sponsor unity between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, in preparation for a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian deal."⁸

When I looked at why the relations upended in 2011, the above mentioned article, "Policy of Zero Problems with our Neighbors" and "Relations between Turkey–Syria" that are published on the official Foreign Ministry of Turkey's webpage gave me

⁸Badran, Tony. "Allies, Adversaries & Enemies: America's Increasingly Complex Alliances". Chapter 12: Turkey's Role in Syria. 1 May 2014.
<<http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/schanzer-jonathan-allies-adversaries-enemies-americas-increasingly-complex-alliances/>>

important background information on the government's perspective on the Syrian Conflict and the relations after 2011. According to these articles, Turkey-Syria relations deteriorated after March 2011, not because Turkey's zero problems approach failed, "but the approach of the Syrian regime, which through its actions, made it impossible to continue good neighborly relations." In the zero-problem policy article, Turkey's Foreign Ministry also stated that Turkey wanted "Syrian authorities to undertake a swift reform program that addresses the needs and demands of Syrian citizens. Turkey has also made it clear that she is ready to provide whatever contribution and support needed in the reform process."⁹

The book *Arap Bahari Degisimleri (Arab Spring Changes)*, by Dr. Mehmet Ali Ediboglu offered me a different perspective on why Turkey-Syria relations improved during the Erdogan-Assad terms and why it deteriorated in 2011. He argued that besides the AKP government's zero problem policy, the US had designated Turkey as a country that was supposed to play a mediator role between Syria and Israel. Different than the Foreign Ministry's reasons to explain why the relations deteriorated after 2011, Ediboglu suggested that Turkey got involved in the Syrian Conflict so deeply because it was pressured by the US. He discussed that the US has a greater Middle East project in mind where it wants to change the borders in the Middle East so that it could secure Israel and energy sources in the region. His book suggested that when the Arab Spring spilled over on Syria in March 2011, the US saw an opportunity to weaken Syria, which is sponsoring

⁹ Turkish Foreign Ministry's Official Website. "Relations between Turkey and Syria."
<<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey%E2%80%93syria.en.mfa>

Hamas and threatening Israel. Giving me a different perspective on the Turkey-Syria relations, he discussed that “the US and Israel use the AKP in order to achieve their goals in the region which will be redesigned again.”¹⁰

After having a grasp about the relations between the two countries, I mostly looked at news report and government statements to understand what steps the Turkish government took towards the conflict in Syria. AKP’s official webpage and newspapers like Hurriyet Daily News, Zaman, Daily Sabah, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and the Washington Post helped me trace incidents chronologically. These newspapers helped me understand how the Turkish government first initiated diplomatic solutions and then started organizing the Syrian opposition on its territory both politically and militarily. These reports also enabled me to trace the parallel policies of the US and Turkey over Syria.

AKP’nin Suriye Yenilgisi ve Esad (AKP’s defeat in Syria and Assad), by Omer Odemis was a very informative book in terms of explaining radical organizations in Syria and Turkish people’s and the government’s relationships with these organizations. Based on his observations and interviews, the author spelled out how jihadists and radicals operate in Turkey, getting support from the government. In his book, Odemis gives real names of the ones who recruit people for radical groups and how and with which cars they cross the border into Syria back and forth. His book also helped me understand the Syrian

¹⁰ Ediboglu, Mehmet Ali. “Arap Bahari Degisimleri.” pg.15.

Conflict and the Turkish involvement from Assad's perspective, who Odemis had an interview with.

A Washington Post article, "In Turkey: A Late Crackdown on Islamic Fighters," by Anthony Faiola and Souad Mekhennet was a very important source for me to examine my hypothesis. The article published an interview of an Islamic State commander in Turkey and drew attention to the Turkish government's support to the radicals.

Another important article from the New York Times, "ISIS Draws a Steady Stream of Recruits from Turkey," by Ceylan Yeginsu and a report, "Looking for ISIS: How Jihadists Operate among Turks," by Hurriyet Daily News spelled out interesting details for me to understand how radicals operate and make recruitments in Turkey.

In addition to these reports and books, similar news reports like "Nurse Says She Is Tired of Treating ISIS Militants," by Today's Zaman helped me see examples of Turkish government's support to radical people.

Lastly, parliamentary questions on the Grand National Assembly of Turkey's official webpage that were submitted by opposition parties in Turkey, CHP (Republican People's Party), MHP (National Movement Party), and HDP (People's Democratic Party), helped me see the incidents regarding Turkey's Syria policies chronologically and also more formally. Dozens of written and verbal parliamentary questions backed by evidence

brought up issues such as sending weapons to radicals, Turkey-Syria relations, border crossing of the jihadists, recruitments, and treating the radicals in Turkish hospitals.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

Research for this study was conducted through literature review, national and international news reports, government statements, parliamentary questions, interviews with current Turkish politicians, and interviews with Turkish jihadists who went to Syria to fight for radical organizations. Also, an interview with a Turkish ISIS fighter's father-in-law and another interview with a Turkish lawyer were also used in this paper. In addition to these sources, international law was also briefly mentioned in the paper in order to understand Turkish government's policies' legitimacy.

A qualitative research methodology was used for this study. According to Creswell, qualitative research is "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem."¹¹ Structured and semi-

¹¹ Creswell, John W., "Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches." Third Edition. pg. 4

structured interviews were used to gather data for this paper. While the structured interview involves asking an exact series of questions to all interviewees, a semi-structured interview is flexible about asking open-ended questions.

The first part of the interviews was conducted during a research trip to Turkey, between December 2014 and January 2015. These were one-on-one interviews and they were semi-structured. Each interview took about 45 minutes to one hour. During these interviews, I intended to understand Turkey's policies regarding Syria in general and if the politicians had any proof showing the Turkish government's support for the radicals. In this context, the following questions were prepared ahead of time and asked to the interviewees:

1. Why did the AKP change its Syria policies in 2011? Why does Erdogan want Assad to step down? What kind of new policies were adopted in this context?
2. Did the government support any radical groups in Syria? How did the government react to the radicals' operations and recruitments in Turkey?
3. How are the Turkish security forces reacting to border crossings and radical operations in Turkey?
4. How did these policies impact the Turkish people in terms of radicalism?
5. How many Turks have gone to Syria to fight for radical groups?
6. Is there still a flow of jihadists or did Turkey seal off the border?

The answers of the respondents were recorded and then typed. The responses were analyzed to understand if there was a pattern regarding the border crossings and the Security forces' attitude towards the radicals in Turkey.

The second group, Turkish jihadists, was interviewed on Twitter, and a structured type of interview was used. I asked each respondent the same series of questions. The questions were prepared once I had a clearer understanding of the topic. During these interviews, the most important intention was to gather first-hand information from those people. In order to understand if what the radicals do and say were consistent with media reports and politicians' statements, the following questions were asked to the interviewees:

1. Why did you go to Syria?
2. How did you cross the border? How were the circumstances? How did you know it was a good place to cross? Do you think the police, soldiers, or the government made it easier for you to cross?
3. Have you ever been afraid of getting caught? Have you ever been afraid of the security forces while crossing the border or operating in Turkey?
4. Did anyone make any guarantees to you that if you were injured while fighting, you would be cared for in Turkey? Who is treating the injured fighters?

The responses were all collected in a Word document and then uploaded to data analysis software (MaxQDA). When I analyzed the responses, three different themes emerged from the data. The codes and themes that emerged from each interviewee's responses

were used to understand if there was any pattern with regards to the border crossings, Turkish security forces' attitudes, and government support.

The interviewed politicians were chosen from Turkish cities that have a border with Syria or that made it to the news with the stories of recruitments and radical operations. Because I couldn't reach out to officials from the AKP, I interviewed four opposition MPs from Hatay, Gaziantep, Ankara, and Konya. Also, I was able to interview the former foreign minister of Turkey, Hikmet Cetin, and the former head of the Intelligence Department of the General Staff.

For the second batch of interviews, I randomly reached out to the Turkish jihadists/radicals on Twitter. The interviewees were mostly male and between the ages of 17 and 50. They all were people from Turkey who moved to Syria at the start of the Syrian Conflict, between 2011 and March 2015.

In addition to these two groups of people, I was able to reach out to a person whose son-in-law crossed the border many times to join the war in Syria on the side of ISIS. During that interview, again, a semi-structured interview was used and he was asked questions to understand how the border crossing was made; Turkish radicals operations in Turkey; and how the police responded to this incident. Also, another interview was conducted with a Turkish lawyer in order to provide a legal analysis to the paper, in terms of Turkish government's actions and the Turkish law.

The methodology of this research of course presents some limitations and weaknesses that should be taken into consideration. First of all, due to the fact that this issue is still an ongoing thing, there is a lack of books written on this topic. Because of the fact that most of the information out there is based on allegations, I felt the need to talk to the people who are in the field and are directly affected by government policies, such as politicians from the affected cities and the Turkish radicals. However, I was never able to reach out to any politicians from the AKP or any officials from the Turkish government to hear about their perspectives. Although I submitted a request for information about the Turkish government's border policies and allegations to the Turkish Intelligence Service under the Right to Information Act, they told me to contact the Ministry of Interior Affairs. Upon this, I contacted the Ministry of Interior Affairs, but received no response. Also, when I checked the responses of the government to the parliamentary questions that were submitted by the opposition parties and the evidences that were showed, it was seen that the government usually did not respond to any of the questions or their responses simply did not go any further than "denying" the allegations. Therefore, the only way to understand the government's perspective and actions was to look into the newspapers, their statements, and some articles from the Foreign Ministry's website. Second, all the politicians I interviewed were from the opposition parties and I think that their political bias might have impacted their neutrality which should be considered as a weakness to this research. Third, another limitation was that although some of the jihadists were very willing to talk to me, they still did not want to give detailed answers. Also, because there was no face-to-face interaction, there was no way to test the accuracy of their responses

as well. In addition, due to time restrictions, the number of the jihadists that were interviewed was too small to be representative. Lastly, the evidences that I used throughout this research may not always be reflecting the reality because they are mostly based on what people saw and heard.

In summary, considering the limitations of this research, I was still able to assess which allegations were more plausible. Assuming that the respondents on Twitter were telling the truth, my Twitter interviews presented me the basis to compare the opposition parties and the government's statements.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON TURKISH-SYRIAN RELATIONS

Pre-Erdogan Relations with Syria

Throughout history, relations between Turkey and Syria were tense until the death of Hafez al-Assad, who was superseded by his son Bashar al-Assad. This tension started specifically with issues over Hatay territory which caused many issues between the two countries for many years.¹² Another main reason of the tension in relations was due to Syria's open support for the PKK, which was considered a terrorist organization by Turkey during Hafez al-Assad's reign. Syria has supported the PKK and allowed it to train and be sheltered within Syrian borders between 1980 and 1990. Even, Abdullah

¹² Erdem, Murat. "Hatay Sorunu."
<http://www.academia.edu/7015450/Hatay_Sorunu_1918-1939_

Ocalan, the supreme leader of the PKK, resided in Damascus until he was captured in Kenya in 1999.¹³ Along with the support that Syria provided for the PKK, water conflicts were another reason for the tensions. In the 1960s, both countries had started to use water from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and both countries attempted to build water and energy-focused projects on these rivers, and as a result, relations between Turkey and Syria worsened even more.

The Adana Protocol that was signed on October 20, 1998, was the turning point for neutralizing the tense relations between the two countries.¹⁴ As a result of this signed agreement with the purpose of fighting with the PKK, relations entered into a normalizing process and moved on the path of collaboration. As a result of this protocol, Abdullah Ocalan, the supreme leader of the PKK, was deported and finally was captured in 1999 and delivered to Turkey.

Relations between the two countries started to soften in 2000 when Bashar al-Assad's father Hafez al-Assad died and Ahmed Necdet Sezer, the President of the Turkish Republic, made Turkey's first official visit to Syria by attending the funeral.¹⁵

¹³ Zaman, Amberin. "Turkey Celebrates Capture of Ocalan." The Washington Post. 13 February 1999. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/daily/feb99/ocalanturkey18.htm>

¹⁴ Mertek, Sefa. "Turkey's New Foreign Policy and Syrian Relations." http://www.academia.edu/8004973/TURKEY_S_NEW_FOREIGN_POLICY_AND_SYRIAN_RELATIONS

¹⁵ Sokullu, Canan Ebru. "Debating Security in Turkey: Challenges and Changes in the Twenty-First Century." (Lexington Books, 2013) pg. 149

After the signing of the Adana Protocol and President Ahmet Necdet Sezer's official visit, relations between the two countries continued improving and official visits on the level of ministers increased, especially when Assad became president in 2000. In this context, firstly Vice President of Syria Abdul Halim Khaddam visited President of Turkish Republic Ahmet Necdet Sezer, and the two countries promised to increase their political, economic, military and cultural relations.¹⁶

Erdogan Administration and Turkey-Syria Relations

With Erdogan elected as prime minister in 2002 and with the AKP (Justice and Development Party) coming into power, the good relations that started in Ahmet Necdet Sezer's time developed significantly. Besides political developments, the Erdogan and Assad families started to meet together and they even went on a holiday together, and Erdogan started to call Assad his "brother".¹⁷ Davutoglu, the foreign affairs minister at that time, defined the relations by saying; "Common fate, common history, common future."¹⁸ Regarding this, the biggest step forward politically was made by Foreign Affairs Ministers Davutoglu and Walid Muallem by abolishing visas between the two countries which happened on September 13, 2009. In addition to abolishing visas, other political actions were taken, such as laying a foundation of the "friendship dam"; mutual

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Biz geldik Esad kardeşimle oturduk, konuştuk.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYizwt5Df2c>

¹⁸ Ayhan, Veysel. "A New Period in Turkey-Syria Relations: High Level Strategic Cooperation Council." Ortadoğu Analiz. November 2009.
<<http://arsiv.setav.org/ups/dosya/28769.pdf>>

trade and military agreements; and opening an airport in Hatay by both Erdogan and Bashar Al-Assad.¹⁹

During the Erdogan-Assad periods, and until the incidents in Syria in March 2011, there are two opinions that explain why Turkey-Syria relations were so positive. Since these opinions are directly related with the subsequent deterioration of relations, it is beneficial to mention them here.

According to the first opinion, and in reference to Washington's plans, Turkey was "objected" as a peacemaker between Syria and Israel, in order to convince Syria to stop providing support to Hamas for a free Palestinian state, receive the Golan Hills back, and to protect Israel.²⁰ In short, the request from the US for Turkey to convince Assad to soften the relations between Syria and Israel resulted in better relations between Turkey and Syria. As it will be discussed in the following pages, Erdogan went to Washington, DC right after a brutal bombing attack in Turkey, the Reyhanli attacks, and in his conversation with Obama, he mentioned that he attempted five times to become a peacemaker between Israel and Syria, but all of his attempts failed. According to the same opinion, other important reasons to establish peace between Israel and Syria are:

- * Turning Israel's Haifa port into an energy center
- * Israel's desire to be and work as an energy corridor
- * Enabling Northern Iraq and Haifa Petrol pipeline

¹⁹ Ibid. p.24

²⁰ FDD volume

* Saving Israel from Syria, Hamas, and Hezbollah threats²¹

The second opinion is related to ideas of politics to create a neo-Ottoman and Sunni Axis in the Middle East that started when the AKP came into power by adopting strategic depth and zero problem policies.

When the AKP came into power, they desired to have zero problems with neighboring countries and move forward with this principle. Zero problem policy is defined basically as “eliminating all the problems—at least, as much as possible—in relations with neighboring countries.”²² In summary, the AKP government promised “friendly relations with region’s countries” on the day they came into power.²³

Besides this, Davutoglu’s strategic depth and neo-Ottoman ideas involved having strong relationships with the region’s countries. The neo-Ottoman and strategic depth ideologies are based on this: “The Turkish Republic largely ignored relations with the states that had been formed out of the former Ottoman provinces in North Africa and the Middle East, and that today Turkey needs to play a greater role there.”²⁴ Similarly, Davutoglu said, “We have a legacy from Ottomans. They call it neo-Ottoman. Yes, we are neo-Ottomans. We have to take care of all the countries in our region. We are actually widening to North

²¹ Ibid. p.24

²² Turkish Foreign Ministry’s Official Website. “Komsularla Sifir Sorun Politikamiz.” <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/komsularla-sifir-sorun-politikamiz.tr.mfa>

²³ Turkish Foreign Ministry’s Official Website. “Yeni Donemde Sifir Sorun Politikasi.” <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/yeni-donemde-sifir-sorun-politikasi.tr.mfa>

²⁴ Taspinar, Omer. “Turkey’s Middle East Policies Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism.” Carnegie Middle East Center. September 2008.

http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cmec10_taspinar_final.pdf

Africa.”²⁵ As it will be mentioned in one of the next chapters, the AKP tried to accomplish this Middle East leadership mission by supporting Muslim Brothers and Sunni governments.

In summary, most of the opinions mentioned that relations during the Assad and Erdogan term were in good conditions because of these reasons, and Turkey was involved with the incidents regarding the Syrian Conflict because of the neo-Ottoman politics.

Before coming to relations between Erdogan and Assad after the AKP came into power in 2002, since it is directly related with the AKP’s Syria politics, it is necessary to talk about the US’s Middle East politics that changed in 2001.

CHAPTER 4

TURKEY, US, SYRIA, AND THE ARAB UPRISING

9/11, New US Middle East Policy, and Turkey

In order to better understand what is happening in Syria today, it is important to look at periphery events that seem directly related to Syria, such as George Bush coming into power and then the terrorist attacks of 9/11 happening shortly after this.

²⁵ Office of the Prime Minister Directorate General of Press and Information. Davutoglu’s Statement. “Biz Yeni Osmanliyiz.” 25 November 2009.
<<http://www.byegm.gov.tr/turkce/haber/ahmet-davutolu-bz-yen-osmanliyiz/14650>>

The US changed its approach to the Middle East dramatically after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. One of the opinions on the matter is that the US, facing radicalism threats after 2001, chose Turkey as an example to other countries for its regime and view on Islam, and therefore took actions together with Turkey. Another change made in the Middle East politics was redesigning the Middle East countries' borders and in this matter providing protection to Israel, giving energy path and petrol control to the US.²⁶

According to "Workshop on the Future of the Greater Middle East," prepared by Carnegie and Rand, Washington had "seven top priorities" in the context of the Greater Middle East Initiative, and it is seen that three of them were "state-building in Iraq, war on terrorism and energy security that is related with the subject." Carnegie and Rand also mention the topic of "the security of Israel."²⁷

According to some opinions, the AKP is a project party that has been brought into power in order to accomplish these two purposes²⁸, and there are people that bring an explanation of what is happening in Syria and Turkey's leading role by this opinion.

²⁶ Coşce, Salim. "Historical Links and Current Relationships Between India and the Middle East in the Context of the Greater Middle East Project." Akademik Bakis. 2008.
<<http://ataum.gazi.edu.tr/posts/view/title/buyuk-ortadogu-projesi-baglaminda-hindistan-ile-ortadogu-arasindaki-tarihi-baglar-ve-guncel-iliskiler-49236> >

²⁷ Olikier, Olga., and Yefimova, Natasha. "Carnegie-Rand Workshop on the Future of the Greater Middle East and the Prospects for US-Russian Partnership." 2004.
http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP118.html

²⁸ Interview with Ismail Hakki Pekin, December 2014.

In the context of this, in her article “Transforming the Middle East” published in the Washington Post on 8.7.2003, the US’s former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice mentioned that: “From Morocco to Persian Gulf, 22 countries’ borders will be changed and Turkey is included as well.”²⁹

Again, in the context of this, CIA specialist Henry Barkey mentioned some goals on his reports about Turkey, that: Israel is the US’s most important ally in Middle East; it is necessary to start a civil war in large countries by provoking ethnic and religious differences, and dividing these countries into smaller countries and weakening them; and petrol and natural gas should be gathered in the East Mediterranean area, and they should be marketed by Israel, lessening the dependency on Russia.³⁰

During a speech, Erdogan said that he is the co-president of the Greater Middle East Initiative and added: “Turkey has a mission in Middle East. What is this mission? We are one of the co-presidents of Greater Middle East and North Africa projects and accomplishing this mission.”³¹

After the break of the Arab Uprising, when protests moved to Syria, another turning point had been reached in relations and a chain of incidents started between Turkey and Syria.

²⁹ Avcı, Erkan. “Arap Bahari’ in Kokeni.: Buyuk Ortadogu Projesi” 2012.

<http://www.academia.edu/2112327/Erkan_Avc%C4%B1_-_Arap_Bahar%C4%B1n%C4%B1n_K%C3%B6keni_B%C3%BCy%C3%BCk_Ortado%C4%9Fu_Projesi>

³⁰ Ediboglu, Mehmet Ali. “Hedef Ulke Turkiye.” pg.18

³¹ “Tayyip Erdogan BOP Esbaskani oldugunu Itiraf Ediyor.”

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpWVwS-a4-w>>

Why the Deterioration?

There are two main opinions on explaining the sudden deterioration of historically troublesome relations between Turkey and Syria while they were in very good friendly condition in 2011.

According to the first opinion, Assad oppressed the uprisings (the Arab Uprising's spillover on Syria) by a "massacre" and Turkey decided to move with the international community in order to first convince him to make reforms and then to ask him to step down from his position. The Turkish government commented on these developments on its Ministry of Foreign Affairs website in the light of having zero problems with its neighbors: "Unfortunately, our relations with Syria have entered to new era because of the regime's cruel violence campaign against the people's protests that started in March 2011. But, this is caused by Syrian regime's politics that does not allow the improvement on relations, not because of a failure or wrongful of our zero problem approach."³² Since the uprisings started in 2011, Erdogan and his administration have called Assad a terrorist who he once called his brother.³³

³² Ibid.

³³ Milliyet. "Erdogan: Esad Bir Teroristtir." 7 October 2013.
<<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/erdogan-dan-onemli-aciklamalar/siyaset/detay/1774034/default.htm>>

The second reason explaining the deterioration in relations is that the US, seeing an opportunity in the context of Arab Uprisings, desired to accomplish its goals of the Greater Middle East Initiative through Syria, and through Turkey's support of the project. In the context of this, Turkey would be supporting the US, and it would get a share from the developments as a part of their neo-Ottomans and Sunni Axis ideas, and would become a stronger country.

Before moving onto Turkey's action as a part of Syria policy, it would be useful to mention an agreement which would summarize the second notion told in this paper. According to Kuwait Islamic Ummah Party Secretary General Dr. Faysal El-Hamd's and Hatay Senator Ediboglu's statements, there is a secret agreement signed in Qatar's capital city Doha, on the dates of November 8-11, 2012, by Turkish Republic Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, Qatar's Foreign Affairs Minister Khalid bin Mohammed, UAE minister Anwar Mohammed Qarqash, US's Syrian ambassador Robert Ford and Muslim Brotherhood's Riyad Sakfa's assistant.

According to the agreement,

- 1- The number of Syrian Arab Army's soldiers will be decreased to 50 thousand and the army will be converted into a defending army.
- 2- Syria can claim it's right on Golan by using only political methods. Peace negotiations between Israel and Syria will be made under US and Qatar's observation.
- 3- All of the chemical and biological weapons and all of the rockets will be transferred to Jordan under US supervision.

- 4- Syria will not claim rights on Hatay and will leave some villages in Idlib and Aleppo to Turkey.
- 5- All members of the PKK will be deported from Syria, and wanted PKK members will be delivered and the PKK will be listed as terrorist organization.
- 6- All of the weapons and natural resources research agreements signed with Russian and Chinese companies will be cancelled.
- 7- Qatar's natural gas pipelines will be permitted to transfer to EU countries through Turkey and Syria.
- 8- Turkey's water transfer from Ataturk Dam to Israel through Syria will be permitted.
- 9- Buildings demolished in Syria during the war will be reconstructed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar. Qatar, the UAE, and the US will have every concession of construction and research.
- 10- Relations with Iran, Russia and China will be limited and relations with Palestine resistance will be stopped.
- 11- The new regime that will be built in Syria will follow liberal Islamic rules.
- 12- This agreement will take effect after Syrian oppositions come to power.³⁴

Signature of this agreement though was firmly denied by the ministry of foreign affairs.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid. p-34

³⁵ Demirok, Ahmet. "News from the Turkish Foreign Ministry." Official website of Turkish Embassy in Doha. 28 March 2013.
<<http://doha.emb.mfa.gov.tr/ShowAnnouncement.aspx?ID=181962>>

CHAPTER 5

TURKEY'S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE SYRIAN CONFLICT AND THE SYRIAN OPPOSITION

On March 2011, as a result of Assad's oppression of the protests in Daraa, Syria, the relations between the two countries, which started to improve since 1998 and developed to a point where both country's supreme leaders went on a vacation together, were turned upside-down.

According to many opinions, as discussed above, Turkey and US were involved in the following incidents, because human rights were violated in Syria and "it was necessary to end Assad's cruelty"; according to others, they were involved because an opportunity was present to apply Middle East plans which were mentioned in an earlier section of this paper.

After March 2011, which was seen as the month the Arab Uprising's spread in Syria, Turkey had an active role against the conflicts in Syria through their neo-Ottoman ideas and Erdogan's and Davutoglu's ideas of turning Turkey into the "leader of the region," and also through being an ally to the US. The AKP's ambitions for the region, just like in Syria when the relations were improved, have shaped Turkey's policies on the matter right after the broken relations with Syria. The best sources to explain these ambitions are the statements given by the AKP. For example, Erdogan said that he does not see the

incidents in Syria as a foreign affairs problem, and he stated how closely he was involved and will continue to be involved in the incidents in Syria by saying, “Syrian incidents are domestic issues of ours.”³⁶ Are these quotes meant to answer the question of which intent motivated the Turkish government in changing its policies toward Syria?- YES- That is my intent.

Then-minister of foreign affairs, Davutoglu, mentioned that it was necessary to have an approach since it affects Turkey’s future and it was necessary to be involved, and he has stated Turkey’s active role against the incidents in Syria by saying, “This [getting involved with incidents] is a must, it is not an option.”³⁷

Davutoglu again in 2012, mentioned in his statement against the critics on Syrian policies that Syria is part of a “political transition period and comprehensive awakening movement with a root of social movement in the Middle East,” and he said that Turkey has taken and will take the necessary actions to be the center country in its region. Davutoglu also stated the AKP’s approach on Syria and the Middle East by saying, “We, as Turkey, will keep managing the transition period in the Middle East, and will also continue to be pioneer of this transition process. Today, all the societies in the Middle East not only see Turkey as a friendly and brotherly country, but also see it as a country with new ideas that have the power to change the future and to pioneer a new regional

³⁶ AKP (Justice and Development Party)- Official Website. “Suriye Meselesi Bizim İç Meselemizdir.” 6 August 2011.
<http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/suriye-meselesi-bizim-ic-meselemizdir/11521#1>

³⁷ Sol Haber. “Davutoğlu: 'Suriye konusunda müdahil olmamız zorunluluk!'” 30 March 2012.
<<http://haber.sol.org.tr/devlet-ve-siyaset/davutoglu-suriye-konusunda-mudahil-olmamiz-zorunluluk-haberi-53231>>

rule. We accomplished and will accomplish the necessities of this mission. A new Middle East is rising. We will continue to be the owner, pioneer and servant of the new Middle East.”³⁸

In the context of the Syrian Conflict, it is seen that there is a similarity on the approach and policies of Syria between Turkey and the US, despite the differences on the AKP’s regional ambitions; the AKP’s ideology; Turkey’s insistence with creating a no-fly zone and buffer-zone; the US’s approach and Turkey’s approach on the Kurdish matter, the PYD, and Kobani; the US setting a priority to destroy ISIS terror while Turkey’s primary focus is on bringing Assad down; the US defining Iran as an enemy while Turkey is criticizing Iran for just its support on Assad regime; and Turkey and the US’s definition of a “moderate rebel”. I suspect this is a key paragraph, but I don't really understand it. Can you spell out its logic?- Until this point, I tried to explain why Turkey changed its policies against Syria and Assad. As you see, according to some books and people, Turkey changed its policies because it was pressured by the US. This paragraph's logic is to explain the differences between the policies of the two countries. I am basically making the argument that Turkey and the US decided to topple Assad and arm the rebels together, but still the two countries have their own agendas and differences as well.

³⁸ Turkish Foreign Ministry’s Official Website. “Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Ahmet Davutoğlu’nun TBMM Genel Kurulu’nda Suriye’deki Olaylar Hakkında Yaptığı Konuşma.” 26 April 2012. <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-tbmm-genel-kurulu_nda-suriye_deki-olaylar-hakkinda-yaptigi-konusma_-26-nisan-2012.tr.mfa>

The former head of the general staff intelligence office, Ismail Hakki Pekin, explains the most important difference between the US and the AKP by saying: “US desired to redesign the region in accordance with the Greater Middle East Initiative. When the Arab Spring started, Turkey saw the opportunity to widen its sovereignty area. Within this context, it wanted to create a Sunni zone and spread the neo-Ottoman ideology, and widen its ruling hinterland in the Sunni zone.”³⁹

As a result, Turkey moved in parallel with the US, and its involvement with Syrian conflicts occurred between March 2011 and March 2015 has passed through several stages. Turkey did not cut all relations with Syria right away. When the conflicts in Syria began, Turkey became the peacemaker and tried to improve Assad’s reforms by the help of its improved relations with Syria. For this purpose, the then-minister of foreign affairs, Ahmet Davutoglu, Erdogan and MIT (Turkish Intelligence Service) undersecretary Hakan Fidan talked with Assad many times. Until the last visit by Davutoglu to Syria on August 9, 2011, government officials talked with Assad many times and stated their concerns on reforms and protests. As a result of the continuity of the conflicts between Assad’s regime and protesters, a call was made for Assad to stop the violence against protesters; also Erdogan stated that he was not willing to see an antidemocratic, authoritarian, and totalitarian regime in Syria by mentioning Assad’s regime.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Zaman. “Erdogan: Suriye’de Otoriter, Totaliter Dayatmanın Olmasını İstemiyoruz.” 26 April 2011. <http://www.zaman.com.tr/gundem_erdogan-suriyede-otoriter-totaliter-dayatmanin-olmasini-istemiyoruz_1126550.html>

Turkey also made some various attempts within the context of the Arab League and the United Nations Security Council, in order to solve the problems in Syria.

Turkey started to give supporting signs to Syrian opponents after March 2011 when the Syrian Conflict began, and in fact, Muslim Brotherhood leader Riad al-Shaqfeh and Secretary General Mohammed Tayfur had a meeting in Istanbul on April 2011 and had a press statement as well.⁴¹

During the interview I held with Ismail Hakki Pekin, he talked about “the AKP project” mentioned above, and said: “Most suitable thing was using the Muslim Brotherhood. They [Turkey and the US] supported the Muslim Brotherhood and turned them against Syria.”⁴²

By this time, attempts of diplomatic solutions left its place to harsh statements on Assad, and finally on July 11, 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated, “Assad has lost his legitimacy.”⁴³ Upon Clinton’s statement, 350 Syrian opponents met in the National Salvation Council in Istanbul on July 15, 2011 and discussed the next steps to bring Assad down.⁴⁴ After all these developments, Turkey supported the creation of armed

⁴¹ Orhan, Oytun. “Suriye’de Muhalefetin Anatomisi.” Center For Middle Eastern Strategic Studies. 18 April 2011.

http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/trUploads/Yazilar/Dosyalar/2011418_orsamsyriaopposition.pdf

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ NTV. “ABD, Esad’ın ipini çekti.” 12 July 2011. <<http://www.ntv.com.tr/arsiv/id/25231476/>>

⁴⁴ Al-Khalidi, Suleiman., and Cameron-Moore, Simon. “Syrian Opposition Form Council to Counter Assad.” Reuters. 16 July 2011. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/07/16/us-syria-opposition-idUSTRE76F0TT20110716>>

opponents, the FSA (Free Syrian Army), in Hatay on July 29, 2011,⁴⁵ and Turkey officially allowed its lands and weapons to opponents of Syria. Finally, the US told Assad to step down on August 2011.⁴⁶ After this date, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, the head organization of opponents, was established in Turkey by the help of the Muslim Brotherhood on September 15, 2011.⁴⁷

On November 22, three months after the US told Assad to go, Erdogan also publicly asked Assad to step down by saying, “Before more blood was spilled, and without any more cruelty, for the sake of your people, country and region; step down.”⁴⁸

After the harsh statements and supporting armed opponents, Turkey’s next attempt was gathering 83 countries together in a “Syria’s Friends” conference in Istanbul on April 1, 2012, and Erdogan showed his solidarity with those calling for Assad to step down by

⁴⁵ White, Jeffrey. “Assad’s Armed Opposition: The Free Syrian Army.” The Washington Institute. 30 November 2011. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/asads-armed-opposition-the-free-syrian-army>

⁴⁶ Myers, Steven Lee. “US and Allies say Syria Leader Must Step Down.” Newyork Times. 18 August 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/19/world/middleeast/19diplo.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

⁴⁷ Anadolu Ajansi. “Suriye’de Icsavas Ucuncu Yilinda.” Hurriyet. 15 March 2013. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/planet/22824015.asp>

⁴⁸ Burch, Jonathon. “Turkey tells Syria’s Assad: Step Down.” Reuters. 22 November 2011. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/22/us-syria-idUSL5E7MD0GZ20111122>

saying, “It is not and shall not be an option for us to support this regime that oppresses its very own people.”⁴⁹

Again, in the same conference, Erdogan stated his support on opponents of Syria by saying, “I greet Syrian heroes who are fighting tremendously against most modern weapons and most cruel attacks in the cities of Syria. I would like to remind our brothers in Syria, who are fighting for freedom, that they will never be left on hands of fate and they are not alone.”⁵⁰

Erdogan again stated about Syrian opponents and bringing Assad down on June 26, 2012, and he said: “Turkey and people of Turkey will provide every needed support, until Syrians get rid of this cruelty, this massacre, this murderous dictator, and his gang.”⁵¹

Turkey received several criticisms from opponent parties and international public’s opinion in the context of “supporting Syrian opponents,” and this paper’s hypothesis is directly involved with those critics.

First of all, as mentioned in the beginning, because of the AKP’s close relations with Sunni ideology, the Muslim Brotherhood organization was the most favorable between all Syrian opponents.⁵² Another reason of this policy is that the AKP’s desire on having a

⁴⁹ “Basbakan Erdogan: Suriye Halkinin Dostlari Grubu 2. Konferansi Konusmasi.” 1 April 2012.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9o6RDRJL4>>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Basbakan Erdogan’in Nato toplantisi Sonrasi Konusmasi ve Suriye’ye Tehdit Mesaji.” 26 June 2012.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eO8ju9Mulhc>

⁵² Ibid.

moderate Sunni Islamist government after Assad, and having this government to serve in the AKP's favor. According to an article by Chatham House, this approach outlined the "anti-Muslim Brotherhood opposition" in opponent organization and it caused Syrian opponents to have a radical Islamist outlook.⁵³

Another critique is that organizations and people who are not Syrian and have nothing to do with the Syrian Conflict became involved because of the support of Turkey on bringing Assad down along with radicalized Syrian opponents. In fact, a statement supporting this idea was given by Turkey's European Union Minister Volkan Bozkir. According to the statement, which was defined as a confession, Bozkir said: "Turkey achieved an important thing. It became a pioneer to create opponents which did not exist in Syria. It led to grow in the lands of Turkey. If we can talk about a Syrian opponent now, it is because of Turkey's attempts. What Turkey achieved can be defined as creating a possibility for an opponent group in Syria and providing support for these opponents in the lands of Turkey. If Turkey had not started this attempt, the opposition would have been established in another place."⁵⁴

Another reality besides the critiques is that the Free Syrian Army's failure on bringing Assad down let ISIS and other radical organizations become popular, and this caused

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Guller, Mehmet Ali. "ISID Kara Teror." *Inkilap Kitap Evi*. 2.Edition. October 2014. Pg.132

many members of the FSA to join radical organizations. In fact, even Omer Gerbe, one of the FSA commanders, left FSA and joined ISIS.⁵⁵

The New York Times published an article related to this subject on August 3, 2012 and it said that the process started to support moderate opponents but now it shifted its purpose, and opponents changed their form. According to the New York Times, every asset in the country desires a change in regime; the control of the rebellion has passed to Al-Qaeda which is financially supported by Saudi Arabia.⁵⁶

Again, an article published in the Washington Post on August 20, 2012, focused on the same issue by saying that Al-Nusra and similar radical organizations have started to rise instead of the Free Syrian Army, and it also stated that an Al-Nusra commander confirmed that they received support from the Turkish Republic.⁵⁷

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Hikmet Cetin mentioned that Turkey made some mistakes in order to bring Assad down, and he added during our interview: “In the beginning of the crisis in Syria, Turkey acted flexible to border crossings of all assets that wanted to fight against Assad. Different terrorist organizations got the opportunity to

⁵⁵ Ibid. p.114

⁵⁶ Komireddi, Kapil. “Syria’s Crumbling Pluralism.” New York Times. 3 August 2012.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/04/opinion/syrias-crumbling-pluralism.html>

⁵⁷ Vela, Justin., and Sly, Liz. “In Syria, Group Suspected of al-Qaida Links Gaining Prominence in War to Topple Assad.” New York Times. 19 August 2012.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-syria-group-suspected-of-al-qaeda-links-gaining-prominence-in-war-to-topple-assad/2012/08/19/c7cfd66-ea22-11e1-9ddc-340d5efb1e9c_story.html>

cross into Syria through Turkey. Those individuals or groups did not cross the border by saying they were from ISIS or Al-Qaeda. They crossed by saying that they were going to fight against Assad. In addition, Turkey also initiated organizing the opposition and they held meetings in Turkey. With the time, the radicals that went to Syria became stronger than the opposition. The countries, especially the US, that were also supporting the opposition with Turkey in the beginning of the events, stopped the support when they realized the situation.” Cetin also added: “There are strong claims that Turkey supported radical terrorist organizations, provided them with training and gave weapons. If these allegations were to be proved, Turkey may have some problems. Also, in the face of ISIS danger, overthrowing Assad is not on other countries’ agenda, except for Turkey.”⁵⁸

In addition to all of these, there are two main reasons for Erdogan to approach Assad in such a strict manner. First one is that Erdogan thought Assad would be taken down as fast as Kaddafi was taken down.⁵⁹ Secondly, he trusted the US and never doubted on the US’s intervention in Syria.

Right now, the last development on arming opponents is that the US and Turkish officials agreed on training and equipping 15,000 rebels who will fight against ISIS, according to

⁵⁸ Former Foreign Minister of Turkey Hikmet Cetin, Interview by author. December 2014.

⁵⁹ Cockburn,Patrick. “Whose side is on Turkey?.” London Review of Books. 6 November 2014. <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n21/patrick-cockburn/whose-side-is-turkey-on>>

a signed agreement dated February 19, 2015. Within this context, the US deployed its 400 soldiers in Turkey.⁶⁰

In the light of all these developments, it is all over the news that after Turkey opened its borders to refugees and political-military opponents, thousands of Turkish citizens started to join these radical organizations. There are claims that Turkey is being silent to its own jihadist and radical citizens in order to bring Assad down.

Turkey on the other hand, underlined and stated many times that it has no relations with any radical organizations, particularly with Al-Nusra. Davutoglu talked on CNN, and he stated: “We have said this over and over, both I and the prime minister. Turkey has no relations with any radical group in Syria, and I am especially referring to Jabhat Al-Nusra. This accusation is ugly propaganda on the part of those who want to overshadow Turkey’s humanitarian policy in Syria.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Arsu, Sebnem. “Turkey: Deal Set to Aid Syrian Rebels.” New York Times. 19 February 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/20/world/europe/turkey-deal-set-to-aid-syrian-rebels.html>

⁶¹ Idiz, Semih. “Pressure Mounts on Turkey Over Radical Groups in Syria.” Al-Monitor. 15 October 2013. <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/10/turkey-must-control-jihadists-entering-syria.html##ixzz3RyCzWdkR>>

According to a statement given by an anonymous Turkish official on International Crisis Group, Turkey thought that “Al-Nusra was containable.” Another Turkish official said in his statement: “Jabhat al-Nusra does have links to Al-Qaeda, we know that. But they have no political future, except perhaps as destabilizing spoilers. We don’t say [the U.S. has to] cooperate with them. We just say, don’t exaggerate, don’t make them into [an official anti-western force], it gives them an oversized ego.”⁶²

CHAPTER 6

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND TURKISH DOMESTIC LAW

As a response to the claims regarding Turkish Republic’s support of Islamic radicals and organizations, and that the police force is ignoring these incidents, which will be mentioned in the next chapter, we are faced with several laws and agreements in the light of domestic and international laws. Before we investigate these laws, Turkey’s membership to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the UN (United Nations) had been considered, and what these two organizations said on this topic was verified.

First of all, according to the North Atlantic Treaty that was signed by Turkey, countries parted on this treaty “reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of

⁶² International Crisis Group. “Blurring the Borders: Syrian Spillover Risks for Turkey.” 30 April 2013. <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/media-releases/2013/europe/blurring-the-borders-syrian-spillover-risks-for-turkey.aspx>>

the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments.”⁶³

Secondly, as mentioned on the second article of the United Nations Regulations: “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”⁶⁴

Other than this, the United Nations Security Council, according to resolution 1267, which is obligatory to all countries, imposes sanctions to all persons and companies that provide financial support to terror organizations related to Al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden. According to this resolution, it brings the responsibility of “preventing these persons’ entrance and transit pass through participated countries, preventing direct or indirect weapons and all type of material supply, sale and transfer.”⁶⁵

According to the UN Security Council Resolution 1373 accepted in September, 2001, countries are obligated to the “prevention of all kinds of terrorist attacks in all stages including the pre-attack stage, collaboration of participated countries with each other

⁶³NATO’s Official Website. “The North Atlantic Treaty.”

<http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/stock_publications/20120822_nato_treaty_en_light_2009.pdf>

⁶⁴ Turkish Foreign Ministry’s Official Website. “Charter of the United Nations.”

<<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/Kutuphane/MultilateralConventions/CharteroftheUnitedNations.pdf>>

⁶⁵ Turkish Foreign Ministry’s Official Website. “UN Security Council’s Resolution 1267.”

<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/bm-guvenlik-konseji_nin-1267-sayili-karari_.tr.mfa>

against terrorism, bringing persons affiliated with terrorist attacks to justice as felony, not granting refugee status for terrorists”. According to this resolution, all states “shall avoid to provide active or passive support” to persons affiliated with terrorist attacks.⁶⁶ The law also states that all states shall “take the necessary steps to prevent the commission of terrorist acts, including by provision of early warning to other states by exchange of information; avoid providing support to persons or companies that have participated in terrorist acts; and prevent the movement of terrorists or terrorist groups by effective border controls and controls on issuance of identity papers and travel documents, and through measures for preventing counterfeiting, forgery, or fraudulent use of identity papers and travel documents.”⁶⁷

Apart from these, according to UN resolution 2170, accepted on 2014, ISIS and Al-Nusra have been censured, and members of the UN have been called on “to suppress the flow of foreign fighters, financing and other support to Islamist extremist groups in Iraq and Syria”. Also, according to the resolution, member states have been asked “to take national measures to prevent fighters from travelling from their soil to join the groups, reiterating obligations under previous counter-terrorism resolutions to prevent the movement of terrorists.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Turkish Foreign Ministry’s Official Website. “UN Security Council’s Resolution 1373.”

http://www.mfa.gov.tr/bm-guvenlik-konseyi_nin-1373-sayili-karari_tr.mfa

⁶⁷ Ministry of Finance, The Financial Crimes Investigation Unit. “UN Resolution 1373.”

http://www.masak.gov.tr/media/portals/masak2/files/mevzuat/terorun_finansmani/uluslararasi_mevzuat/BirlesmisMilletler/BM_1373_Karar.htm

⁶⁸ United Nations. “Security Council Adopts Resolution 2170(2014) Condemning Gross Widespread Abuse of Human Rights by Extremist Groups in Iraq, Syria.” 2014.

<http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11520.doc.htm>

Apart from these signed agreements by Turkey about support for terrorists, the country has its own domestic laws as well. Lawyer Gokhan Basan from Turkey during a phone interview gave me some explanations on making propaganda of terrorist organizations, being a member of such organizations and “freedom of travel” that Turkish security forces mentioned continuously:

“Law accepts making ‘propaganda’ of terrorist organization as a crime. The lexical meaning of propaganda is spreading a feeling, a thought, and news. Propaganda also means to advertise or praise something. As mentioned in law article 7/2, ‘making propaganda of terror organization,’ means introducing terrorist organizations, telling organizations’ purposes, spreading its actions to other individuals, praising organizations, its actions, and members. Everyone can make propaganda for a terrorist organization. A terrorist organization and its members can make propaganda of their organization, rather as personal or corporate. Propaganda can be made with every kind of tool. Making propaganda through media is a reason for a punishment increase. People who make propaganda for terrorist organizations will be punished with imprisonment of one to five years.”

“According to Anti-Terror Law article 7: (Changed second subsection: 11/4/2013-6459/8 article) People who make propaganda that legitimizes or praises or encourages the use of such methods, including force, violence or threat by terrorist organizations, shall be punished with imprisonment of between one and five years. In case this crime occurs through using media and broadcasting, the punishment will be raised by half. Also,

people who are not participating in the crime but are responsible from media and broadcasting shall be punished with a punitive fine equal to 1000 to 5000 days. Actions and behaviors below shall be punished with accordance to this subsection:

a) Covering fully or part of their faces in order to hide their identities during the meetings and protests converted into a terrorist organization's propaganda.

b) Even if it would not occur in a meeting or protest, being in a manner that reveals membership or support to terrorist organizations is accepted as a crime, such as;

1. Hanging or carrying the emblem, picture or signs of such organizations,

2. Shouting slogans,

3. Broadcasting with audio devices,

4. Wearing uniforms with a terrorist organization's emblem, picture, or signs. Where this assistance is provided to these organizations in the form of buildings, premises, offices or extensions of associations, foundations, political parties, workers and professions' institutions or their affiliates, or in educational institutions, or dormitories, or their extensions, the punishments mentioned in the second subsection shall be doubled.

Freedom of residence and travel is defined as giving people freedom to reside in any place and to travel to any desired place. Freedom of residence is the freedom of settling and living in any desired place as long as it is respectful to others' rights and is legal. Freedom of travel means traveling, visiting, seeing, researching, and changing places independently.

Our constitution's twenty-third article is about Freedom of Residence and Travel. Here is the article:

‘Everyone has the right to freedom of residence and movement. Freedom of residence may be restricted by law for the purpose of preventing offences, promoting social and economic development, ensuring sound and orderly urban growth, and protecting public property; freedom of movement may be restricted by law for the purpose of investigation and prosecution of an offence, and prevention of offences. A citizen's freedom to leave the country may be restricted on account of civic obligations, or criminal investigation or prosecution. Citizens may not be deported, or deprived of their right of entry to their homeland.’ In which situations are the Freedom of Residence and Travel restricted? A person has the freedom of residence in any desired places, and freedom of travel to any desired place. But, freedom of residence and travel can be restricted for the reasons below:

- Providing social and economic development
- Prevention of committing a crime
- Protecting public's common belongings

· Providing healthy and orderly urbanizing’

“According to the seventh article of the Anti-Terror law, those who found terrorist organizations in order to commit crimes by using force, violence, and methods of pressure, frightening, intimidation, oppression, and threat for the purposes as specified in Article 1 under any name, or who organize and lead activities in such organizations, shall be punished in accordance with Turkish Penal Code article 314. Since it is a crime to join a terrorist organization, and therefore in order to prevent such people from committing crimes, necessary notice should be given to the official authorities. Since freedom of travel can be restricted in order to prevent committing a crime, security forces should be taking necessary precautions for the reported person and follow the necessary procedure as well.”⁶⁹ A legal analysis is helpful, but this does seem to be overkill. I did shorten it. It was 10 pages. I deleted the half of it. Still too long? I think all these are so relevant

CHAPTER 7

BORDER CROSSINGS, ACTS OF RADICALS IN TURKEY AND THE APPROACHES OF THE GOVERNMENT AND SECURITY FORCES

⁶⁹ Turkish Lawyer Gokhan Basan, interview by author, March 2015.

As seen on Turkey's Syria policies, Turkey, along with the US and other countries, have trained and supported Syrian opponents in order to topple the Assad regime. However, Turkey's relations with the groups and persons who are fighting in Syria are more complex than the other states. While there is a "good rebels"/"bad rebels" separation on the table for the US, there are claims that Turkey is supporting every radical without hesitation in order to bring down Assad. Since the incidents started in Syria, both local and international media have mentioned and reported on Turkey's open support for ISIS, Al-Nusra, Ahrar Sham and other radical organizations. Soli Ozel made a comment on the topic, which could be accepted as a summary of public opinion. According to Ozel: "When Al-Nusra was declared a terrorist organization by the United States and accepted as such by the UN, the Turks tried to defend it tooth and nail. If you read government-supported daily newspapers then, they were all singing the praises of Al-Nusra and saying it wasn't that radical ... They thought Al-Nusra and other groups would be good militants and overthrow [Assad], but once that was done, they'd be easy to contain."⁷⁰

Besides media organizations, criticisms were made by Western Countries and the US. On May 2013, during a meeting between Obama and Erdogan, Obama sent a clear message to Erdogan and stated, "USA believes that Turkey is allowing for weapon and militant transfers for the 'wrong rebels' and anti-western jihadists."⁷¹

⁷⁰ Leigh, Karen. "Turkey's Bleeding Border." Council on Foreign Relations. 24 June 2014.
<<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141597/karen-leigh/turkeys-bleeding-border>>

⁷¹ Entous, Adam., and Parkinson, Joe. "Turkey's Spymaster Plots Own Course in Syria." The Wall Street Journal. 10 October 2013.
<<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303643304579107373585228330>>

After this incident, US Ankara Ambassador Ricciardone mentioned during his speech at Atlantic Council on September 2014 that the US's opponents were divided into yellow, red and green accordingly to their level of trust, and he stated that Turkey is working together with unacceptable groups and added: "It is not possible for us to work with them. It would be beneficial for you to not work with them. We said, in our opinion, you should not let these groups cross through your borders." Ricciardone mentioned Al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham as the groups that are unacceptable to work with and stated that they are not working with these organizations.⁷²

Criticisms were made against Turkey for listing Al-Nusra as a terrorist organization on June 2014, more than one year after the US listed them as terrorist organization on December 2012; the UN did the same on May 2013.⁷³

Davutoglu mentioned that criticizing the US for accepting Al-Nusra as a terrorist organization would bring more harm than benefit.⁷⁴

Within this context, another crisis with the US occurred between US Vice President Joe Biden and Erdogan. Joe Biden, during his speech at Harvard University on October 2, 2014, stated that Erdogan accepted his mistake about ISIS. Biden said, "President Erdogan told me, he is an old friend, said you were right, we let too many people

⁷² Cumhuriyet. "Turkiye Cihatci Gruplarla Calisti." 12 September 2014.

<http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/dunya/118597/_Tukiye_cihatci_gruplarla_calisti_.html>

⁷³ Daloglu, Tulin. "Turkey finally Designates Jabhat-al-Nusra a terrorist Group." Al-Monitor. 6 June 2014. <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/06/turkey-al-nusra-terrorist-organization-syria-al-qaeda.html>>

⁷⁴ Idiz, Semih. "Why is Jabhat-al-Nusra no longer useful for Turkey?." Al-Monitor. 10 June 2014.

<<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/06/idiz-turkey-syria-opposition-nusra-terrorist-unsc-erdogan.html>>

through, now we are trying to seal the border.” Defending US foreign policies, Biden on his speech also blamed the region’s states for the rise of ISIS and added: “The regional allies of the US determined to take down Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, poured hundreds of millions dollars, and tens thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad, accepted the people who would be in supply for Al-Nusra and Al-Qaeda and extremist elements of jihadists coming from other parts of the world.” Also by mentioning Turkey he said, “Our biggest problem is our allies. Our allies in the region were our largest problem in Syria.”⁷⁵

Thereupon, Erdogan stated that he never told Biden that he was wrong and he was expecting an apology. Erdogan also added: “I have never said to him that we had made a mistake, never. If he did say this at Harvard, then he has to apologize to us. Foreign fighters have never entered Syria from our country. They may come to our country as tourists and cross into Syria, but no one can say that they cross in with their arms.”⁷⁶

Then, Biden apologized to Erdogan. Later, during his interview with CNN on November 3, Biden mentioned that he did not apologize to anyone and he also added: “Look, what I learned is, I'm not changing my brand. There's nothing I've said that I haven't said that

⁷⁵ Tanis, Tolga. “Biden Says Erdogan Admitted ISIL Mistake.” Hurriyet Daily News. 3 October 2014. <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/biden-says-erdogan-admitted-isil-mistake.aspx?pageID=238&nID=72530&NewsCatID=359>>

⁷⁶ Logiurato, Brett. “Turkey’s President Demands Biden Apologize Over Comments About ISIS.” Business Insider. 4 October 2014. <<http://www.businessinsider.com/turkey-erdogan-biden-apologize-apology-isis-2014-10#ixzz3RxX3mLpH>>

was truthful. And so sometimes -- you know, everybody says they're looking for authenticity, I never apologized to him. I know him well. I've dealt with him. I called him and said, 'Look, what was reported was not accurate to what I said.'”⁷⁷

As an answer to accusations, Turkey is not denying the existence of Turks in radical organization in Syria, but Turkey is denying the allegations of full support for these organizations.

This chapter will discuss interviews made with Turkish citizens who went to Syria in order to join radical organizations; security forces' approach on the subject; how the border crossings are being accomplished; numbers of Turkish radicals; treatments of militants in Turkish hospitals; and statements made by the government.

It is a well-known reality that there are thousands of Turkish citizens who went to Syria to fight in the name of jihad since the beginning of the war in Syria. Since border crossings are not official, it is hard to give an exact number, but there are some estimations being made.

By September 2013, according to information on MIT (National Intelligence Organization) reports, there are 500 Turks fighting in Syria.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Today's Zaman. "Biden Says He Never Apologized to Turkey's Erdogan." 4 November 2014. <http://www.todayszaman.com/national_biden-says-he-never-apologized-to-turkeys-erdogan_363461.html>

In July, Gaziantep Senator Mehmet Seker, during our phone interview, mentioned that his estimation was around 5000; in January, during our second interview, he said that the number is way higher than his previous estimation. Mehmet Seker said that he gathered this information from the families asking for help.⁷⁹ Another person I interviewed, the former Director of Intelligence Agency Ismail Hakki Pekin, stated that there are 12,000 Turks in total—this figure was reached by using the information he received from his friends in the area.⁸⁰ Another claim about numbers was made by Boris Kalnoky from the German Die Welt newspaper. According to Kalnoky, ISIS has 10 to 15 thousand militants in the area, and 10% of them are Turks. In regards to the author’s report based on European Intelligence Units, there are more than 1000 Turks who crossed the border to join ISIS.⁸¹

According to Hurriyet, a Turkish newspaper dated June 27, 2014, police received 163 applications concerning their arrival in Syria to fight for ISIS. According to the same article, Turkish Intelligence reports that 600-700 Turkish citizens joined ISIS and the Turkish government does not accept the fact that there are 3000 Turkish ISIS militants.⁸²

⁷⁸ Ozay, Huseyin. “500 Turkish Fighters Are Among Syrian Opposition Ranks.” Al-Monitor. 29 September 2013. <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2013/09/turkish-fighters-syria-opposition.html#>>

⁷⁹ CHP Gaziantep Deputy Mehmet Seker, interview by author, December 2014.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ CNN Turk. “Die Welt: ISID’in yuzde 10’u Turk.” 5 August 2014.

<http://www.cnnturk.com/haber/dunya/die-welt-isidin-yuzde-10u-turk>

⁸² Kizilkoyun, Fevzi. “Families Say 163 Turkish Citizens Have Joined ISIL.” Hurriyet Daily News. 27 June 2014. <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/families-say-163-turkish-citizens-have-joined-isil-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=68372&NewsCatID=341>>

As can be seen, even though there is no agreement with regard to numbers, it is an undeniable truth that people of Turkey are joining radical organizations intensely.

The Turkish government has made several statements about the number of Turkish radicals in Syria. For example, during a fasting break in July 2014, Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc commented on the subject: “I would never think of existence of such thing in my country, I would not give it a possibility and chance. Are they in large numbers? No, even a few or one person would be a great crime for us. This is a really big mistake. We are investigating it... Some of them are on social media, Allah may chasten them. Our young girls are having a relationship through social media; they cross the border somehow, and commit murder together with those. Some of them are being trained here. Maybe with a foundation or association or anything in their name, they are being trained with the term of Islam. Jihad is being thought wrongfully. It is being thought to them that they could do anything, because you are this and they are that. Under the cover of seminar, association acts, our young ones are being thrown in doing bad things; because, we underestimated, and thought that they would not be able to find supporters, and these are the rumors of a few people; and because our religion is not being told correctly, there aren't good relations with young ones, and maybe we did not let them know the beauty, truth and good well enough, and we did not take the necessary precautions; I am deeply saddened for all this.”⁸³

⁸³ Anadolu Agency. “ Arinc'tan Genclere ISID Uyarisi.” NTVMSNBC. 6 July 2014. <<http://www.ntv.com.tr/arsiv/id/25524873/>>

Foreign Affairs Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu commented on November 2014: “In the context of the fight with ISIS they banned border crossings for 7000 people and in the same context they deported 1100 people”. Regarding participation with ISIS and similar radical organizations from Turkey, Cavusoglu stated that the number of Turkish radicals is around 600 for now, based on intelligence reports. Cavusoglu said, “We received the information of more than 100 deaths of people who died during ambush in the area”. He also said that they, as being the government, are trying to prevent participations to ISIS from Turkey, as well as trying to prevent border crossings of other radical organizations.⁸⁴

In short, both local media and international media and even the Turkish government accept the fact that there is participation with radical organizations amongst Turks, and people are crossing the border and operating in Turkey. The only difference is that the Turkish government mentions that they are in a fight and prevention process with the subject. However, statements from people and their relatives who went to and returned from Syria mention another truth.

Before mentioning local and international media interviews on people who went to Syria from Turkey in order to fight, I would like to provide some selections from the interview I conducted on January 14, 2014, with a family who wishes to remain anonymous. This interview included essential details on how active the radicals are in Turkey and how

⁸⁴ Hurriyet Daily News. “Mevlut Cavusoglu: Turkiye’den 600 Kisi ISID’e Destek Amacli Katildi.” 25 November 2014. < <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/27645432.asp>>

high the participation is from Turkey. A grandfather of two told me about the nightmare that started 3-4 weeks before January 14, 2014, because of his son-in-law's participation in ISIS in Syria:

“My son-in-law believed in the Turkish Republic's values and was not interested in religion as much as I knew. He started to change since the war started in Syria. We began to realize this change by the pressure he was trying to build up on my daughter. His behaviors started by throwing their TV into the garbage as it was a sinful device and continued by putting my daughter in a burka and finally banning her from going out in the streets. After a while, he tore down the posters of the Turkish Republic's founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and even Turkish flags in his home and started to teach the same hatred against Turkey to my grandchildren. He would talk about us as heathens. Since the AKP freed these kind of actions, these brain-washing people increased in number and started to be seen everywhere. We see and hear those people as well. Finally, my son-in-law wanted to move to Syria as a family, but my daughter rejected the idea. In the end, he went to Aleppo. He called my daughter on the phone and told her how beautiful the place was and how he wanted to live there. He said that he wished to live as a Muslim and wanted to raise his children in Muslim lands. However, my daughter did not want to go there and he returned after two months. He is doing it, he was easily crossing the border. Thereupon, we informed the police about it, but the police let him walk away after gathering his statement. We investigated with our own resources, but neither flight records, nor bus records listed his name. After that, we suspected that he would kidnap my grandchildren, but he assured us that we could trust him. Finally one day, what we were scared of happened and he left the house by saying that he was taking the children

to the park and they never returned. He lastly has called my daughter and said, ‘I am in Muslim land, you did not leave me another choice.’ We can’t really do much about it since the people who tricked him live around us and may harm us. I am sleeping with my own gun, since there is no one to protect us. He is still calling and he says he could bring her to his side by the help of smugglers, if she could come to Gaziantep.”

After what he told me, I asked him about the actions taken by the police and government, and he said in every chance that the government did not do a thing and added: “The government is definitely not helping us. I am trying to gather information through my own connections with no success. One of the cops told me in person that they know all of their names, but they are not able to do anything. Another cop told me in person again that if the police see a person with a sign on his back saying ‘I am joining ISIS,’ he would still turn his head the other way.” Finally, he told me the names of several other people who joined ISIS as well, and said it is impossible for the police to not know what I already know.⁸⁵

There are several interviews on Syria-Turkey border crossings and police ignorance on the subject. One of them is made by Omer Odemis, a Turkish journalist who knows the area very well and had a chance to meet with Assad. Twenty-year-old Hacettepe University student Ahmet Soylemez’s father, Onur Soylemez, is also talking about how his son left the house and joined ISIS and his struggle on the matter: “We applied everywhere. We went to the security directorate. We said that our son is missing. We said that Faysal Cakar (Atik) is responsible for our missing son. If you could find this guy,

⁸⁵ A grandfather from Turkey who wishes to remain anonymous, interview by author, January 2015.

you can find our son as well, but they did not care at all. They said my son is twenty years old and he can make his own decisions, and they sent us away”.⁸⁶

According to Odemis’ interview with the family, the father received a text message. In his text, Ahmet was saying he is in Syria and went there to jihad in Allah’s name, and his family should not be worried. Thereupon, the father went to Reyhanli and met with the mayor and the director of security, and these people put him in contact with a guy named Abu Sam, and for a while, Onur received information about his son through this guy. In short, the police guessed who Ahmet might be with, and they gave those phone numbers to Onur, but they still did not do anything to help retrieve Ahmet.⁸⁷

Another example is from Gaziantep. According to an article in Zaman newspaper on August 23, 2014, Cengiz Dogan, son of 58-year-old Vakkas Dogan, is also one of the people who joined ISIS from Turkey. The father said: “An association opened its doors in the Güzelyurt neighborhood. My son began to visit there. He was saying that he was performing prayer and learning the Koran. I respected him and did not say anything. He is married and he has a four-month-old child. He had a motorcycle but sold it. He resigned from his job. As I heard, he joined ISIS. I talked with my son, and he says nothing but ‘Allah-u Akbar.’ He will be leaving really soon; we are in trouble.” The father informed the police, and their response was: “They sent me to Gaziantep Governorship from the police station. The Governorship did not care; they directed me to

⁸⁶Ibid. p.152

⁸⁷ Ibid. p.153

the Anti-Terror unit. In the Directorate of Security, I have been told by police officers that there is nothing to do. They said, ‘These men are crazy; if he wants to leave, he will leave. So many people left just like your son. You watch out as well; they would not let you relax’. Vakkas Dogan also mentioned that his brother-in-law joined ISIS and he has many people like that in his environment.⁸⁸

Another victim is Deniz Sahin, whose spouse took her children along with him and went to Syria. As told by the mother on TV, a total of 16 family members, including her spouse, brother-in-law, brother and his children, joined ISIS, and she gathered this information from the Anti-Terror unit. While the Anti-Terror unit was telling her to wait and not to talk about it since they were planning an operation, her husband Sadik Turkkorkmaz came to Turkey again and this time he took his children with him. In order to get information about her children, Deniz Sahin contacted many Turkish ISIS members on social media, and even those people told her to go to Syria near her husband. Sahin also said that her husband met with those people through a Koran and Followers of Sunnah association, and she also mentioned that those people reside in Sincan, Ankara.⁸⁹

Another example of participation in ISIS is 14-year-old Taylan. Taylan met with ISIS members in Hacibayram neighborhood of Ankara and crossed into Syria, and again he

⁸⁸ Kaya, Nurullah., and Culha, Ilhan. “Bir Babanin Feryadi.” Zaman. 24 August 2014. <http://www.zaman.com.tr/dunya_bir-babanin-feryadi_2239265.html>

⁸⁹ A video from Cuneyt Ozdemir’s 5N1K. ”Cocuklarini da Aldi, ISID’e Katildi.” 17 Eylul 2014. <<http://www.cnnurk.com/video/turkiye/cocuklarini-da-aldi-iside-katildi>>

was brought back to Turkey by militants when he was injured. He was picked up by Turkish soldiers at the border and brought to a Turkish hospital. Taylan talked about what he went through: “Five smugglers, with one of them being Azerbaijani, brought us to Syria in exchange for money. The ISIS militants we met took us to Raqqa. We received Islamic education for a month and a half. One day when I was in the garden, an ambush started and my leg was injured by an explosion. I fainted and they took me by car to the border. Then soldiers brought me to the hospital, where I received treatment. The people we went to Syria with regretted their decision and returned in a few days. I did not return, but now I regret my decision.” His father commented on the matter: “I am asking authorities to take precautions for the sake of other families. Our border should be taken under control”.⁹⁰

Regarding this incident, I contacted Ankara Senator Izzet Cetin to ask about police or government approaches on the matter, and he told me that the police and the government have taken no actions. He also mentioned that he is closely following the situation, and he is worried that the AKP authorities might have been supporting radical Islamists. He also added: “AKP Administration has ignored organizations recruiting jihadists from Turkey in addition to providing political and material support. Significant amounts of people joined ISIS from Turkey as mentioned in the media, and the government has never denied these claims. In the center of the capital of Turkey, from Hacibayram neighborhood in Ankara, participation of persons who are in age of a child was the subject on the news. I also personally tried to follow up the matter of 15 to 16-year-old

⁹⁰Cumhuriyet Gazetesi. “14 Yasındaki Taylan: ISiD’e Katıldığım İçin Pismanım.” 26 June 2014. http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/87355/14_yasindaki_Taylan__ISiD_e_katildigim_icin_pismanim.html

children joining ISIS from the region that I was elected from; I tried to receive information from authorities. But no satisfying explanation was made to my side. I brought the subject to the TBMM (Grand National Assembly of Turkey) in the form of a parliamentary question and asked for information from the government. Unfortunately no answer was received for my parliamentary question. Our persisting questions on what kind of investigations, researches and things were made for the people who joined ISIS and returned back, were left unanswered.” According to Cetin, the government is not providing information and refusing to provide any information in order to hide their relations with these radical organizations.⁹¹

Another important interview was conducted about gathering militants and participants in ISIS from the Hacibayram neighborhood in Ankara and was published in a New York Times article “ISIS Draws a Steady Stream of Recruits from Turkey” on September 15, 2014. The article began with 27-year-old Can who joined ISIS with his ten childhood friends by crossing to Syria illegally. Can regretted his decision and returned to Turkey with his two friends after three months. The article claims that the Hacibayram neighborhood in Ankara turned into a recruiting ground for ISIS and mentions that, “Locals say up to 100 residents have gone to fight for the group in Syria.” According to the article, radical acts that take in place in the neighborhood have begun with the arrival of a long-bearded man named Arif Akbas, and these actions were being organized by him. The article also asserts that “one of the first men to join ISIS from the neighborhood was Ozguzhan Gozlemcioglu, known to his ISIS counterparts as Muhammad Salef. In

⁹¹ CHP Ankara Deputy Izzet Cetin, interview by author, December 2014.

three years, he has risen to the status of a regional commander in Raqqa, and locals say he frequently travels in and out of Ankara, each time making sure to take back new recruits with him.”

Mehmet Arabaci, a Hacibayram resident who assists with distributing government aid to the poor, said younger members of the local community found online pictures of Mr. Gozlemcioglu with weapons on the field and immediately took interest.⁹²

In the article published in the New York Times, it is mentioned that Erdogan and Davutoglu went to a mosque in a Hacibayram neighborhood to give their prayers, and during the visit, residents approached them “to catch an opportunity to raise the issue.”

⁹³A lynch campaign from the Turkey side started for a Turkish Journalist named Ceylan Yeginsu after publishing the article, and Erdogan called the journalist a “traitor” and a “female spy.”⁹⁴ Erdogan also called the article “shameless, ignoble and baseless”.⁹⁵

The newspaper later gave a statement, and backed up their article and Yeginsu by saying, “The Times has never said or implied that Turkey supports terrorism.”⁹⁶

⁹² Yeginsu, Ceylan. "ISIS Draws a Steady Stream of Recruits From Turkey." The New York Times. 15 Sept. 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/16/world/europe/turkey-is-a-steady-source-of-isis-recruits.html?_r=0>

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Gladstine, Rick. “US Criticizes Efforts to Intimidate Times Reporter in Turkey.” The New York Times. 20 September 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/world/europe/us-criticizes-efforts-to-intimidate-times-reporter-in-turkey.html?_r=0>

⁹⁵ Today’s Zaman. “Pro-Erdogan Media Targets New York Times Reporter. 18 September 2014. <http://www.todayszaman.com/national_pro-erdogan-media-targets-new-york-times-reporter_359140.html>

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Another important report on the participation in radical organizations from Turkey and security forces' approach on the matter belongs to CHP Konya Senator Atilla Kart. As a result of an interview I conducted on December 29, 2014, he started his words with saying that nobody can know the real number of participation, but MIT and Turkish Republic themselves, and he added:

“There is a created situation in Turkey about joining jihad. Of course it is unfair to fully blame the AKP on this. This is an ongoing situation for at least 30 years. However, it has to be accepted that the AKP fed and supported this situation. These people grew stronger with the help of this situation. In the context of this, we are mentioning participations to ISIS, mostly from Konya and especially since August 2014. This information is mainly gathered from suffered families.”

When I asked him about police actions on the subject, he answered: “It is known where the ISIS sympathizers are gathering and being trained in Konya. We informed security forces about this. We also reported where people are gathering in Gaziantep, on which hour and with which bus they are going to Gaziantep as well. Security forces tell us in return that it is their freedom of travel and we cannot prevent it.” It is correct theoretically says Atilla Kart, but he also says that public authorities are not being sincere.

“What happens in modern countries? If there is a suspicion of a citizen to join ISIS, legal action is being taken right at the moment. Let's say there is freedom of travel for people, and you didn't take actions for people in Konya, Sakarya, but in Gaziantep, Urfa, Kilis

people in groups are crossing the border in front of soldiers. Mothers and fathers in there are telling them that this is my child, bring him back. And the police say: ‘We can’t take only your child out. If we take him, we have to take them all, and that would cause us a problem. So, generally this is how the situation is. The government still tells to show evidence for ISIS support, otherwise the people with their claims are dishonorable and ignoble. A big fat lie. Here we are providing you the evidence, what else can we show? What else should we report? This is an actual situation. And you have to act on this actual situation in the names of Turkey’s security, public order, and peace. This is the necessity of being a government.’”

At the end of the interview, Kart handed me a list of around 200 Turkish citizens who went to Syria to join radical organizations including their names, places and dates of birth and places of residence; he also mentioned that he gave the same list to security forces as well, but no one has responded to him to start an investigation. He said: “Nobody called me to take further information about the evidences provided.”

When I asked about the US’s and international public opinion’s warnings for Turkey to take precautions on border crossings in order to prevent recruiting for jihad, he simply told me: “No, no. It still continues. I just let the journalists know where they are actively working in Konya. They went there. On specific days, they are hanging ISIS flag. But now they stopped it, since it is getting attention. After this matter gained attention in public, although the same addresses are in use, they are not hanging flags any more. But it is certain where they operate. Journalists went there. They followed them and that

house for 3-5 hours. They talked with the business owners over there. I mean this information was confirmed. But, of course people are scared. They are even scared from their own shadows. Well, there is no public or government order. People are trying to stay away from trouble; they do not want to get involved. But, unfortunately this kind of situation, a reality of Turkey is coming to surface.”

Apart from the interview that I had with Konya Senator Atilla Kart, he also made some press releases, prepared a report and asked parliamentary questions as well, and these are also important on the matter of participating in radical organizations and security forces’ approach on the subject.⁹⁷

On the date of April 16, 2013, he also gave a parliamentary question for the then-Prime Minister Erdogan, and in his question he mentioned that he shared the information about Bayram Meric, the son of Salih, who resided in Konya, whose date of birth is 5.5.1986, and who has gone to Syria and has joined Al-Qaeda for jihad; and again, Mustafa Ozpinar, the son of Isa and Ayse, whose date of birth is 7.10.1993, and who resided in Konya, had already joined jihad; but he did not receive any answers from Erdogan.⁹⁸

On August 27, 2014, Kart gave this information, based off of families’ statements, in his press release text: “Hodjas, named as U.B, İ.K, S.Y, B.M, gather around the young ones in N..... bookstore and talk about jihad and its importance. By doing this, people who met with them in Konya have reached around 3000. Seventeen people from Cihanbeyli

⁹⁷ CHP Konya Deputy Atilla Kart, interview by author. December 2014.

⁹⁸ Atilla Kart’s parliamentary question, number 7/22626.

have joined and eight of them are dead. Twelve people from Hadim and 50 people from Bozkir are participating in ISIS. Twelve people from Cayirbagi, Konya, have joined and six of them are dead. Ten people died from Karadiğın Village. The names of these hodjas', training young ones and directing them under the name of jihad, are well-known by security forces. The ones who are organizing meetings in Istanbul, and performing their Eid prayers in open air, and shouting 'Jihad'; they are also organizing meetings in Konya and saying 'Go to Jihad.' Every Saturday night, meetings are being organized under the responsibility of 'T..... Magazine.' It is reported that their training center is in Dershaneler Sokağı. Security forces know about these meetings. Eid prayers were performed around the Altınapa Dam. This prayer was performed between two black flags [ISIS flags]. I am talking about the acts have taken place on July 29-30, 2014." In his press release, he mentioned that these actions have been taking place for two years and they are known, and he asked why there are not any intelligence or judicial operations on the organization. ⁹⁹

On September 1, it was said in the response given by the Konya Directorate of Security that "statements given by Atilla Kart are intending to be sensational; participation in Konya is on the same level as other countries; and people who died are limited by just a few." ¹⁰⁰

On September 17, 2014, Kart stated in his press release that 53 families with their children had crossed Syrian border through Gaziantep, on the nights of September 11-12.

⁹⁹ CHP Konya Deputy Atilla Kart's press release, 3 September 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

He also stated that these people were ready to cross Iraq through Raqqa as well. He continued his press release by asking why the border crossings and organizations in Urfa, Ceylanpinar and Hatay are not prevented, even the government has the knowledge of them, and why suffering families' cries are not being heard. Kart also added that he shared this information with police and government as well, but to no avail.¹⁰¹

In September 2, 2014, again on his press release, he said that 150 people from Konya had crossed the Syrian border; 25 of them had died as confirmed from families, and some of the dead people's identities are known. As mentioned in an interview, crossing Syrian border is accomplished through Gaziantep, and the head commander of these people is critically wounded, and this fact is known by security forces.¹⁰²

Kart, in another press release made on October 2014, stated that they have the information from the previous 8-10 days that B.K., N.U. and A.K. and also two more brothers from Konya were killed in Syria.¹⁰³

Besides Atilla Kart, another person, closely monitoring the AKP's Syria policies and people joining jihad, is Gaziantep Senator Mehmet Seker. During the interview we had in

¹⁰¹ Today's Zaman. "Opposition Deputy: 53 Families Joined ISIL in Last Two Months." 14 September 2014. <http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail.action;jsessionid=N5+m81uI0awVuLP4L+-Skgbv?newsId=358725&columnistId=0>

¹⁰² CHP Konya Deputy Atilla Kart's Press Release. 2 October 2014.

¹⁰³ CHP Konya Deputy Atilla Kart's Press Release. 10 October 2014.

the Senate on January 5, 2015, he stated that there are families coming to him non-stop and asking for his help because their children had joined ISIS. He also told me: “Actually, there are not any borders over there anymore. If you ever go to Urfa, Gaziantep (cities neighboring the borders), you will see that 100 people from a village are crossing the border. That is an area where there is not a government and where some people are overlooked. Families are coming to me. Some informed the police as well. Police say, ‘I would not know.’ Now if I take you with me, we can easily go to Syria, drink a tea and come back. Since the situation is like that, so many young people joined ISIS. Twitter and Facebook are full of them. They are gathering together, being organized and crossing the border. Government is ignorant. They keep it quiet. I, just by myself, confirmed the deaths of 22 Turkish people who went in and their dead bodies were returned.”¹⁰⁴

Besides Atilla Kart, another person I had a chance to have an interview with was Hatay Senator Mehmet Ali Ediboglu who knows the area well. On January 2015, during our interview, Ediboglu stated that the government is providing support for jihadists, and he talked about two very important topics which could be accepted as evidence. When I asked him about how the border crossings were made and about the security forces’ approaches, he told me that the Turkish State has opened more border gates in Hatay in addition to two official border gates Yayladagi and Cilvegozu, and he added: “They built three border gates in front of soldiers and gendarmes. These are unofficial gates. We do not know what is being transported or who are passing through. Vehicles are crossing for

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

24 hours, there is traffic. **Because of the MIT trucks incident**¹⁰⁵, nobody can ask anything about them or take action against them. We already have two official border gates, but in the 400 km of land, we probably have 30 unofficial gates. All unofficial business is being done through these places.” Ediboglu mentioned that if the government denies this, he can prove it with the pictures. In addition to this, in regards to the jihadist situation in Turkey and the government’s approach on the matter, he said that he personally followed 50 jihadists on a bus convoy and 10 police cars were with them.¹⁰⁶

Again on Sozcu newspaper, according to article by Basak Kaya on November 5, 2014, three young people left Ankara to join ISIS. The name of the person who picked up the young ones and the license number of the car were reported, but the ministry of internal affairs took no action. According to article, one young person’s family reached CHP Istanbul Senator Aykut Erdogdu. They said that their children left the house by saying “we are going to fight” and went through Hatay, and they were picked up by Bilal Erten from the Cagri Association by a car with license number 19 SU 930. According to the article, even the Senator informed the government, and no actions were taken.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ EXPLAIN

¹⁰⁶ CHP Hatay Deputy Mehmet Ali Ediboglu, interview by author. December 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Kaya, Basak. “Uc Genc ISID’e Katildi, Bakan Izledi.” 5 November 2014.

<<http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2014/gundem/uc-genc-iside-katildi-bakan-izledi-639709/>>

According to an interview published in Cumhuriyet on February 8, 2015, and in Newsweek on November 6, 2014, an old ISIS member had confessed about relations between Turkey and ISIS.¹⁰⁸

According to an interview published in Newsweek, Sherko Omer, son of a rich Iraqi family, left Iraq and came to Turkey in order to help Syrians. He stated that he came to Turkey on November 2013, and he went to Syria and found himself in an ISIS camp. He stated the parts about Turkey in ISIS as: “While with ISIS, I noticed that the field captains and commanders spoke fluent Turkish. I rarely heard them speak in Arabic. ISIS commanders in Raqqa openly talked about the best foreign jihadists crossing into Syria from Turkey. Once, I heard that some ISIS foreign jihadists had been stopped by the Turkish border guards and police, but such were the ISIS connections that they were soon freed and safely on their way to Syria”.¹⁰⁹ According to the report, Omer also said: “I have connected ISIS field captains and commanders from Syria with people in Turkey on innumerable occasions. While we tried to cross the Ceylanpinar border post, the Turkish soldiers' watchtower light spotted us. The commander quickly told us to stay calm, stay in position and not to look at the light. He talked on the radio in Turkish again and we stayed in our positions. The watchtower light then moved about 10 minutes later and the

¹⁰⁸Cumhuriyet. “ISiD Uyesinden Carpici Iddia: Turk Ordusu ISiD ile Isbirligi Yapiyor.” 8 February 2015. <http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/209679/ISiD_uyesinden_carpici_iddia__Turk_ordusu_orgut_ile_isbirligi_yapiyor.html>

¹⁰⁹ Omer, Sherko. “‘It Was Never My Intention to Join ISIS’: Interview with a Former Islamic State Member.” Newsweek. 6 November 2014. <<http://www.newsweek.com/2014/11/14/it-was-never-my-intention-join-isis-interview-former-member-islamic-state-282431.html>>

commander ordered us to move because the watchtower light moving away from us was the signal that we could safely cross the border into Serekaniye.”¹¹⁰

According to an article published in the Washington Post in November 2013, almost all the jihadists, who helped Al-Qaeda to gain power in Northern Syria, had come through Turkey, and Turkey simply ignored it. A Syrian smuggler named Mohammed resides in Kilis; in an interview he stated that crossing the border is really easy. “He claims he has escorted dozens of foreigners across the border in the past 18 months, including Chechens, Sudanese, Tunisians and a Canadian”. According to the report, he said: “For example, someone comes from Tunisia. He flies to the international airport wearing jihadi clothes and a jihadi beard and he has jihadi songs on his mobile. If the Turkish government wants to prevent them coming into the country, it would do so, but they don’t.” On the same article, an interview was held with a Turkish official, who remained anonymous. The official stated that this is not the outcome that Turkey desired at the beginning, and nothing was done on purpose, and he added, “Now, I think, everyone is realizing how much of a problem these extremist groups are.”¹¹¹

¹¹⁰Guiton, Barney. “‘ISIS Sees Turkey as Its Ally’: Former Islamic State Member Reveals Turkish Army Cooperation” Newsweek. 7 November 2014. <http://www.newsweek.com/isis-and-turkey-cooperate-destroy-kurds-former-isis-member-reveals-turkish-282920>

¹¹¹ Sly, Liz. “Turkey Confronts Policy Missteps on Syria with Rise of Al-Qaeda Across the Border.” The Washington Post. 16 November 2013. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/turkey-confronts-policy-missteps-on-syria-with-rise-of-al-qaeda-across-the-border/2013/11/16/e6183f12-4e27-11e3-97f6-ed8e3053083b_story.html>

On August 2014, an interview was published in the Washington Post which said that Islamist jihadists see Turkey as their “own shopping mall”; and in order to take Assad down, Turkey is rolling out the red carpet for every single Assad opponent without a hesitation. As mentioned in the paper, recently, some precautions have been taken by the help of the warnings issued by the US and the European Union; though, the border crossings from Turkey to Syria still continue. On the interview held in Reyhanli with 27-year-old Abu Yusaf, who is the senior security commander for the Islamic State, Abu Yusaf said that it is not as easy as it was before to enter Turkey, but as it could be seen there are still many ways to accomplish this. The Islamic State commander, who crossed to Syria from Reyhanli, said; “The group had the Turks to thank in part for its current success.”¹¹²

Another report about Turkish fighters and radicals’ operations in Turkey was prepared by Hurriyet and its seven reporters and four photographers. It includes impressive information in its article titled “How Jihadists Operate among Turk,” particularly in Gaziantep, Kocaeli, Ankara, Diyarbakır, and Istanbul by providing photos and interviews as well. A correspondent, who received death threats from interviewing on the street, starts his report by interviewing a family in Gaziantep with a son who joined ISIS. According to the report, Hasan A., who has a 27-year-old son who joined ISIS, mentions that he could not reach his son for a month and half; at first his son started to go to an

¹¹² Faiola, Anthony., and Mekhennet, Souad. “In Turkey, a late crackdown on Islamist Fighters.” Washington Post. 12 August 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/how-turkey-became-the-shopping-mall-for-the-islamic-state/2014/08/12/5eff70bf-a38a-4334-9aa9-ae3fc1714c4b_story.html>

Islamic association opened in the neighborhood, and afterwards their quite ordinary son started to threaten them for not praying, and one day his son left the house with a note saying “I am leaving to die for Muslims.” Again from Gaziantep, in an interview held with Dursun Y., he stated that his 22-year-old son and 34-year-old nephew started to visit an association, and afterwards they joined ISIS. According to the paper, Dursun Y. informed the police force about the matter, and as a response they said: “Everybody goes there, don’t mess with it, and don’t get yourself into trouble.”

Because of the pressure in there, they returned six months later, but the father is still worried about them going back there again. As understood, they are free and police have done nothing. According to the father, this association is influencing people and recruiting them.

A police officer gave an interview to the same journalists, with the condition to remain anonymous, and he says the number of Islamic associations in the city that encourage young people to wage jihad is rising. “Young Muslims” and the “Furkan group” are the most influential organizations. People apparently go to their meetings to read the Quran, but in reality, these two associations are allegedly recruiting youths for ISIS and serving as grassroots training facilities, according to the police officer. “You know that a man is from ISIS, but you can’t prove it easily. For instance, you check his passport and see that he’s from the United Kingdom. He says he is in Gaziantep for touristic purposes. How can you arrest this man? What evidence can you refer to?” he said.

According to the report, the Turkish city Urfa, across the border from areas under ISIS control, is being used as a crossing point by jihadists. One of the reporters has interviewed a person named S.C., who openly admits that he is an ISIS militant, and he threatened the reporter by telling the reporter not to ask any more questions on the matter, otherwise he would be killed in the middle of the street.¹¹³

A report also verifies Gaziantep Senator Mehmet Seker's estimations on participation in ISIS. During the direct conversations made with the area's people, they mentioned that there are 4000 people who joined ISIS from Gaziantep alone.

Besides the East, Turkey's western cities are also making their names on joining radical organizations. One of these cities is Kocaeli. There are reports that Kocaeli is really essential for ISIS's recruitments.

Again, during the interviews conducted with local residents, they told that crossings are being made through Hatay and Gaziantep, and they even know the name of an ISIS recruiter (Abdulkadir Polat). According to a conversation held with a shoe keeper, ISIS openly made propaganda and invited people who are not performing their prayers to the "religious education classes and discussions."

¹¹³ Izci, Ipek., Kuru, Burak., Kizilkoyun, Fevzi., Balikci, Faruk., Cakir Morin, Arzu., Yucel, Deniz., Ozbey, Savas., Samiloglu, Savas., Akgun, Muhsin., Gokhan, Mert., and Saka, Murat. "Looking for ISIL: How Jihadists Operate Among Turks." Hurriyet Daily News. 22 September 2014. <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/looking-for-isil-how-jihadists-operate-among-turks.aspx?PageID=238&NID=72054&NewsCatID=352>>

Again in another eastern city, Diyarbakir, journalists went for an interview, and mentioned that families are too scared to talk. A person accepted to talk, tells that he met with ISIS through a bookstore and joined them, but returned later.

Lastly, the paper's report takes attention to jihadists' acts in Istanbul, where they conducted another interview with a Turk. Huseyin stated that he climbed over the fences and crossed the border from Hatay, and he joined Al-Nusra. He crossed the border five times by using this method.

The report also mentions how ISIS is organizing on social media, and how Turkish militants are sharing their pictures with no need to hide.¹¹⁴

Another example for Islamic State's sympathizers' acts in Turkey is the jihad call made in Istanbul on July 2014. As I followed really closely on Takvahaber, a website that was created to announce Islamic State's news and support their actions, a call for a picnic was announced and hundreds of people gathered in Istanbul. An imam talked at the event saying: "Make us one of the warriors for jihad. My almighty Allah, help the Mujahedeen fighting for jihad and being patient, help them to reach the victory. Make their shots to find their targets." Upon this, senators handed parliamentary questions, and the response from the Ministry of Justice was: "Any actions by our ministry or another authority,

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

office, department or person are out of question.” Bozdog mentioned that the investigation still continues by the İstanbul Republic Chief Public Prosecutor's Office.¹¹⁵

On September 26, 2014, upon some students protests against the massacres made in Rojava [a Kurdish region in Syria] by ISIS, jihad sympathizers attacked the aforementioned group and injured one of them; the police and university management took no actions on the matter.¹¹⁶

According to an article published in Radikal on September 29, 2013, Al-Qaeda and Al-Nusra and similar radical organizations recruit militants in Turkish cities, such as Adiyaman, Bingol, Batman, Urfa, Diyarbakir and Bitlis. In the article, it is mentioned that recruited young people were crossing the border in groups of 15 through Hatay, Kilis and Urfa; in Adiyaman, 200 people crossed Syria in order to join radical organizations. According to an interview held with a person named M. D., it is stated that the father informed the security forces about how his son went to Syria, and when he returned, he received this answer from them: “Your son is an adult; we cannot get involved.” A paper also published similar interviews with two different families, and it also stated that they

¹¹⁵ Evrensel. “Mudahalede Bulunamayız.” 3 February 2015.

<<http://www.evrensel.net/haber/103754/mudahalede-bulunamayiz>>

¹¹⁶ Hurriyet Daily News. “Islamists Attack Students Protesting ISIL at Istanbul University.” 26 September 2014. <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/video-islamists-attack-students-protesting-isil-at-istanbul-university.aspx?PageID=238&NID=72219&NewsCatID=341>>

reached the Adiyaman Governorship and Directorate of Security about the matter, but none of them were willing to have an interview.¹¹⁷

Again according to news in the Wall Street Journal, a person named Mehmet, aged 47 from Gaziantep, stated that his son joined jihad last year, and he went to the police. The father said: “The police told us our son had been a member of a group affiliated to extremists. They have all this information, but they don't prevent the recruitment of our sons. The police said there are 170 families like us in Gaziantep alone.”¹¹⁸

Another incident that could be accepted as a part of radical acts occurred in Istanbul on June 2014, when an ISIS store opened its doors. Selling ISIS emblems and t-shirts printed “Mujahedeen around the World/ United We Stand,” the store owners wanted to expand their brand out of Bagcilar, Istanbul, as well.¹¹⁹

As seen, according to interviews with families who crossed the border and politicians from the area, it is clear that participation in ISIS and similar radical organizations from Turkey is extremely high and these people are crossing the border easily and security

¹¹⁷ Emen, Idris. “Adiyaman-Suriye Cihat Hatti.” Radikal. 29 September 2013. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/radikal_turkiyeden_suriyeye_savas_icin_goturulenlerin_aileleriyle_konustuadiyaman__suriye_cihat_hatti-1152993 >

¹¹⁸ Parkinson, Joe., Malas, Nour., and Albayrak, Ayla. “A Violent Year in the Life of the Syria-Turkey Border.” Wall Street Journal. 20 November 2013. <<http://m.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303661404579179760868678206?mobile=y&mg=reno64-wsj>>

¹¹⁹ Mezzofiore, Gianluca. “ISIS Hoodies and T-shirts Go Sale in Istanbul Shop.” International Business Times. 24 June 2014. <<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/isis-hoodies-t-shirts-go-sale-istanbul-shop-1454021> >

forces are taking no actions on the matter. Also, it is seen that the government is not providing enough explanations. For example, in February 2015, Nazmi Gur, an HDP Senator, presented a proposal to investigate ISIS's actions in Turkey, but it was rejected by the AKP senators.¹²⁰

There are also statements made and precautions taken by the government on the matter. First of all, in June 2014, Erdogan, gave a statement on the subject and said that there is an entrance ban on 5300 people with suspicion of using Turkey as a transit country to join the war in Syria and 800 foreigners were deported. Calling upon the European Union to take more actions on sharing intelligence and exits from the countries, Erdogan also said: "Our country is used as a transit state for many crossing into Syria; these people are a source of threat primarily for Turkey. The threat for the source countries starts when these fighters return to their country. ... We take all necessary measures to prevent third country citizens that are planning to cross into Syria to join radical groups [from crossing the border]. Within this scope, we posed an entry ban to Turkey for 5300 people."

Erdogan also stated that they deported 824 people with a suspicion of affiliation to terrorist organizations.¹²¹

¹²⁰ The Jerusalem Post. "Turkish Government Strikes Down Parliamentary Request to Investigate ISIS Activity in Turkey." 22 February 2015. <<http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Turkish-government-strikes-down-parliamentary-request-to-investigate-ISIS-activity-in-Turkey-391790>>

¹²¹ Today's Zaman. "Turkey Says Has Banned 5300 Potential Syria Fighters." 24 June 2014. <http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_turkey-says-has-banned-5300-potential-syria-fighters_351248.html>

According to an article published by the Hurriyet Daily News on July 10, 2014, authorities have started to talk with the families whose children were recruited by ISIS. According to the article, “Terror and intelligence officials have reached up to 370 families and are constructing a profile of the people who have gone to Syria to fight alongside forces fighting President Bashar al-Assad.” The article also states that authorities are investigating three organizations in Istanbul and persons who helped those people cross to Syria in regards to families’ statements. The article also mentions that 13 people were caught and returned to their families before they were able to join ISIS, and also 163 families went to the police. Also it says, “According to the latest Turkish intelligence reports, there are currently around 600-700 Turks in ISIS. Security measures have recently been intensified along the border against illegal crossings, and thousands of European jihadists were recently blacklisted by Turkey.”¹²²

In the news published in Hurriyet on September 11, 2014, Turkey has caught 830 European jihadists before they went to Syria from Turkey, and deported them. In addition to that, “Turkey also filed search warrants for 2000 people who are thought to have joined the jihadist ISIS militants.” A total of 240 passengers who entered Turkey via these two airports have been stopped by these units on suspicion of joining ISIS. After detailed investigations and interviews with the passengers, it was established that a majority came from European countries. Some 56 of these passengers were deported to

¹²² Kizilkoyun, Fevzi. “Turkey Steps Up to Stop Jihadists Flow to Syria, Iraq.” Hurriyet Daily News. 10 July 2014. <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-steps-up-to-stop-jihadist-flow-to-syria-iraq.aspx?pageID=238&nID=68908&NewsCatID=510>>

their country of origin on suspicion of being a member of ISIS, while the rest were released.¹²³

According to the Associated Press on September 2014, a person named Mourad Fares aged 29, a French-Moroccan who recruits jihadists for Syrian war, was taken under custody at an airport in Istanbul, Turkey and he was extradited to France. According to a ministry statement by France, a person affiliated with the Islamic State was defined as dangerous and arrested in France.¹²⁴

On September 24, 2014, President Erdogan, on his speech at the General Assembly of the UN, stated that Turkey is not a country supporting or ignoring terror; on the contrary Turkey is the country fighting against terror most efficiently.¹²⁵ On his speech at the Security Council, Erdogan said, “Troubles caused by the instability on our southern borders helped terrorist organizations in their acts.” He added, “Unfortunately, the region became more appealing for terrorist fighters. Turkey warned international public opinion on the matter continuously, since the beginning of the war in Syria. **The lethargy that international public opinion stuck with reasoned the Al-Qaeda to come to life and led it to**

¹²³ Kizilkoyun, Fevzi. “Turkey Sends Back 830 European Jihadists.” Hurriyet Daily News. 11 September 2014. <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-sends-back-830-european-jihadists-.aspx?pageID=238&nid=71565>>

¹²⁴ Ganley, Elaine. “French Arrest Terrorist Recruiter Suspect.” Boston Globe. 12 September 2014. <<http://www.bostonglobe.com/news/world/2014/09/11/suspected-french-jihad-recruiter-arrested-paris/IASGRoy5Rw5EJN4zzS3TRO/story.html>>

¹²⁵ Recep Tayyip Erdogan Birlesmis Milletler Genel Kurul Konusmasi(Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s Speech at the United Nations General Assembly). 24 September 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZkUk0p7c1c>>

grow stronger under the name of ISIS by the support from regime. Yet, there are not any fights that we cannot win as long as we move along in coordination with international society. Turkey, by its long termed precautions, is in the effort of trying to block foreign terrorist fighters' transits to the area. But, this is not a fight that Turkey can have alone.” Erdogan said that these countries took no actions in the past, and the countries just started to share information. In his speech, he said that around 6300 people were banned from entrance, and more than 1000 people were deported, and risk analysis groups were created in airports as well. He said that with international support, “we can stop these transits. We primarily want to prevent the young ones from all around the world to fall into hands of terror. ISIS is a blood thirsty terrorist organization. Our government took all the legal precautions from the beginning.” He also mentioned that he is saddened by the unfair critics while they were giving this much effort. He also said, “Turkey’s determination on the subject cannot be questioned.”¹²⁶

On the date of September 26, 2014, Erdogan spoke to journalist on his way back from New York, and he again talked about preventing foreign fighters’ entrances to Syria from Turkey, and improving border security.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Recep Tayyip Erdogan Birlesmis Milletler Ust Duzeyli Guvenlik Toplantisi Konusmasi (Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s speech at the UN High-Level Security Meeting). 24 September 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LD3G6Bi814>>

¹²⁷ Today’s Zaman. “Erdogan: ISIL Acts Hurt Us Deeply as Muslims Cast Shadow Over Islam.” 26 September 2014. <http://www.todayszaman.com/national_erdogan-isils-acts-hurt-us-deeply-as-muslims-cast-shadow-over-islam_359970.html>

In the news by Reuters in August 2014, an anonymous Turkish official was interviewed, and according to that interview, Turkey had created a no-entry list, and by the help of foreign intelligence agencies, issued an entrance ban for 4000 including suspects who want to join radical organizations in Syria. The same official stated that 70 people were arrested in the context of this. In the same article, an interview was held with an Islamist fighter, not from Syria, and this person said that he crossed the border several times in 2012, but recently it got harder to accomplish, and he added: “The borders were wide open. We used to get in and out of Turkey very easily. No questions were asked. Arms shipments were smuggled easily into Syria.”¹²⁸

According to news published in Hurriyet Daily News on January 31, 2015, Turkey, in response to criticism, created “risk analysis centers” countrywide, in bus terminals and international airports, in order to detect and deport radicals. According to the news, they let Agence France Press observe security teams and the precautions that have been taken. The Turkish official, who desired to remain anonymous, stated in his interview that: “The teams have detected some 1500 suspects and around one third of them were sent back to their countries of origin.” According to the news, the official said that especially after the Paris attacks on January 7, all eyes were on Turkey and precautions were increased. The same official also said that 33-year-old S.L. was taken under custody in last June due to

¹²⁸ Tattersall, Nick., and Karouny, Mariam. “Turkey Struggles as “lone gatekeeper” against Islamic State Recruitment.” Reuters. 26 August 2014. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/08/26/us-iraq-security-turkey-idUSKBN0GQ0ZO20140826>>

his suspicious behaviors, and he was deported to his country of origin after he admitted that he was going to join ISIS.¹²⁹

In September 2014, Efkân Ala, Minister of Interior, stated on participations to ISIS, and said, “An entrance ban was issued for 6620 people from 81 countries; 1013 people from 73 countries were deported.” Ala also mentioned that they seek help and support from international society on the matter.¹³⁰

On January 21, 2015, Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Tanju Bilgic, during his weekly brief, mentioned that they have deported 1056 people who came from other countries with an intention to go Syria through illegal ways, and they have a list of 7833 people with suspicion to join ISIS. Denying the claims that Turkey is a country foreign fighters use to join ISIS, Bilgic said, “Turkey has been affected by ISIS terror in various ways, therefore, Turkey's will to fight terrorism should not be questioned.”¹³¹

During his speech on January 27, 2015, spokesman Tanju Bilgic mentioned, “There are around 15,000 foreign fighters in Syria. We have an entrance ban on around 10,000 people by the help of intelligence share. That means, there is missing information on

¹²⁹ Agence France Presse. “Turkey Airport Police Hunt Extremists En Route To Syria.” Hurriyet Daily News. 31 January 2015. <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-airport-police-hunt-extremists-en-route-to-syria.aspx?pageID=238&nID=77715&NewsCatID=509>>

¹³⁰ Radikal. “Türkiye 6 bin 620 Kisiye Giriş Yasası Koydu.” 26 September 2014. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/turkiye_6_bin_620_kisiye_giris_yasagi_koydu-1215101>

¹³¹ Anadolu Agency. “Thousands of Suspects on Turkish Government List for ISIS Links.” Daily Sabah. 21 January 2015. <<http://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2015/01/21/7833-suspects-on-turkish-govt-list-for-isis-links>>

5000 people.” Bilgic also said that the numbers are continuously increasing on the fight with ISIS, and the numbers of deported people have reached 1080.¹³²

After all these statements, Turkey, who was criticized by international society for a long time for letting jihadists to cross borders, stated that they cannot seal the borders and explained the reasons for it. Afterwards, Davutoglu stated that they will do their best to prevent jihadists’ transits through borders, and then the first arrest of an ISIS member happened. On January 22, 2014, he made another statement saying: “We can close the border, but who will save the refugees, who will give them a safe haven? [...] All those people who are escaping by walking, should we close the border to them? Is that ethically acceptable? It's a 937-kilometer border, it's impossible to do. We can't put a soldier on every inch. We can, of course, declare the border a military zone and say that nobody will enter, but then the same people who are criticizing us now will say that barbaric Turkey closed the border and people are being killed as a result,” Davutoglu said. “We will never do it.”¹³³

On February 4, 2015, according to the Hurriyet Daily News article titled “First Turkish ISIS Member Arrested in Turkey,” Musa Goktas, a 38-years-old, went to Syria in order to join ISIS by taking his 15-year-old twin sons along on October 8, 2015; he stayed there

¹³² Anadolu Ajansi. “Girisi Yasak Listesinde 5 bin Kisilik Acik Var.” 27 January 2015. <<http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/tag/456618--girisi-yasak-listesinde-5-bin-kisilik-acik-var> >

¹³³ Moore, Jack. “Turkey PM Davutoglu: We can’t stop foreign jihadist entering Syria through Border.” 22 January 2014. International Business Times. <<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/turkey-pm-davutoglu-we-cant-stop-foreign-jihadists-entering-syria-through-border-1484588>>

four months, and on January 27, 2015, he returned to Turkey to sell his house and to bring his wife along; and he was arrested for being an ISIS member. In his statement, he confessed that he joined ISIS, and crossed the border illegally with both of his sons. The same article also stated that four more people were arrested with suspicion of being an ISIS member.¹³⁴

After the capture of ISIS member Musa Goktas on January 27, 2015, according to an announcement given on the General Staff's official website: "on February 9, 3pm, in Oguzeli/Gaziantep, one Turkish citizen and 13 foreigners were caught while going to Syria from Turkey with intentions of joining ISIS. With the direction of public prosecutor, upon receiving their statements, Turkish citizen was released and 13 foreigners were given to Gaziantep City Directorate of Security for being deported."¹³⁵ Lots of testimony. is there any link between the fact that your interviewees were all in the opposition to the government and their view that the Turkish gov is violating its own laws? I don't know what you mean by this. Should I write something that brings together the violation of laws and all these I have written so far?

TREATMENTS OF RADICALS IN TURKEY

¹³⁴ Hurriyet Daily News. "First Turkish ISIL member Arrested in Turkey." 4 February 2015. <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/first-turkish-isil-member-arrested-in-turkey-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=77891&NewsCatID=341>>

¹³⁵ The Turkish Armed Forces Official Website <http://www.tsk.tr/4_olaylar/4_2_onemli_yurtici_olaylar/onemliyurticiolaylar.html>

Besides providing transit to militants and allowing their operations within the country, treating the militants who were injured in Syria is another policy that may have encouraged the Turkish radicals. Again, both local and international media associations published many articles and reports on the subject, and Turkish authorities also gave statements on the subject.

The first reaction to these claims was given by an opposition party senator after a photo of ISIS commander Abu Mohammed, taken on April 16, 2014, was revealed; it was claimed that he came to Turkey after an injury he got during an ambush in Syria and he was treated for free in a State hospital in Hatay. After the reveal of the photo on June 9, CHP Deputy Chairman Muharrem Ince stated that he was expecting an explanation from Minister of Foreign Affairs Davutoglu.¹³⁶

On September 2014, Muezzinoglu, Minister of Health stated that they cannot make any separation on treatments, as a response to an asked question by a journalist about treatments of ISIS militants, and he said: “We cannot separate people because of their identity, religion, race, color, and sect. Our mission is not determining who did what, it is treating the patient.”¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Hurriyet Daily News. “ CHP lawmakers accuse Turkish government of 'protecting ISIL and al-Nusra militants'.” 13 June 2014. <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/chp-lawmakers-accuse-turkish-government-of-protecting-isil-and-al-nusra-militants.aspx?pageID=238&nID=67750&NewsCatID=338> >

¹³⁷ Ozmen, Engin. “Muezzinoglu: ISID Yaralisi da Olsa Tedavi Ederiz.” Hurriyet. 24 September 2014. <<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/27267646.asp>>

Upon the statement of the Minister of Health, opposition senators received several letters from the nurses working at the hospitals around the Syrian border, and several interviews were given to newspapers as well. One of them was E.G., who talked to Taraf on September 2014. In her interview, E.G. stated that she is sick of treating ISIS casualties, and she added: “We treat them, and they go on to decapitate people. I am sick of treating wounded ISIS militants.” E.G. has also written a letter to the Parliament and the National Police Department, saying she and her colleagues are extremely disturbed by the fact that they have to treat people “who chop off heads.” However, she noted that she had found out that most of the Syrians recently admitted to the hospital were ISIS members. The ISIS commander named Mohammed Ali R. who was admitted to the hospital on Aug. 7, was treated at room number 323. “Many of his bodyguards kept watch around the hospital. Many other ISIS commanders like him and soldiers have been treated at our hospital, and returned to war after the completion of their treatment. I don't want to help these people. I want you to inspect these hospitals. And I am referring the owners of the hospital and its management to God.”¹³⁸

Another government official who talked on the subject was Deputy Prime Minister Besir Atalay. In his speech to a journalist on August 14, Atalay denied the claims on treatments of militants in the hospital, and added: “We do not have any data in hand on

¹³⁸ Today's Zaman. “Nurse says she is tired of treating ISIL terrorists.” 17 September 2014.<http://www.todayzaman.com/national_nurse-says-shes-tired-of-treating-isil-terrorists_358992.html>

that issue, but there is nothing like us exerting efforts to bring people here, or anything such as assistance and treatment.”¹³⁹

Abu Yusef, a 27-year-old former ISIS commander, who was mentioned in chapter 7, also admitted that radicals were treated in Turkish hospitals in his interview on Washington Post: “We used to have some fighters—even high-level members of the Islamic State—getting treated in Turkish hospitals. And also, most of the fighters who joined us in the beginning of the war came via Turkey, and so did our equipment and supplies.”¹⁴⁰

Mehmet Seker, during our meeting in December, confirmed these claims, and he even claimed that ISIS militants have their own hospital in Gaziantep.

Another claim was made by Human Rights Watch. In their report published on October 11, 2013, HRW gave the names of Ahrar al-Sham, ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra and such radical armed organizations; it also said that foreign people fighting for these groups went to Syria through Turkey, and they also received free health services in Turkey.¹⁴¹

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted to the report right away, and said that it is unacceptable. While the Minister of Interior was saying that they would never open their

¹³⁹ Hurriyet Daily News. “Government rejects claims that jihadists were treated at Turkish Hospitals.” 14 August 2014. <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/govt-rejects-claims-that-jihadists-were-treated-at-turkish-hospitals.aspx?pageID=238&nID=70426&NewsCatID=338>>

¹⁴⁰ Faiola, Anthony., and Mekhennet, Souad. “In Turkey, a Late Crackdown on Islamist Fighters.” Washington Post. 12 August 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/how-turkey-became-the-shopping-mall-for-the-islamic-state/2014/08/12/5eff70bf-a38a-4334-9aa9-ae3fc1714c4b_story.html>

¹⁴¹ Idiz, Semih. “Pressure Mounts on Turkey Over Radical Groups in Syria.” Al-Monitor. 15 October 2013. <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/10/turkey-must-control-jihadists-entering-syria.html##ixzz3XaxMStBJ>>

borders for terrorist organizations, except for the sake of humanitarian assistance; according to Zaman's article, a diplomat from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, willing to remain anonymous, said: "We totally deny the claims that those groups enter Syria from Turkey and that Turkey provides them with weapons. It is wholly unacceptable to paint Turkey with such accusations. Turkey is doing its utmost to maintain security along the border and is carrying out operations to prevent smuggling."¹⁴²

The latest development on the subject was that a grenade dropped from 22-year-old Abu Bilal's pocket while he was being carried with a gurney in Hatay Mustafa Kemal University Hospital. The injured person was brought to the hospital from the Syrian border by an ambulance.¹⁴³

CHAPTER 8

INTERVIEWS WITH TURKISH RADICALS

After analyzing the interview responses of 30 Turkish jihadists, three themes emerged from the data.

Jihad, religion, Islam

¹⁴² Today's Zaman. "Turkey lashes out at HRW claims of support for Syrian terrorist groups." Today's Zaman. 11 October 2013. <<http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail.action;jsessionid=PzZ+Wm7xyBDKT32Tly2X6nAh?newsId=328809&columnistId=0>>

¹⁴³ Celik, Ramazan. "Hastaneye Getirilen Suriyeli'nin Cebinden El Bombasi cikti." Milliyet. 18 February 2015. <<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/hastaneye-getirilen-suriyelinin-gundem-2015769>>

In order to understand the reason behind joining the radical organization in Syria, interviewed people were asked, “Why did you join the war in Syria?” 30 out of 30 respondents (100% of the respondents) answered by saying that they feel responsible, and because of their religious beliefs, they have joined the war. All 30 respondents said that Islam orders jihad to Muslims and they do not desire to live in a place without Allah’s orders, and they went there for the sake of Allah. For example, one of the respondents, C.A., said: “I came here for the sake of Allah. People are coming for the sake of Allah. My job is being a servant for the compassionate. In the countries of blasphemy, we will not be partnered with cruelty; we will bring them to the book, both for you and us, by the permission of Allah.” Telling how nice the life and Islamic State are, and how the people love Islamic State, C.A. also mentioned that countries ruled by democracy, including Turkey, have ill-gotten gains, rape and cruelty and that he is avoiding these. Another respondent, D.M., again mentioned that he went for only and only his religious beliefs, and added: “Our prophet mentioned the holiness of Damascus by saying that angels covered it with their wings, it is such a beautiful place. Right now it is a land with real Islam. There is sharia and there are real Muslims.” Another respondent, B.S., also said: “Sharia is not ruling in Turkey. In here though, there are sharia and jihad. That’s why we are emigrating.” B.S. also added that jihad was in Pakistan and Afghanistan before, he and people he knew went there, now they came in Syria to fight after the announcement of the caliphate. Another respondent, M.I., said that not only from Turkey, but from all over the world, thousands of people immigrated to Syria, because those people desire to live as a Muslim.

Regarding the claims made on the news that Turkish radicals received support or money from the government, I asked them by saying, “Did someone offer you anything?” 30 out of 30 respondents (100% of the respondents) mentioned that jihadists were given money when they arrived (in Syria), but the amount was relatively small; however, they went there only for Islam’s order. For example, one of the respondents, A.U., said: “Jihadists need money to continue on their life, but no one would ever risk their lives for this amount of money.” In addition to this, A.U. said that he knows many rich people and all of them have left their money, cars, and jobs behind, and immigrated to those lands to live Islam fully.”

According to this matter, D.M. said that people who are going there naturally need money. The Islamic State gave some money and supported them, but no one would ever go there to die just for money. D.M. also said, “If we are going to die there, this would happen only in name of Allah. It is a great honor and pride to die in jihad.” A.B. mentioned that he received some money, but no one would ever jihad just for money, and added: “You can be shot by a barrel bomb or a tank shell. Do you think, people would go to their own death for being unemployed, or some money, or someone told so?”

27 of 30 respondents (90% of the respondents) said that they decided to join the fight in Syria on their own, and no one else had any effect on their decision. For example, C.A.

mentioned that he had already joined jihad in Afghanistan before the incidents began in Syria; after the announcement of the caliphate, he immigrated to Syria by his own will, since Syria was the jihad land.

Another respondent, B.E., again mentioned that he went to Syria by his own will, and added, “I remember the feel of jihad in me once again after the arrival of the caliphate—I mean the real Islam.” Another respondent, A.K., said that he had not met or talked with any person or associations about jihad, and added: “When I started to watch Syria in 2012, I understood the incidents. I, only by myself, learned from the imams and websites with Salafi tradition. Because, if we do not wage jihad and learn our religion, it says Allah would not forgive us. As most of the people, I was living in a religion with superstitions and sins, I was thinking that it was Islam, but it really was not. I went there because I realized the mistakes of my religious beliefs.”

S.K. said that everyone who goes there, including himself, loves Turkey, but he left there “because the ruling system is against Allah’s orders.” He said: “Many people came here after the announcement of the caliphate, but I am here for more than a year. I came here to build the only country which applies Allah’s sharia. For many years, caliphate was the biggest dream of real Muslims. People who heard about the caliphate came here. Of course they were religious before, otherwise they would not show up. There are plenty of people here who learned about it afterwards through associations as well.”

Besides this, three respondents, who decided to go Syria through some middlemen, said the following.

D.M. said that he was introduced to jihad through his fiancée, and his fiancée was already living in Afghanistan before.

One of the respondents, K.P., said that one of the biggest action areas of jihadists is Istanbul and added: “There are plenty of Hezbollah and ISIS houses in Istanbul.” He also mentioned that people can take any information from those places after it is understood that they have good intentions. He said that as long as a person wishes to be “enlightened” about jihad and religion, many places and people can be found. K.P. also added that he gathered information through these kinds of people. K.P. also said that these people are not hiding or scared from the police or government, and there is not any reason for secrecy since there is freedom of thought in Turkey.

Again another respondent, U.U., said without details that the religion he followed before was not the real Islam and he understood by the help of “friends.” U.U. said that he was introduced to jihad in 2012 and he joined jihad with a friend of his.

Crossing the Border into Syria and Turkish Security Forces

As a result of the questions asked regarding the border crossings, 28 of 30 respondents (93.3% of the respondents) said that they went to Syria through the Turkey-Syria border without having any necessary official documents.

However, C.A. said that he went to Syria from Afghanistan and not from Turkey at all, 11 out of 29 respondents said that Turkey opened its borders in order to bring Assad down regardless of if the passers were members of ISIS or radical organizations or not, and the crossings were being made easily. For example, A.B. said that Turkey let every opponent, regardless of their identity, cross the border in order to bring Assad down; therefore, he crossed the border as well. A.B. also added: “Right now Turkey does not see opponents as enemies, and provides every logistic support to them. Unintentionally, it is ignoring many things as well. I did not have any problems while leaving, but yes there is a problem: it is free to leave, but it is forbidden to return. If you would like to leave, Turkey does not inhibit that, but if you would like to return it does not let you to do so. It is arresting you since you receive all kind of trainings and you can be a danger for the state.”

Eight of the respondents said that the Turkish Republic has a different approach now than the time when the first conflicts started in Syria, and crossings were a lot easier and allowed in the past, but lately Turkey has started to not allow border crossings. For example, O.D. said that it was really easy to cross the border up until mid-2014, and added: "Because of Assad, the Turkish Republic was on the side of the opponents, but now it is obeying US policies. It supported the Kurds and, because of the pressures it started to follow a parallel policy with the US and sealed its borders. Turkey is surrounded by all sides and cannot have its own decisions even though it owns the borders." Again, S.K. mentioned the same things on his statements that opponents were moving together in the past and in this period Turkey was letting anyone, including ISIS, to cross its borders and he added: "As soon as we (ISIS) were contradicted with opponents and conquered big cities such as Mosul and announced caliphate, Turkey became an enemy with us. They supported not only us but the all opponents in the past, just because we were fighting against Assad. They assumed that ISIS was just a simple opponent fighting against Assad. This approach ended almost a year ago. Previously, Turkey was in silence since it was beneficial for it that we were fighting against Assad. But now, Turkey is in war against ISIS in Syria. Everything is reversed because of US pressure." H.A. said that there are a lot of people and support for jihad from Turkey, and in the past, crossings were easier, but now it is harder. Therefore there is a decrease of people joining jihad from Turkey. H.A. said that Turkey is still supporting the Free Syrian Army along with the Syrian Islamic Front and Ahrar-Sham and letting them cross the border; and he also said that since the caliphate was announced and ISIS proved its strength, Turkey took precautions against the Islamic State and its mujahedeen. H.A. said

that Al-Nusra's and other organizations' only aim is to bring Assad down and they are not a threat for Turkey, but Islamic State has an intention to widen sharia to all the world and Turkey realized that too late. H.A. also added that there are MIT agents in organizations in Syria and "if intelligence tells that this is our guy, the mujahedeen can still cross the borders." H.A. mentioned that in addition to all of this, Turkey took precautions on Islamic States mujahedeen's border crossings after US pressure and many people he knew were arrested while trying to cross the border. H.Y. also talked about the same situation and said: "Turkey supported all of us in order to get rid of Assad. The borders were open to all opponents without any separations. But after Islamic State intended to build sharia and take control of ruling, Turkey saw us as a threat and ended the support." H.Y. added: "Of course, it is not written on our head which group we are the members while crossing the border, but these kind of things are being made by middlemen under the observation of government or by smugglers."

18 of 29 respondents said that Turkey is not opening its borders to anyone and it is against jihad, but since the border is relatively long, they are crossing to Syria by using illegal ways. **Might this explain all the border crossing rather than Turkish policy?** For example, A.K. said that Turkey will never be able to prevent border crossings, and added: "A person, who wants to go through Turkey, can do this easily. There is already smuggling over there for a hundred years. Smugglers in there are local residents and they

know every single place. It could not be prevented for a hundred years, how will they prevent it now? Nobody can prevent it.” Another respondent, K.P., mentioned that crossing border could be made easily even if the government would not allow it, and added: “the borderline is a long time smuggling area and crossing is not an issue.” Another respondent, B.S. said that Turkey considers ISIS as an enemy since it applies sharia and he crossed the border illegally, and added: “The rumors on government that it lets jihadists to cross the border are nonsense.” Saying that Turkey is absolutely closing the borders to jihadists, C.H. also mentioned: “If we return to Turkey and stay in there, all of us will be imprisoned by Turkey as being a member of Al-Qaeda.” C.A., crossed through Afghanistan, said that his friends had to cross Syria through illegal ways, and Turkey is inhibiting jihadists but “it cannot accomplish this, it cannot control everywhere.” According to C.A., the only thing that Turkey was doing is supporting the USA on every asset and in within this context “doing its best to destroy jihadist.”

H.O. who crossed the border illegally, said that a very close friend of him crossed the border many times before the spring of 2014, but he was arrested by the police officers while he was trying to enter Turkey. H.O. also said that his friend was released on probation and he had to sign in every week at a police station, finally he got bored of it and illegally returned to Syria and he became a martyr there. H.O. added that Turkey has sealed the border and no one can cross the border, therefore everybody is using smugglers’ help to cross.

Again, another jihadist, B.S., said that crossings can be made only by illegal ways, and added: “The spouse of one of my friend’s was caught while emigrating and was imprisoned. There are many others I know who were imprisoned.”

B.R., one of two people who crossed the border differently than the other 28, said that Turkey opened its borders and he crossed the border from Turkey to Iraq just because it was more convenient, and he supported jihad from there.

Eleven of 30 respondents said that Turkey’s border policies eased their work, and they were not scared from the police or other people while on action; however, 17 respondents said that they were scared to be caught.

Turkish Hospitals

When I asked if anyone was guaranteed a treatment in a Turkish hospital in case of an injury, 30 of 30 respondents said that nobody gave such a guarantee. But C.A. from ISIS

said that two people he knew were treated in Turkey after getting injured, and A.U. said that even if nobody guaranteed it, jihadists could receive treatment in Turkey under the name of “opponents.” Again, D.M. said that there is a treated person between the people he knew, and added: “Treatment is being received. And they are returning after treatment somehow; nobody really knows.” A.K. talked on the matter by saying, “The media thinks every bearded person is a member of ISIS,” and he added that without a hesitation every single Assad opponent can be treated in Turkey as necessary. Again, A.B. also mentioned that Turkish hospitals have people from all kind of organizations, and Turkey does not investigate which organization injured persons belong to. H.A. said that an Islamic State member he knew was treated in Turkey for their amputated leg.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to examine if the Turkish government’s Syria policies has had an impact on radical Turks’ decision to go to Syria and join the radical organizations there. My main argument for this research was that so many Turks joined radical organizations in Syria because they felt encouraged and supported by the Turkish government in the context of its Syria policies. Border crossings, the approaches of the Turkish security forces, helping “moderate rebels”, and treating radicals at Turkish hospitals were chosen as policies which might have had a direct or indirect impact on radical Turks who decided to go to Syria to fight for radical organizations. While investigating Turkey’s

Syria policies, this paper also gave background information about Turkey-Syria relations in a historical frame and why the improved relations deteriorated in March 2011. Also, because Turkey and the US have had some parallels between their Syria policies, it became necessary to look into their similar stances on the subject as well. Research so far mostly covered all these questions, but they all lacked a structured type of interview with the radicals. This paper's contribution to the field is the interviews that were conducted with Turkish radicals.

In order to examine the hypothesis of this paper, domestic and international news reports, books, and parliamentary questions were collected, analyzed, and used as a main source. News helped me collect statements and see developments chronologically. In addition to these sources, my main first-hand information sources were my interviewees. Also, in order to make the argument that supporting radical terrorists and letting them travel freely were not legitimate things to do, I made a brief investigation about Turkish and international law that supported my argument.

According to the data I collected for this research, Turkey and Syria have always had problematic relations throughout history. The two countries had issues over territory, water, and the PKK. When the current Syrian president, Assad's father Hafiz Assad, died in 2000, Turkey and Syrian relations started normalizing with the initiations of Assad and former Turkish president Ahmet Necdet Sezer. In the aftermath of the AKP's election in Turkey, the relations between the two countries witnessed a golden era. As this paper discussed, there are two main opinions that explain this betterment. The first opinion is

that the relations improved because Erdogan and Davutoglu adopted a zero-problem policy with the neighboring countries. The second opinion is that Turkey was chosen as a “project party” by the US that “used” Turkey as a mediator between Israel and Syria and also for the US’s “Greater Middle East” aims. When the deterioration of the relations in 2011 was analyzed, again, two different opinions were found. The first opinion that explains the deterioration argued that Turkey got involved in the Syrian conflict in 2011 because Assad started oppressing the protests violently and Turkey felt responsible in terms of humanitarian reasons. The second notion argued that Turkey got involved in the conflict so directly because of the US’s pressure. According to this notion, the US, with the Arab Uprising’s spillover in Syria, found an opportunity to reshape Syria and topple Assad who posed a threat to Israel’s security.

After giving background information about Turkey-Syria relations and Turkey’s reasons to become involved with the conflict, this paper traced back the developments such as supporting armed and political Syrian rebels in Turkey. The data I gathered demonstrated that after March 2011, Turkey and the US initiated meetings to support rebels to topple the regime in Syria. However, the research showed me that whereas the US made a distinction between the rebels based on their radicalism level, Turkey considered even the most radical groups as “containable”.

When I first came up with the research questions for this study, I started with the view that the Turkish government was helping any jihadists from ISIS, Al-Nusra, etc. to topple the regime in Syria. Also, I assumed that thousands of Turks joined the jihad in Syria

because they were supported and encouraged by the government. I still favor this view because credible sources such as the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and the Washington Post; and statements from other sources such as politicians and experts agree with this as well. Also, although the majority of the radicals said that they were completely motivated by their beliefs to join the jihad and the government did not help them, the evidence shows that it is an undeniable fact that the AKP created this atmosphere within the country. The evidence from newspapers and radicals' statements showed me that those people would have found a way to cross the border into Syria anyway, but the government did not even arrest or stop anyone until the middle of August. All of the statements demonstrate that there was a tendency for the security forces to ignore radicals saying that they were free to travel. All credible newspapers and sources are all uniform about the fact that Turkey turned a blind eye to border crossings for a very long time. However, they also agree that the Turkish government started cracking down on border crossings and radicals' operations towards the end of 2014.

Of course there are limitations to this study: I wasn't able to reach out to any AKP officials; all politicians I interviewed were from opposition parties; there were time restrictions and safety concerns; and I don't know if the radicals on Twitter were telling me the truth. Therefore it is difficult to come up with one single answer.

For further research, I would recommend finding a way to reach out to AKP officials and allocating more time to interview radicals so that the results would be more representative.