Analysis of war-related risks – case study of Syrian civil war

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Abstract.

Local military conflicts are prominent issue in today's world. The paper applies systematic and some other approaches to war-related risks in a specific case – Syrian civil war.

Keywords: war-related risks; civil war

1. Introduction

Local military conflicts are prominent issue in today's world. They raise many security issues not only in the countries where they arise but also in their neighbors, in the regions where the countries are located and even for global security. Her we consider a case of local conflict – recent civil war in Syria which is still ongoing.

The Syrian civil war is a multi-sided armed conflict in Syria in which international interventions have taken place. The war grew out of an unrest of the 2011 and is now being fought among several fractions receiving substantial support from foreign actors. Because of foreign involvement, many researchers label the conflict a proxy war.

2. Methodology

The main approach of the study is the systematic approach. Systematic approach considers the security as a system of interrelated elements – treats (and possibilities), resources for defense (and attack), security actors (organizations participating in the conflicts), security products (which in case of war are actually the defense and attack of each party and defense/attack developing with time). These elements can be considered from the perspective of different parts of the reality: nature, economy, policy, social life, resulting in different aspects of the security – ecological, economical, political, social, cultural.

A model of security system (Stoynov, 2016) is presented at Figure 1.

In this paper, mainly political (and specifically military) as well as some social aspect of the Syrian civil war are considered.

For analyzing different elements of the security system in the context of the Syrian civil war, different additional methods are used: historical approach - for tracking the development of the conflict, game-theory approach - for identifying involved parties, statistical data analysis - for identifying the risks and the resources for dealing with these risks.

3. Syrian civil war – the actors.

The key internal political actors are: Syrian Government, Democratic opposition, Army of conquest, ISIL, Kurds. Every political actor has its military sub-actors.

As of February 2016 the government held 40% of territory and 66% of the population. ISIL controls 20-40% of territory, 20% of territory controlled by rebel groups and other 15-20% are held by Kurds. In Figure 2 current territory distribution among the key players is presented.

The Syrian government enjoys high levels of support in certain areas under its control - according to a poll organized by British ORB International, up to 73% of the population in government-controlled areas support the government effort.

The main armed forces of Syrian government include Syrian Armed Forces (178 000) and National Defense Forces (100 000).

Before the uprising and war broke out, Syrian Armed Forces was estimated at 325 000 regular troops and also approximately 280 000–300 000 reservists. Since June 2011, defections of soldiers have been reported.

The Syrian National Defense Force (NDF) was formed out of pro-government militias. They receive their salaries, and their military equipment from the government. The force acts in an infantry role, directly fighting against rebels on the ground and running operations in coordination with the army.

Syrian Government receives support by external allies: Russia 4000 and 1000 contractors (since 2015), Hezbollah 6000-8000 (since 2013), Iran 3000-5000 (since 2013).

According to independent analysts, by the beginning of 2014, approximately 500 Hezbollah fighters had died in the Syrian conflict.

Since the start of the civil war, Iran has expressed its support for the Syrian government and has provided it with financial, technical, and military support.

On 30 September 2015, Russia's Federation Council unanimously granted permission for use of the Russian Armed Forces in Syria.

The armed forces of Syrian Democratic opposition include Free Syrian Army -FSA (40 000- 50 000), Southern Front (from 2014), Fatah Halab (25 000-32 000) (from 2015), Islamic Front 40 000-70 000 (2013-2015).

Formation of FSA was announced on 29 July 2011 by a group of defecting Syrian Army officers. The FSA functions more as an umbrella organization than a traditional military chain of command, and was first based its head office in Turkey, but moved its command headquarters to northern Syria.

The Islamic Front is a merger of seven rebel groups involved in the Syrian civil war that was announced on 22 November 2013. The group is widely seen as backed and armed by Saudi Arabia.

The armed forces of Syrian Democratic opposition receive also help by external allies like Turkey as well as from other countries: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, France, United States.

SECURITY SYSTEM							
	SOCIETY		POLICY		ECONOMY		ENVIRONMENT
Security Manage-ment	Social security manage-ment through social security policies and programs	↔	Internal and external security management through internal and external state policy	↔	Economic security management through economic security policies	↔	Ecological security management through environmental policies and programs
	↕		↕		↕		↕
Security Resources	People, Social groups	↔	State with central and local administration, specialized security organizations (army, police,…)	↔	National economy and economic resources with security use	↔	Relief, climate, waters, food
	↕		↕		↕		↕
Exposures	Life, personal values, human rights	↔	Sovereignty, territorial integrity, rule-based international system, national values, public safety	↔	Sustainable growth, employment, financial stability; stability of supply, positive balance, guaranteed export, reserves	↔	Air, water, soils, biodiversity
	↕		↕		↕		↕
Security Products	Social security system	↔	Internal and external security, activities of the specialized security organizations (army, police,…)	↔	Military sector of economy, security products, security services	↔	Readiness system for protecting public safety form natural hazards
	↕		↕		↕		↕
Risks	Social risks	↔	Political violence and military treats	↔	Internal and external economic risks	↔	Natural hazards

Figure 1. Proposed model of security system. Source: Stoynov(2016).

The armed forces of Army of conquest include: Al Nusra 13 000 (since July 2016 Jabhat Hateh Al Sham), Ahrar Al Sham, Turkistan Islamic Party of Syria.

The al-Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front, being the biggest jihadist group in Syria, is often considered to be the most aggressive and violent part of the opposition.

In the east, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a jihadist militant group originating from Iraq, made rapid military gains in both Syria and Iraq.

The armed forces of ISIL (31 500-100 000) include Military and Khalid Ibn Al Walid Army.

The armed forces of Kurds include mainly YPG and SDF (57 000 – 60 000), Syrian Arab Coalition (4000), MFS. Its allies are IFB, PKK. They also receive support by Russia and Iraqi Kurdistan.

YPG was the first military organization of Kurds. Kurds – mostly Sunni Muslims, with a small minority of Yezidis – represented 10% of Syria's population at the start of the uprising in 2011.

SDF are an alliance of Arab, Assyrians, Armenian, Kurdish, and Turkmen militias fighting for a democratic and federalist Syria. They are opposed to the Assad regime, but have directed most of their efforts against Al-Nusra Front and ISIL. The group formed in December 2015, led primarily by the predominantly Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). On 17 March 2016 the Syrian Democratic Council, the political wing of the SDF, declared the creation of an autonomous federation in northern Syria.

A number of countries, including many NATO members, participate in the Combined Joint Task Force, chiefly to fight ISIL and support rebel groups perceived as moderate and friendly to Western nations such as the Free Syrian Army. Those who have conducted airstrikes in Syria include the United States, Australia, Bahrain, Canada, France, Jordan, The Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom.

Turkey has been accused of fighting against Kurdish forces in Syria and Iraq, including intelligence collaborations with ISIL in some cases.

Formed on 23 August 2011, the National Council is a coalition of anti-government groups, based in Turkey. The National Council seeks the end of Bashar al-Assad's rule and the establishment of a modern, civil, democratic state.
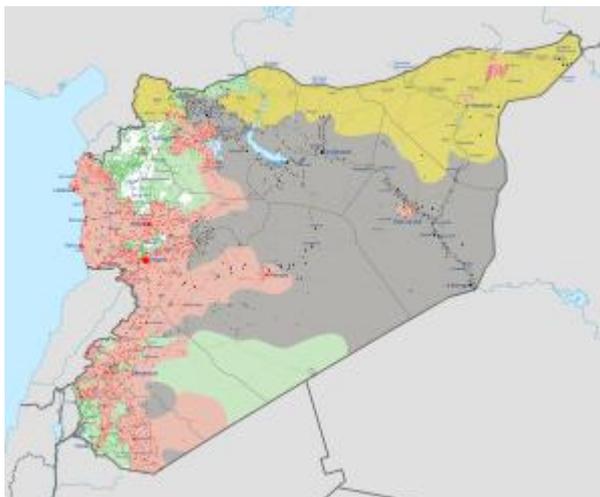

Figure 2. Territory distribution among the key players about the end of 2016. Yellow: Kurds. Red: Government. Green: Moderate opposition. Grey: ISIS. White: Al Nusra Front. Source: Syrian Civil War – Wikipedia (2016)

On 11 November 2012 in Doha, the National Council and other opposition groups united as the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. The following day, it was recognized as the legitimate government of Syria by numerous Persian Gulf states.

4. Syrian civil war – historic approach.

The protests began on 15 March 2011 when protesters marched in the capital of Damascus, demanding democratic reforms and the release of political prisoners. Fire was open on the protesters by unknown men. President Bashar al-Assad blamed foreign conspirators pushing Israeli propaganda for the protests.

On 29 July 2011, seven defecting Syrian officers formed the Free Syrian Army (FSA), composed of defected Syrian Armed Forces officers and soldiers. On 23 August, a coalition of anti-government groups called the Syrian National Congress was formed. The council, based in Turkey, attempted to organize the opposition.

In December 2011, USA, UK and France started deploying instructors, weapons (mainly for Muammar Gaddafi's arsenals) and volunteers from the Libyan Transitional National Council at Turkish military bases close to the Syrian border.

On 6 September 2012 Kurdish activists reported that 21 civilians were killed near Allepo. In a statement released shortly after the deaths, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) vowed to retaliate. A few days later, Kurdish forces killed 3 soldiers in Afin and captured a number of other government soldiers in Kobani and Al-Malikiyah from where they drove the remaining government security forces.

Starting on 5 June 2014 , ISIL seized swathes of territory in Iraq in addition to heavy weapons and equipment from the Iraqi Army, some of which they brought into Syria. On 19 August, 2014, American journalist James Foley was executed by ISIL in retaliation for the United States operations in Iraq. American jets began bombing ISIL in Syria on 23 September 2014. Foreign partners participating in the strikes with the United States were Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan and Australia.

On 30 September 2015, at an official request by the Syrian government headed by President Bashar al-Assad, the Russian Aerospace Forces began a sustained campaign of air strikes against both ISIL and the anti-Assad FSA.

On 8 October 2015, the U.S. officially announced the end of the Pentagon's $500 million program to train and equip Syrian rebels in an acknowledgment that the program had failed (other covert and significantly larger CIA programs to arm anti-government fighters in Syria continue).

In mid-November 2015, in the wake of the Russian plane bombing over Sinai and the Paris attacks, both Russia and France significantly intensified their strikes in Syria, France closely coordinating with the U.S. military.

At the end of July 2016, the fighting between the government and Islamist rebels in and around Aleppo intensified. On 24 August 2016, Turkey′s armed forces invaded Syria in the Jarablus area controlled by ISIL starting what the Turkish president called the Operation Euphrates Shield, aimed against, according to his statement, both the IS and Kurdish ″terror groups that threaten our country in northern Syria″.

5. Syrian civil war – economic resources involved.

Both the Syrian government and the opposition have received support, militarily and diplomatically, from foreign countries leading the conflict to often be described as a proxy war.

The major parties supporting the Syrian Government are Iran and Hezbollah. Both of these are involved in the war politically and logistically by providing military equipment, training and battle troops. The Syrian government has also received arms and support from Russia

The main Syrian opposition body – the Syrian coalition – receives political, logistic and military support from the United States, Britain and France. CIA operatives and U.S. special operations troops have trained and armed nearly 10,000 rebel fighters at a cost of $1 billion a year since 2012.

The Syrian coalition also receives logistic and political support from Sunni states, most notably Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The Financial Times and The Independent reported that Qatar had funded the Syrian rebellion by as much as $3 billion.

It is estimated ISIL has sold oil for between $1 000 000 and $ 4000 000 per day principally to Turkish buyers, during at least six months in 2013, greatly helping its growth. The Turkish government has been also accused of helping ISIL by turning a blind eye to illegal transfers of weapons, fighters, oil and pillaged antiquities across the southern border.

On the other hand, initial refusal from the West to support the Syrian liberal opposition has contributed to the emergence of extremist Sunni groups. These include ISIL and the Nusra Front, linked to al-Qaeda.

6. Syrian civil war – risks and treats.

With porous borders with most of its neighbors, the fighting has spilled across them, sparking fears of a regional war which is the most important political risk related to Syrian civil war.

In June 2014, members of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) crossed the border from Syria into northern Iraq, and have taken control of large swaths of Iraqi territory as the Iraqi Army abandoned its positions.

The Syrian civil war has led to incidents of sectarian violence in northern Lebanon between supporters and opponents of the Syrian government, and armed clashes between Sunnis and Alawites in Tripoli. Fighting between rebels and government forces has spilled into Lebanon on several occasions.

The fight between ISIL and the Kurds in the town of Kobani on the Turkish border has led to rioting throughout Turkey and to brief occupations of a number of parliament buildings in Western Europe.

The waves of migrants create political and social tension in the countries of Middle East and Europe.

The economic treats are related to the huge economical loses. Whole cities in Syria are destroyed in large extent and the Syrian economy is in collapse. The conflict holds the record for the largest sum ever requested by UN agencies for a single humanitarian emergency—$6 500 000 000 worth of requests of December 2013.

The social risks are related to lost lives, migration, poverty, diseases.

Estimates of deaths in the conflict vary widely, with figures, per opposition activist groups, ranging from 140,200 to 470,000. Some areas of the country have been affected disproportionately by the war; by some estimates, as many as a third of all deaths have occurred in the city of Homs.

On 20 August 2014, a new U.N. study concluded that at least 191 690 people have died in the Syrian conflict. The UN thereafter stopped collecting statistics, but a study by the Syrian Centre for Policy Research released in February 2016 estimated the death toll at 470 000, with 1 900 000 wounded (reaching a total of 11.5% of the entire population wounded or killed).
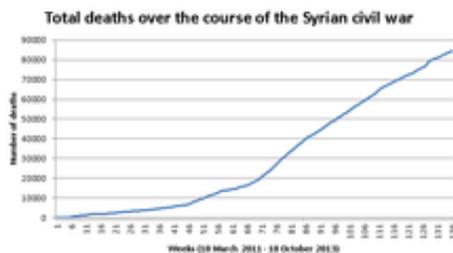

Figure 3. Total deaths over the course of the conflict in Syria (18 March 2011 – 18 October 2013). Source: Wikipedia (2016).

Formerly rare infectious diseases have spread in rebel-held areas brought on by poor sanitation and deteriorating living conditions.

The violence in Syria has caused millions to flee their homes. As of March 2015, Al-Jazeera estimates 10 900 000 Syrians, or almost half the population, have been displaced. 3 800 000 have been made refugees.

According to various human rights organizations and United Nations, human rights violations have been committed by both the government and the rebels, ISIS forces have been accused by UN of using public executions, amputations and lashings in a campaign to instill fear. Criminal networks have been used by both the government and the opposition during the conflict.

As of March 2015, the war has affected 290 heritage sites, severely damaged 104, and completely destroyed 24. Five of the six UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Syria have been damaged. UNESCO listed all six Syria's World Heritage sites as endangered but direct assessment of damage is not possible.

The international humanitarian response to the conflict in Syria is coordinated by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 46/182. The primary framework for this coordination is the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) which appealed for USD $1 410 000 000 to meet the humanitarian needs of Syrians affected by the conflict.

7. Conclusion.

In Syrian civil war, not only the internal political forces are involved but also the also Syria's border countries, regional countries and Global powers.

Regional power supporting Government is Iran. Government is also supported by Hezbollah organization.

The rest of countries and organizations in the region, including both the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation who suspended Syria's membership, support the opposition.

Among the Global powers European Union and many Western governments expressed support for the opposition while Russia and China support Syrian Government.

Because of these opposite interests, the only right way for stopping the conflict is the negotiation between all concerned parties. This Negotiation could be performed as soon as possible to achieve stable peace in the country and in the region.

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