IS THE SYRIAN CRISIS CONTRIBUTING TO CHANGE THE NATURE OF WAR?

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1-INTRODUCTION

The modern war, which was the result of the Industrial Revolution and the development of the nation-states, was transformed to total war[1] through the First and the Second World Wars. During the Cold War, the use of large-scale conventional forces and nuclear weapons was prevented through deterrence. However, the Cold War continued as a struggle of global powers for superiority within the bipolar political system after the Second World War. In this complex struggle, while military methods have been used in regional wars in a relatively limited way, more covert operations, blockades, coups, political and economic pressures, ideological struggles, alliances and indirect war methods have come to the fore (Akad, 2013: 233).

The state-centered, conventional and nuclear-based military security problems during the Cold War have been replaced by broader-spectrum security problems such as ethnic and regional conflicts, incidents of migration, human trafficking, failed states, terrorism, cyber-attacks, ballistic missiles, energy security and maritime bandits in the post-Cold War era. The new security threats have emerged according to time, conjuncture and perception. This period has paved the way for new types of security threats such as ballistic missiles, cyber-attacks, and terrorism. These three new security threats do not recognize the national borders. Furthermore, it is not easy to identify the source of such kinds of threats. Depending on the character of threats to security, countries' security needs also have changed. As the security

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[1] **Total war:** It is a type of war that is carried out not only against the military forces but also against the nations themselves and which needs to use all the power of the nation (Ludendorff 2017: 13,23).

problems have changed, the security environment has also begun to change the nature of conflict or war.

Among the newly emerging security threats, terrorism is the most prominent one because of its impact on target states and societies. As terrorist organizations with different motivations have increased their actions, several countries have suffered a lot from terrorism. Some terrorist organizations such as YPG/PYD, a branch of PKK, have served as a proxy to realize the objectives of some countries which have provided political, financial and arms supports to themselves. While "The war is only a continuation of state policy in other ways." according to Clausewitz (2018: 29), some countries today use terrorism as an inseparable and indispensable part of their foreign policies. The widespread use of terrorism in this way and proxy wars[2] are the products of the Cold War. In this context, the new approaches to deal with new security environment such as indirect war, asymmetric war[3], proxy war and hybrid[4] war have come into prominence in the military strategy. When closely examined the ongoing Syrian crisis, the use of these new approaches could be openly seen.

2- ANALYSIS OF SYRIAN CONFLICT

The conflict in Syria has been more than a civil war for eight years. The country has become a battlefield for regional power plays, the war on terror and various intra-Syrian conflicts. It has been a series of battles for geopolitical dominance. The separate conflicts in Syria have not been isolated from each other. An indirect general state of war supported by various diplomatic efforts seems to exist in Syria between intervening states, even if it remains undeclared. Syrian civil war has been transformed to a miniature of the Third World War through regular forces, proxies, terrorists and mercenaries, and has been continuing

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[2] **Proxy war:** The indirect engagement of a third party who wants to influence the strategic outcome in the event of a dispute (Mumford, 2013: 1).

[3] **Asymmetric war:** War between military, economic and technological forces, which are apparently unequal, and tend to adapt war strategies to the needs of the weak (Heywood, 2014: 301).

[4] **Hybrid war**: It is a type of war in which many types of battles are used at the same time in the most appropriate conditions (Hoffman, 2007: 29).

without any end as if the rehearsal of upcoming World War was happening. While the conflict among the four warring factions (Syrian regime forces, Free Syrian Army, *recently called itself as Syrian National Army*, PKK/ YPG/PYD terrorist organization, *a proxy of USA*, and Shia Militias) has been continuing, the conflict has become more regionalized. As the conflict in Syria has deepened, global and regional powers have struggled for influence and border security. Depending on the developments, global actors (Russia and the USA) and regional countries (Turkey, Iran and Israel) have directly involved in fighting from time to time through different methods and justifications. What began as a civil uprising eight years ago now looks more like an international conflict.

The conflict in Syria has been continuing on local, regional and global levels. At the local level, the balance of four warring factions is relatively fragile. Since the regional countries involved in Syria crisis have different agendas and divergent interests, the regional conflict seems to be unpredictable, the global aspect is more complicated. The main competition continues between two global actors (USA and Russian Federation) for the control of all the region. The other actors have also involved in Syrian conflict through different agendas.

Both external and internal factors have affected situation in Syria. Main external factors are (1) rivalry between USA and Russian Federation, (2) Diverse and competing goals of outsider powers, (a) USA's ambitions to build Kurdish state, provide security of Israel, control Iran and Turkey closely, (b) Russia's objectives to maintain air and naval military bases in Syria, preserve Kurd card for leverage, and gain a predominant role in regional balances. (c) Iran's goal to maintain political influence over Syria and preserve the ability to reach Shia groups to threaten Israel closely, (d) Turkey's aim to provide border security against YPG/PYD terrorist threat from Syria and resettle displaced Syrian people in Turkey to Syria. (3) Competition on Peace Talks between the Geneva Process and the Astana Process, (4) The rivalry of routes for the transportation of energy resources over Syria. On the other side, prominent internal factors are; (1) Destruction of major urban areas and economic infrastructure in Syria, (2) Deterioration of economic and social lives, (3) Over 12 million people- half the country's prewar population – displaced from their homes (over 6 million

externally displaced persons from Syria and over 6 million internally displaced persons), (4) Four warring factions based on religion and ethnicity, (5) Fighting among the four warring factions together with temporary and limited collaboration of some for a short period of time, (6) The decrease of the desire of ethnic and religious groups to live together and the increase of hates among them.

There are still many reasons to believe that the war in Syria won't be ending anytime soon. First, the conflict has no clear trend toward a peaceful resolution. Second, the war is multilateral, and the conflict is likely to continue. Third, the compromise between the Syrian regime and opposition seems to be unlikely. Fourth, the intervening external powers have diverging agendas.

Under current situation, Assad has been trying to consolidate and expand his hold over the country. The USA wants Assad to step aside. Russia wants to preserve Assad's position and its own as a power broker in the Middle East. Turkey has been struggling to prevent autonomous Kurdish region along its border. Iran wants to reap the gains of its investments in Syria and Assad. Israel is opposed to a permanent Iranian and Hezbollah military presence on its border in southern Syria. They seem as if they supported the continuation of the conflict.

In addition to current difficulties, the existing generation of Syria will never forget the hostilities among the warring parties. Since the hate seeds have been sown for the next conflict, the establishment of internal peace among the ethnic and religious groups in Syria seems to be very difficult.

If the conflict terminates, there may be five possible geopolitical models for Syria. These five models could be expressed as; (1) Unified Syria with Assad, territorial integrity protected, (desired by Russia and Iran), (2) Unified Syria without Assad, territorial integrity protected, (desired by Turkey), (3) Federal Syria with Assad, territorial integrity protected, (autonomous Kurdish region also accepted by Russia). (4) Federal Syria without Assad (desired by USA) and (5) Fragmented Syria. When looked at these models, it does not seem easy to predict which model will be realized under the current conditions. Therefore, solving the Syrian crisis will not be easy and will take some more time.

As seen in the Syrian crisis, states, opposition groups and terrorist organizations have involved in the conflict environment. Therefore, Syrian conflict has been evolved into an international conflict rather than a civil war. Along with the civil war, the fight against terrorism has become a part of the civil war and allied relations of external powers with terrorist organizations such as between USA and YPG/PYD have been established and legalized. Alliance relations between warring factions in the conflict have changed from time to time. Conflicts have continued in a asymmetrical structure. Conflict/war has become hybrid in terms of targets, forces and weapons systems used. The tactical, operative and strategic levels of war have intertwined in each other by disregarding the strategical hierarchy. This situation has created serious difficulties in command and control of the conflict. Conflict areas have been predominantly directed to occupied areas. Therefore, the civilian population have become the target of the conflicts and the management of the conflict have become more difficult. The displaced people movements in the conflict areas have both made conflicts difficult and led to civilian deaths. The conflict environment has also made humanitarian aids difficult. The more obvious situation in conventional warfare, such as the success of conflict, ie victory, becomes uncertain in this new form of conflict. This has an effect that prolongs the duration of the conflict. As long as the conflict lasts long, the probability of the peaceful solution in near term becomes less. Most of the elements in the field have been supported and managed by external actors, and some conflicts have been carried out in the form of proxy war. In a country where there is a fight against terrorism and civil war, cease-fire talks and negotiations to end the conflict seem to be more difficult when compared with the conventional war between two states. If the intervening global actors in the crisis area direct their attention and resources to other areas or their policies change, the effects of these intervening global powers could relatively diminish in the crisis area, then, the peaceful solution could be feasible.

Considering all related factors to include also some outcomes of Syrian crisis, the followings about the changes in the nature of war can be expressed briefly; (1) New security threats are multidimensional, indeterminate, unpredictable, uninhibited and variable, with particular emphasis on terrorism, cyber attacks and ballistic missiles. (2) New security threats

target society and economy as well as the state and military power. (3) The concept of security becomes holistic, covering political, military, economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions. (4) Security policies are established and implemented among actors such as states, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. (5) The distinction between peace, crisis and war is blurred. (6) Newly emerging security threats lead to differentiation of targets, tools and methods in military strategy. (7) Uncertainties and surprises make the security environment irregular, dynamic and chaotic. (8) The concepts of asymmetric war, proxy war and hybrid war come to the fore. (9) The number of parties having diverse agendas in the security environment is increased. (10) How to use power has become more complicated and this affected the decision-making processes. (11) The tactical, operational and strategic levels of war are intertwined in each other through creating serious command and control difficulties.   Despite the decrease in the possibility of large-scale conventional war between states and their allies, the increase in the probability of asymmetric, low-intensity conflict among states, their proxies, terrorist organizations and non-state organized groups constitutes the most important feature of the changing nature of war (Eslen, 2009: 18).While the scope of security and changes of the nature of war have not changed the essence of the military strategy that provides the balance among the target, the tool and the method, it has made the strategy more complicated and difficult to use a wide range of tools and different methods for different objectives in a broader spectrum. Strategy practitioners are becoming increasingly dependent on ethical and legal rules, creating serious challenges in war, a highly chaotic nature (Kane-Lonsdale, 2016: 18).

3-CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, instead of intervening directly in the country of interest, the global or regional powers may begin to intervene by means of their proxies, contributing to the outbreak of the civil war in that country. Syrian conflict has turned into a battlefield of the new Cold War-like global confrontation, two great powers seem to have positioned themselves on opposing fronts in an open political conflict. Neither country has the power to impose a lasting final state on the war alone. The regional and global peace and security requires international cooperation.

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The Syrian conflict has set the scene to implement together all the components of contemporary war such as proxy war, asymmetric war and hybrid war. The new nature of war seems to not give an opportunity to reach the ultimate end of war through open victory. The new form of war prolongs the conflict period and overturns people's living spaces, community life and economic activities. Contemporary war could likely force the warring country to consume all sources till becoming a failed state and therefore destabilize the region surrounding the crisis country for unforeseeable future.

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