

## DRK INSIGHT:

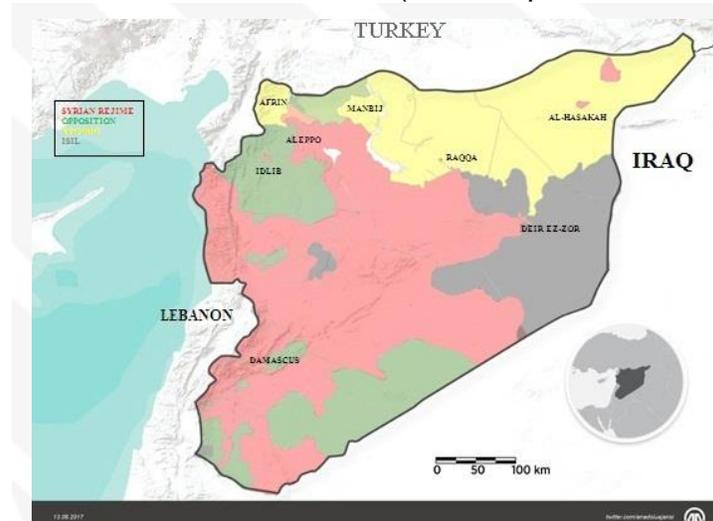
### Turkey's Possible Military Operations: Idlib & Afrin

#### 1. MOVEMENT PERSPECTIVE (SYRIA)

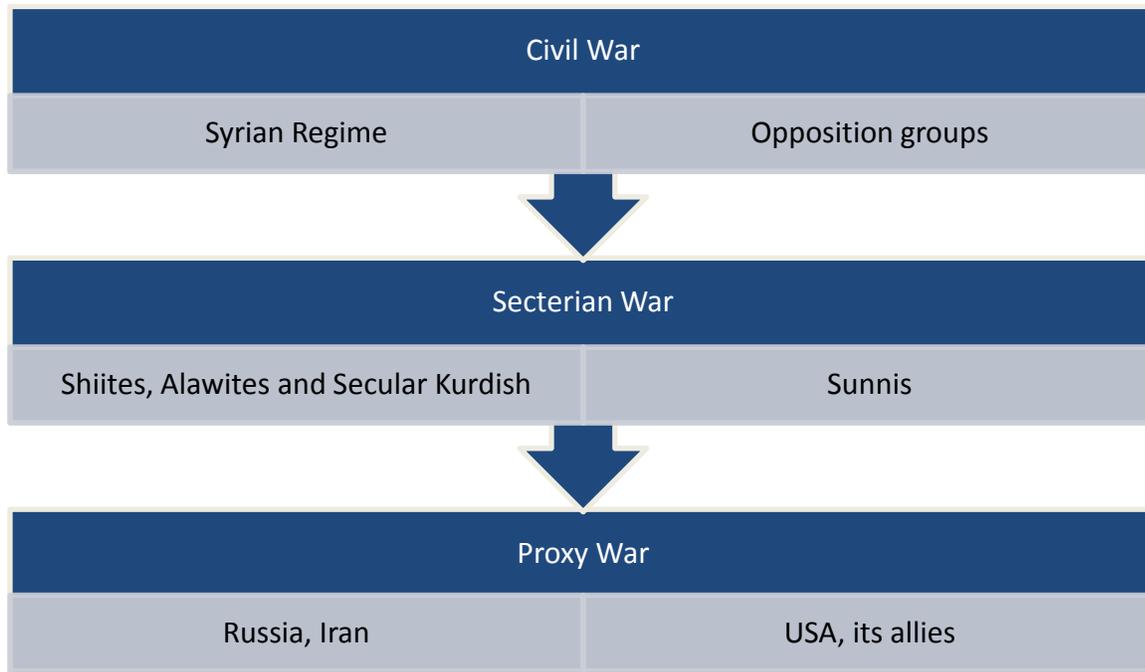
##### Dynamics of the Region

The coalition between Syrian Regime, Russia and Iran has tired the opposition groups and the Syrian Regime began to gain its territories back. Meanwhile, the Kurdish opposition groups have become stronger gradually and they have captured most of the territories of other moderate opposition groups. The Kurdish groups established so-called autonomous territories and tried to unite those territories under a so-called dependent Kurdish State. During the period between 2014 and 2016, Turkey had to live with terrorist groups at its border along Syria. On 24 August 2016, Turkey initiated an operation called 'Euphrates Shield' to secure its border and create safe zones for refugees. The operation ended up successfully in 2017. The United States of America (USA) shot Syrian Regime directly for the first time by Tomahawk missiles after the Regime used chemical weapon in Han Sheikhoun in 2017 as a result of exercising its rights from the Chapter 7 (response against the threat to international peace and security) and Article 51 (right to self-defense) of the Charter of United Nations, and also United Nations Security Council Resolution no. 2118 condemning use of chemical weapons as a breach of international law and a threat to international peace and security. In 2017, the so-called capital city of Islamic state of Iraq and the Levants (ISIL), Raqqa, was taken by Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Today, most of the territories under ISIL control were taken back by Russian-backed Syrian Regime and US-backed SDF.

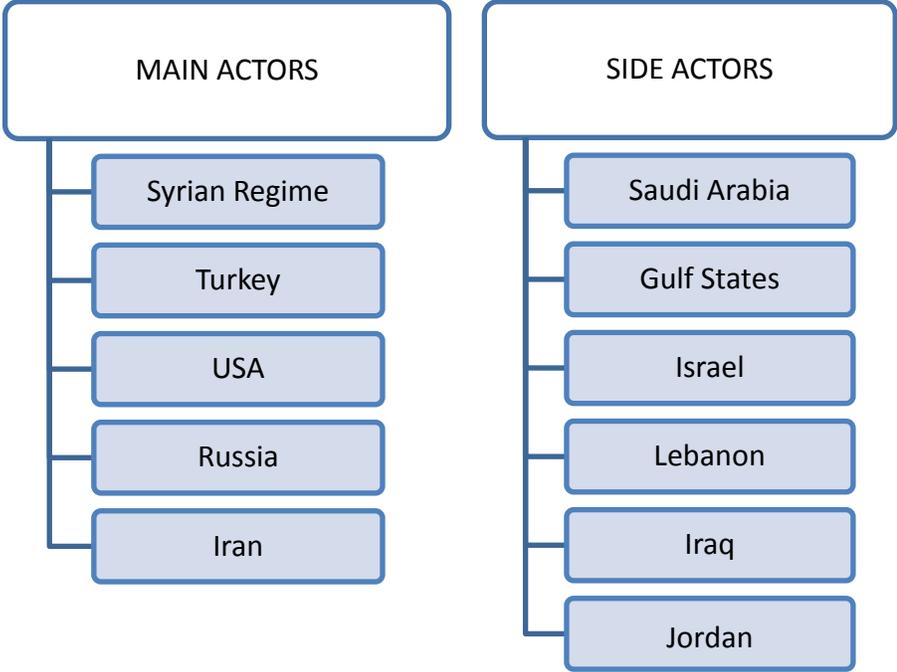
THE LATEST SYRIA MAP (As of September 2017)



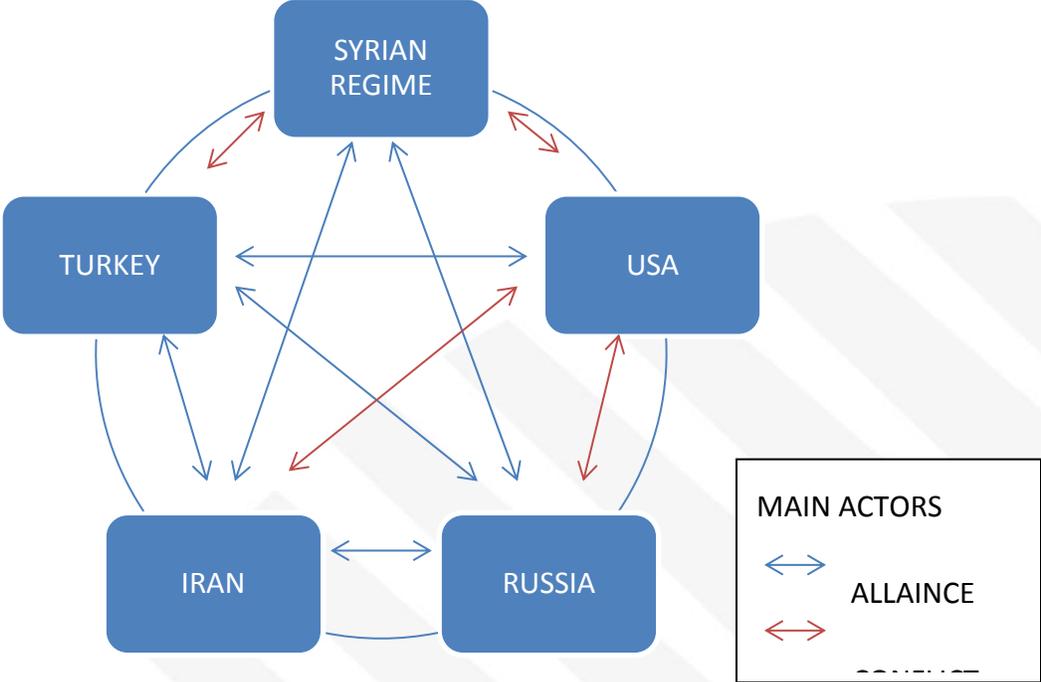
The characteristic of the conflict in Syria is complicated. There is more than one pattern of armed conflict between sides. First of all, the conflict is a civil war between Syrian Regime and people of Syria. So, there are Syrian regime and Opposition groups at each side. The conflict is also of a sectarian characteristic. The armed conflict is between Shiites, Alawites and Secular Kurds, and Sunnis. Moreover, the conflict is a proxy war between rival States. There are Russia and Iran at one side, and USA and its allies are at the other side.



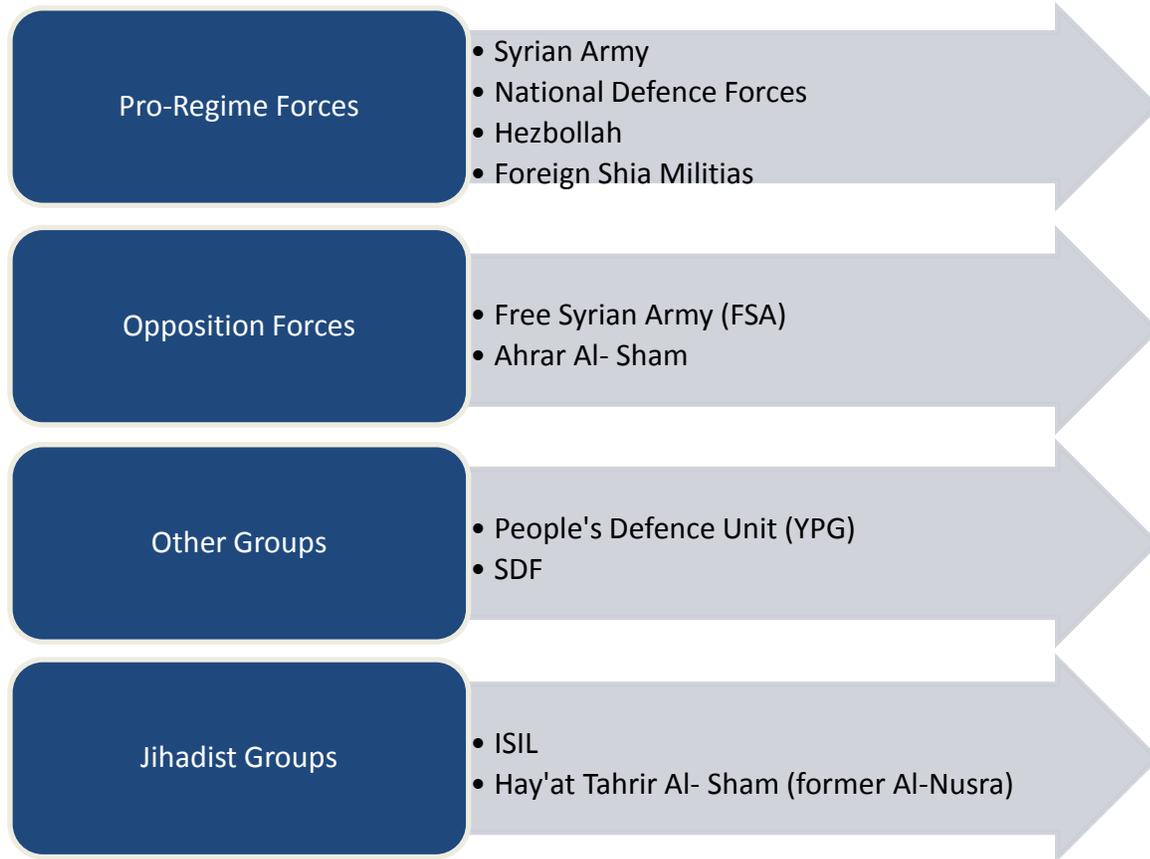
# Sides of Syrian Conflict



# Relations amongst Main Actors in Syria



## Forces in the field



## 2. EXCLUSIVE CASE: IDLIB & AFRIN

### Recent Developments

The timeline of the possible operation for Idlib & Afrin is given below.

## Timeline of the Operation for Idlib-Afrin



## Astana Peace Talks

Turkey, Iran and Russia as the three guarantor countries met in Astana, Kazakhstan to ensure peace in Syria and made their first meeting on January 23, 2017. In the context of the Astana Peace Talks, topics such as the continuation of the ceasefire in Syria, the joint struggle against ISIS and Al-Nusra, the territorial integrity, independence, unity and sovereignty of Syria, as well as the political cooperation of the way which is necessary to solve the problems in Syria.



## Current Situation

Afrin is a neighboring border town to Turkey. It is 28.3 km away from the Öncüpınar border gate and 84.5 km away from Idlib. The major ethnicity of Afrin is Kurdish (%74). There are also Arabs (25%) and others (1%). The population of Afrin is 48,693 as of 2016 data. Sunni Muslims constitutes a vast majority (89%) in town. There are also Christians (6%) and Alawites (4%). The town is held by YPG forces. The Minning air base is located between Azaz and Afrin.

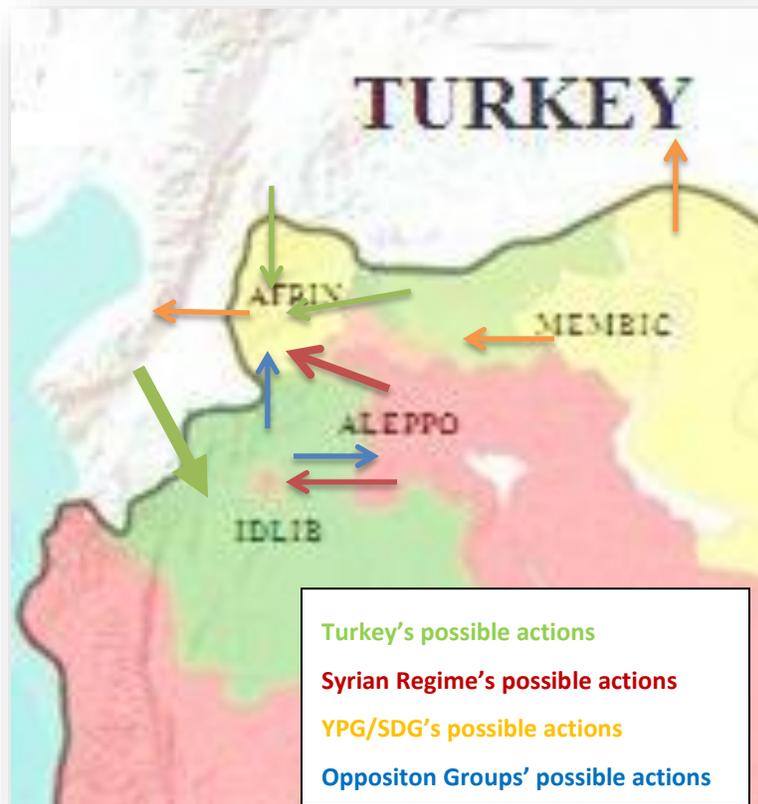
Idlib has border with Turkey as well. Cilvegözü border gate is one of the main gates for trade and humanitarian aid to Syria. It is 59 km away from city center of Aleppo. The population of the town is 128,840 as of 2016 data. On the other hand, Idlib governorate has almost 2 million population. The vast majority of the town is Sunni Arabs. Until recently, the city center and most of the governorate were held by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (HTS) and Ahrar al Sham groups together. However, HTS attacked Ahrar al Sham accusing Ahrar al Sham to support Astana Peace Talks, where HTS is taken as terrorist organization. The majority of the governorate is, now, held by HTS, which is once Al-Qaida affiliates former Al Nusra Front.

After the end of Operation Euphrates Shield, Turkey has announced that another operation into Syria is on the way. As a guarantor country of ceasefire in Syria, Turkey is also ceasefire observer in Idlib. Turkey has long been prepared for the operation to Afrin and Idlib under the international law by exercising its right of self-defense according to the Article 51 of the UN Charter, and 'within the context of the responsibility attributed to member countries in the fight against terrorism through Security Council resolutions 1373 (2001), 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014).' Heavy machinery and armored vehicles have crossed the border and a number of troops are deployed in the Syrian border. FSA forces are united under one command and the commander of the new united FSA is Fahim Isa, the former commander of Brigade of Sultan Murat.

### 3. NOW

#### Possible Course of Actions of the Forces in the Field

- 1- The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) has been preparing for a second operation into Syria since the last April (AA, 3 April, 2017).
- 2- As a result of the Astana Peace Talks, Turkey, being a guarantor country, could deploy soldiers in Idlib.
- 3- The Syrian regime has a tendency to attack to towns where others groups trying to capture. So, the SR is likely to have an operation towards Afrin.
- 4- The YPG forces might also attack TAF and FSA from Manbij and Afrin.
- 5- The Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (HTS) can attack other opposition groups in Idlib to reinforce its dominance in this town.
- 6- Russia can help SR by air strikes if they attack on opposition groups.
- 7- USA can help YPG/SDG by air strikes if they attack on Jihadist groups.



## 4. CONCLUSION

### Most likely Developments

It is most likely possible that a future operation might be launched for Idlib due to the Astana Peace Talks where an international consensus has been reached that Turkey would secure Idlib city center. Securing Idlib may also mean securing borders of Turkey and eliminating possible terrorist attacks before operation to Afrin.