

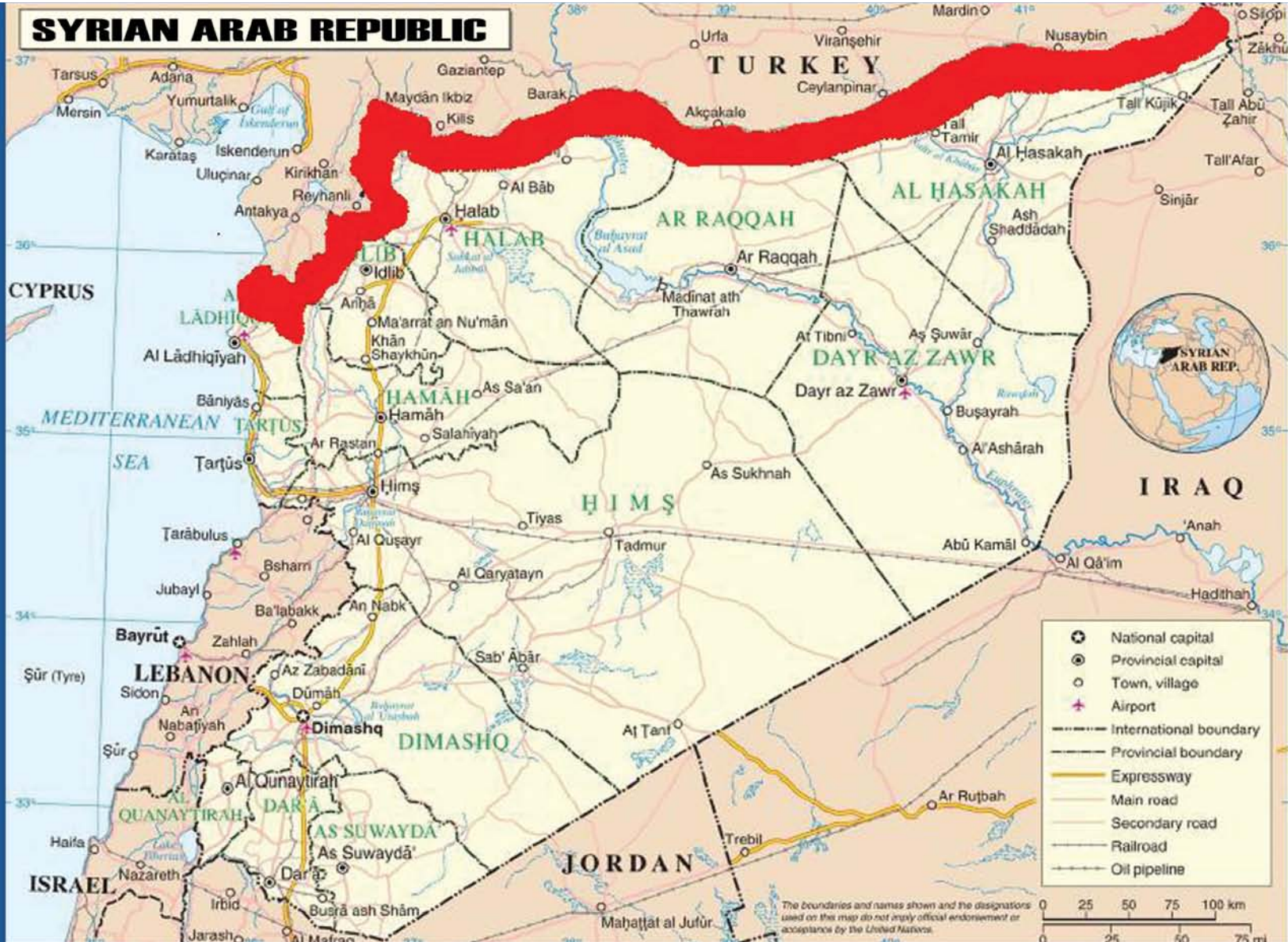
# ARGUMENTS ON SAFE HAVENS IN SYRIA: RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES AND SCENARIOS FOR TURKEY

## SURİYE'DE GÜVENLİ BÖLGE TARTIŞMALARI: TÜRKİYE AÇISINDAN RİSKLER, FİRSATLAR VE SENARYOLAR

نقاش حول إحداث منطقة آمنة في سوريا  
المخاطر والفرص والسيناريوهات من وجهة النظر التركية

ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

مرکز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية



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## PRESENTATION

It has been the 1st anniversary of Syria unrest. The violence across the country continues at full steam. Even though fortresses of the resistance fall one after another, it seems almost impossible to suppress the unrest in Syria after this stage. Lastly, Baba Amr, which is considered to be the fortress of Syrian opposition, was seized by the regime forces after the military operation organized in Homs, center of the unrest. However, this situation only leads to the change in the location of the aforesaid center. Nowadays, the military operations of the Syrian army have been continuing in Idlib. As a result, there has been a considerable increase in the number of Syrian guests arriving in Hatay.

The whole world has been striving to be able to find a solution to the Syrian crisis. In this respect, different opinions come to the forefront. In addition to the approaches such as inducing the Assad regime to change the policy through sanctions and pressure, more strict suggestions come to the forefront such as providing Syrian dissidents with arms aid especially by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. These subjects were handled during the Friends of Syria conferences, the first of which was held in Tunisia and the second in Istanbul. On the other hand, the efforts of Kofi Annan, who was appointed as the UN special envoy to Syria, to solve the problem through diplomatic methods still continue. The Annan Plan, which was prepared as a result of the talks held with all parties, was accepted by the Syrian regime. Everybody expects the solution of the problem through peaceful means, but how Syria or dissidents will respond to the calls within the plan is an important question mark.

Another subject coming to the forefront during this process is the establishment of safe haven on Syrian territories in the Turkey-Syria frontier zone. There have been two important developments aggravating these arguments. The first one is the increase in the number of Syrian people immigrating to Hatay in the recent period, and Turkey's efforts to take precautions. The second, on the other hand, is the statements of Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu regarding that the safe haven issue was discussed.

We expect that the ORSAM report entitled, "Arguments on Safe Haven in Syria: Risks, Opportunities, and Scenarios for Turkey", prepared by Oytun Orhan, will shed light on the aforesaid arguments. In this study, you will find information related to demographic, geographic and political environment of the Turkey-Syria borderline, and you will also find safety evaluations carried out based on the aforesaid information. Considering these evaluations, maps of the alternative safe haven lines are also included in the study. We bring the study to the public attention hoping it contributes to the arguments on safe haven, and we extend our thanks to those who contributed.

*Hasan Kanbolat*  
*ORSAM Director*



**By:** Oytun Orhan  
ORSAM Middle East Specialist

# ARGUMENTS ON SAFE HAVENS IN SYRIA: RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES AND SCENARIOS FOR TURKEY

## Executive Summary

*- The truth, brought out following a year since the beginning of the unrest in Syria, is the fact that the power struggle in Syria has fairly turned into a wrist wrestling and that it is almost impossible both for the regime and dissidents to turn back from their positions. It seems that the struggle will continue until the regime topples or Syrian dissidents are suppressed.*

*- There is an asymmetrical power between the Syrian army and military opposition. This fact leads us to the conclusion that "It is quite difficult to change the Assad regime without foreign actors' taking military measures or without providing the military opposition with foreign support". Thus, more concrete and strict foreign policy options for the actors arguing for the regime change in Syria were started to be discussed. Within this framework, safe haven option comes to the forefront.*

*- These following points should be taken into consideration while establishing safe haven: Ethnic, religious, sectarian distribution of the population living in places, where safe haven is considered to be established. The relations of locals with the Syrian regime and dissidents, and their outlook on the uprising. The locals' outlook on Turkey, and how they will approach to the establishment of safe haven. The presence of non-state actors that might pose a safety threat for Turkey in the region. And lastly, the geographic situation of the region.*

*- Establishing the safe haven to be created in Syria in a very limited zone can cause trouble both in terms of humanitarian accommodation and also in terms of the military protection. Therefore, if safe haven is going to be established; it should, at least, be 20 kilometers deep. However the borderline of this zone within Syria will not be a straight line. Considering geographic conditions and settlements, the borderline might be drawn to places closer to Turkey. Of course, military protection will be required for the region both by land and by air. The safe haven will serve, above all, for reception of Syrian civilian people escaping from the operations of Syrian army before entering in Turkish territories and for their accommodation without any security risk. Thus, Turkey will try to prevent economic and social problems to be created as a result of mass migration waves. The answer to the question regarding what the ultimate goal of establishing safe haven will be should shed light on where and how the safe haven will be created.*

## Introduction

More than 9000 civilians have been killed across Syria since the outbreak of the revolt on March 15<sup>th</sup> 2011. The number of people who are missing and not heard about is more than the others. The truth, brought out following a year since the beginning of the unrest in Syria, is the fact that the power struggle in Syria has fairly turned into a wrist wrestling and that it is almost impossible both for the regime and dissidents to turn back from their positions. It seems that the struggle will continue until the regime topples or Syrian dissidents are suppressed.

Currently, there is instability in favor of the regime between the Syrian army and Syrian military opposition in terms of power distribution. This situation prevents the permanence of the Syrian military opposition over the regions they seized control in the country. Becoming the center of resistance against the regime, Homs was seized by the regime following the military operation of the Syrian army not long ago. The Syrian army turned towards the province of Idlib, which is another center of resistance, after Homs with a strategic importance. As a result of military operations carried out in Idlib, which is located on the Turkish borderline, a large number of Syrians began to immigrate to Hatay and the number of Syrian refugees in Hatay has exceeded 24.000. The increasing migration caused arguments on taking precautions. The statements of Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu regarding that “safe haven issue is on the table to discuss” aggravated the argument. Accordingly, safe haven will be established within the Syrian territories in Turkey-Syria border, and migration wave will be met on the other side of the border. In this study, the Syrian side of the Turkey-Syria borderline will be strived to be x-rayed in order to shed light on the aforesaid arguments. Within this framework, factors;

such as population structure in the region, locals’ outlook on the uprising and on Turkey, how they can approach to safe haven, and the geographic situation of the area will be analyzed. Based on the resulting table, the line with minimum and maximum risk in terms of establishment of the safe haven will be strived to be detected. However, it should not be forgotten that the establishment of safe haven in itself poses risk that might lead to inter-state war. Therefore, this study aims at shedding light on the arguments to emerge, if a political decision taking the risk of war is made.

### 1. Process towards the Arguments on Military Measures for the Solution of Syrian Problem

Syria intervened in the uprising, which spread throughout the country on March 2011, through conventional methods and it did not use the army as security force. The countries, which criticized the struggle method of Syria, put certain foreign policy instruments in practice respectively such as; economic sanction, diplomatic pressure, political support to the opposition. On the other hand, after a certain stage, Syria’s developing military solution for the uprising led to the arming of Syrian dissidents. The Syrian young people, who left the Syrian army or armed to protect themselves, gathered under the roof of Free Syrian Army (FSA). Despite the limited means of the FSA; they could achieve seizing the control over the provinces such as Hama, Homs, Dar’aa, Idlib and Deir ez-Zor and the suburbs of Damascus, where the opposition is powerful, also with the support provided by the people. Nevertheless, the Syrian regime sent the army to the provinces, and respectively took back the control over the aforesaid provinces. This situation gave weight to the idea regarding that stronger military measures should be taken against the Assad regime, which does not pay attention to pressures, among the pro-change figures in Syria.

We can summarize the reasons, why the Syrian military opposition could not establish a balance against the Syrian army, as follows:

- It is seen that the Assad regime has a considerable control over the state apparatus and especially over the security units. The splits from the Syrian regime were not at such level to disturb the balance in favor of the dissidents.
- The regime uses the armed groups such as regular army and Shabihah together in suppressing the riots. Heavy weapons, tanks and air forces are used against the opposition when necessary.
- Nusayri, Druze and Kurdish minority groups centered around certain provinces. Nusayris are dense on the coastline including provinces of Latakia and Tartus. Druses live in Suwayda province located in the southernmost corner. Kurds, on the other hand, are dense in northern-north-western part of the Aleppo province and also on the Turkish borderline of the Hasakah province. A considerable amount of Christian and other minority groups live in metropolitans such as Damascus and Aleppo. The fact that these groups do not support the dissidents or that they have the position of passive neutrality enables the regime to mostly send their military forces to the regions with Sunni majority. Considering in terms of geography, the uprising is limited with the certain parts of central and northern regions of the country. The province of Dar'aa, which does not have a geographic relation to the aforesaid region, can be included in this. The fact that the uprising was limited narrowed security forces' area of conflict and relieved Syria.
- The Syrian opposition provide weapons from inside of the country to a large extent.

The soldiers leaving the Syrian army join in the dissident camp with their weapons and the depots they seized. In addition to this, some of the Arab tribes uprising against the regime already have light weapons from past to present. And the last resource is the weapons purchased from Syria and from neighboring countries on a limited scale. Thus, the armament opportunities are limited. In fact, ammunition is depleted, even if there is still weapon. Besides, the dissidents only have light weapons such as rifles and machine guns. They do not have heavy weapons such as artilleries, howitzers, antitank weapons or tanks. In addition to this, they have limited means of communication such as radio and internet access that will enable them to act in a more coordinated way.

- There is a total consensus among the foreign powers supporting the Syrian regime. They provide all kind of unconditional political, diplomatic, financial and military support.
- On the other hand, there are disagreements among the foreign actors supporting the Syrian dissidents. While Saudi Arabia and Qatar argue for directly providing weapons to the opposition; another group opposes to this idea with the concern that this situation would further increase the instability across the country. These actors, who want to solve the problem within the framework of international legitimacy, still insist on a peaceful solution because of post-Assad concerns. It is estimated that the Syrian dissidents will become stronger and declare a rebel zone in the country and then attain the goal with a Libya-style model, in case it cannot be achieved.
- In Syria, the government loses the control especially in rural areas from time to time. However, the loss of authority in rural region does not have a strategic significance



for the regime. Because restoring the authority in these regions would be easy. What matters is to be able to create permanent loss of authority in large settlements. It had been achieved in Dar'aa, Hama, Idlib, Deir ez-Zor, suburbs of Damascus and especially in Homs. Nevertheless the regime respectively carried out extensive military operations in these regions, and achieved seizing the control. Most recently, the control of Baba Amr district in Homs turning into the fortress of the resistance was seized by the regime forces. Currently, the operations in Idlib province, which is located on the Turkish border, carry on. In case the former experiences are repeated, it might be thought that the regime will seize control over here as well. Thus, declaration of rebel zone cannot be permanently made in any region. This situation both prevents the splits from the regime and also prevents dissidents from getting organized in a safe area. Nevertheless, the fact that the regime seized control over these regions doesn't, of course, come to mean that it ended the resistance. Following the last Baba Amr operation, there has been a "tactical withdrawal", as the Free Syrian Army stated.

The asymmetrical power, which appeared as a result of these aforesaid factors, causes the Syrian regime to take back the regions under the control of the dissidents with each passing day. This fact leads us to the conclusion that "it is quite difficult to change the Assad regime without foreign actors' taking military measures or without providing the military opposition with foreign support". The fortresses of the resistance have been falling one after another. Thus, more concrete and strict foreign policy options for the actors arguing for the regime change in Syria were started to be discussed. None of the actors discuss a direct military intervention option because of the typical characteristics of the Syrian problem. Within this framework, two major methods come to the forefront.

**a. Arms Aid For Syrian Dissidents:** Saudi Arabia and Qatar argue for this option. However, even the U.S. and France, who have an extremely strong discourse against Syria, think that providing arms aid for the dissidents would lead to more severe consequences. The U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated, not long ago, that "they do not want to provide arms to the Syrian opposition without understanding the essence of the Syrian opposition more clearly". The French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé also stated that "It would be inconvenient to provide arms aid for the Syrian insurgents in Syria, and this could lead to a horrible civil war in Syria". The main concern here is the fact that it is not clearly known who compose the Syrian opposition carrying out armed struggle inside, and what their political objectives are. Besides, the opposition is not controlled from a single center. And this situation creates the concern regarding how the arms will be used in case they are provided, or how the groups to be provided with arms will be controlled. Therefore, primarily the internal opposition should become organized in a more organized and hierarchical order.

This situation brings up the arguments on safe haven which is another military option to the agenda.

**b. Establishing Safe Haven:** Among the military measures, the option discussed the most is establishing safe haven, where military protection will be provided within the Syrian borders. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of this step should be discussed as well. As such a step would mean a direct intervention in the sovereign base area of another state, it would most probably create severe consequences. First and foremost, the risk that the process can evolve into an inter-state and even into a regional war should be taken into consideration.

The development that will legitimize such an operation for Turkey would be a great number Syrian immigration to Turkish borders. The Prime Minister Erdoğan stated that “there is a concern about the migration wave, works on establishing safe haven continue, and that ‘right to protection’ may be put into use according to international rules, depending on the developments. Thus, in case the number of Syrian guests reaching 25.000 as of April 2012 attain higher levels, establishing safe haven within the Syrian border might be brought up to the agenda.

Regarding the establishment of safe haven, two questions come to mind. The first question is “what will be the objective of safe haven?” Probably there are two different expectations within this scope. The first one is the objective to prevent the problems to be created in Turkey as a result of humanitarian needs and dense migration wave. In this case;

- A safe zone, where people escaping from the attacks of the Syrian army could take shelter, will be created,
- In case the flow of people reach great levels, social, security and economic problems that could emerge within the borders of Turkey will be met out of border.

However, the objective might not be limited with this. The safe haven can turn into a means to reach political and military goals. In such a case, the strategic target of the safe haven would be “to change the Assad regime”. If the target is set so, the safe haven should be expected to serve these following tactical purposes:

- The choices of people among the Syrian army, intelligence, high-level politicians and bureaucrats, who choose to stay within the regime due to security concerns even if they want to join the opposition

camp, might be affected. In this way, the small-scale crack within the regime can be deepened.

- The Syrian military opposition cannot be organized as they cannot establish a permanent safe haven. Dissidents cannot establish permanent authority over the regions, where they declared rebel zone. The military opposition to take shelter in safe haven will have the chance to be organized without being subject to the intervention of the Syrian army. Besides, the military opposition will gain a status that can be further controlled. This situation might eliminate the concerns on providing arms aid to the Syrian opposition.
- The Syrian regime might be forced to give up its strategy of buying more time by making so-called changes, and thus it might pave the way for a real democratization. So that, the safe haven can apply pressure on the regime, and serve for a peaceful change in Syria as well.
- Terrorist actions to turn from Syria to Turkey might be prevented.

The second question coming to mind about establishing safe haven is “where the safe haven will be established?” The safe haven might be expected to be established in 5-25 kilometers deep on the 910 kilometers-long Turkey-Syria borderline. However, establishing safe haven on a line covering the whole 910 kilometers would create problems in terms of controllability, security and cost. Therefore, establishing safe haven in the regions, which will provide opportunity to realize objectives listed above and which have minimum risk for Turkey, would probably be preferred.

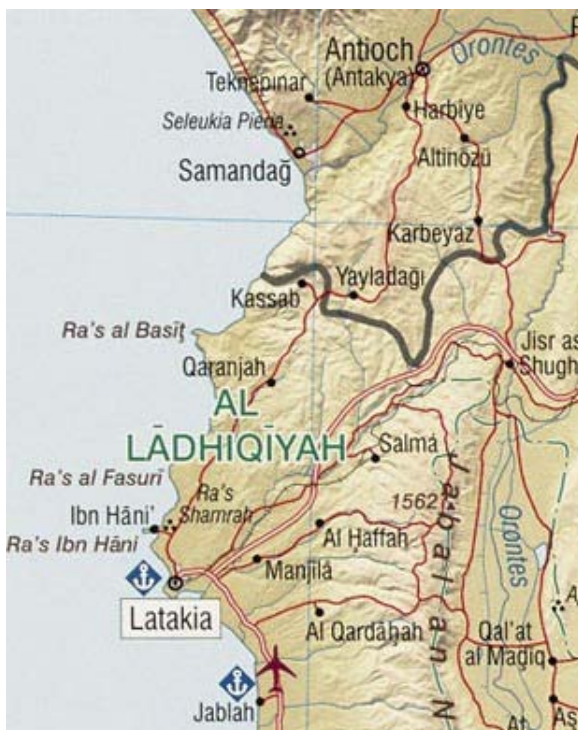
The factors to be taken into consideration to determine the safe haven could be listed as follows:

- Ethnic, religious, sectarian distribution of the population living in places, where safe haven is considered to be established.
- The relations of locals with the Syrian regime and dissidents, and their outlook on the uprising.
- The locals' outlook on Turkey, and how they will approach to the establishment of safe haven.
- The presence of non-state actors that might pose a safety threat for Turkey in the region.
- The geographic situation of the region.

## 2. The General View of the Line Planned to Be Established Safe Haven

In this section, the 910 kilometers-long Turkey-Syria borderline will be evaluated in terms of the factors listed above.

### a. Latakia Province – Turkey Borderline



On the Syrian side of the borderline on Yayladağı district of Hatay province is found the Latakia province. Mostly Latakia Turkmen, who are also known as Bayır-Bucak Turkmen, live in the regions that are close to the borderline of this province with approximately 70-kilometers depth starting from the Mediterranean coast. These villages are located together with Nusayri villages. In the inner parts of the region, there are Sunni Arab villages. And there is a mutual mistrust between Sunni Arabs/Turkmen and Nusayris in this region.

Although the Bayır-Bucak Turkmen in the border region are in the opposition camp, they could not participate in the uprising at high-level due to the fact that they live in Latakia province, where the regime is strong and Nusayris are in majority. Although it seems to be a low-risk region in terms of establishing safe haven as the Turkmen live on the borderline; it is also a risky province, where the regime is most powerful and which has a strategic importance. Besides, the Nusayri villages that are located together with the Turkmen villages are also situated on the borderline. The safe haven should be expected to be open to attack, as this community would oppose to the establishment of safe haven.

The geographic conditions are not quite convenient for military control. It is an area with plenty of forestland and mountainsides. In the past, PKK camps were found on these mountains that are the extension of Amanos range. Although PKK is not currently found in the area, it is a region convenient to penetrate.

Other than the aforesaid disadvantages, it has a strategic importance in terms of providing safe haven with an open way to the sea. It would enable the use of seaway for an uncon-



trollable transport of all kind of aid for Syrian dissidents. It is important for the success of Syrian opposition. However, the sea connection can also lead to consequences such as the Syrian opposition's and safe haven's getting out of Turkey's control and passing to the control of other actors.

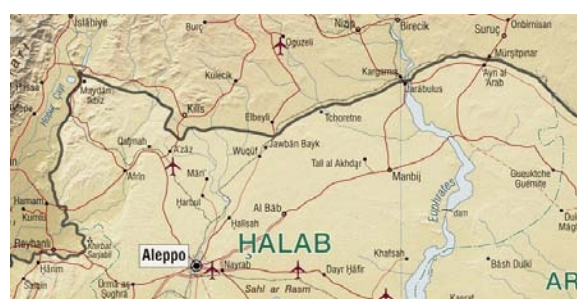
In case the regime topples between Nusayris and Sunni Arabs/Turkmen in the region, it is highly probable that a conflict can break out. Another advantage of including this borderline in the safe haven is that possible conflicts between Nusayris and Sunnis might be prevented.

## b. Idlib Province – Turkey Borderline



The province of Idlib is situated right across Altınözü and Reyhanlı villages of Hatay. The majority of the population in the province is composed of Sunni Arabs. Besides, a small number of Turkmen population lives in the province. On the borderline are located settlements such as Jisr al Shukur, Ariha, Salqin, Harim, Khirbat, and Sarjabli. Almost the whole population in the province is on the opposition camp. It can be considered as a relatively safe zone in terms of being one of the most powerful provinces of the opposition. Sunni Arab population living on the borderline would lean towards the establishment of safe haven. The Idlib borderline contains fewer amounts of forestland and mountain-sides. Therefore, it is relatively more controllable region in military terms. In addition to this, it can provide vast opportunities for the Syrian military opposition to become organized more comfortably.

## c. Aleppo Province – Turkey Borderline



The province of Aleppo is located right across the borderline starting from Kumlu, Kırıkhan and Hassa villages of Hatay, continuing with Gaziantep (Kilis in between) and including the southwestern corner of Şanlıurfa. Christians, Kurds, Turkmen, Armenians, Nusayris and Sunni Arabs in majority live in the Aleppo province. The outlook of these groups on the uprising is as follows: Although the group of Sunni Arabs is the one leading the unrest in other provinces, their uprising in Aleppo rather remained limited with rural ar-

eas. Christians and Armenians either support the regime as all around Syria, or stay neutral. The majority of Turkmen support the uprising. The participation of Kurds in the uprising is at an inefficient level.

On the Aleppo province – Turkey borderline is situated settlements such as; Maydan Ikbiz, Qatmah, Azaz, Mera, Javban Bayk, Tchoretne, Jarabulus, Ayn Al Arab. Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen live in these settlements. Sunni Arabs and Turkmen population living on this borderline would lean toward the idea of safe haven. In most of the places, where Sunni Arab and Turkmen populations live, dissidents seize the control from time to time.

The Idlib province borderline is a triangle composed of Maydan Ikbiz and Azaz; it is a risky region both because of the fact that locals do not lean toward safe haven and that PKK is an effective force in this triangle. In addition to this, it is also difficult to control this province as the region is relatively forestry and mountainous. The Kurdish population living in this region either does not support the opposition or cannot actively participate in the uprising due to the PKK pressure, even if they want to support. Kurdish population is the majority in Afrin and rurals, located in the northwestern part of the Aleppo province. The Kurdish population would perceive the safe haven as a threat. Besides, the PKK activity is in question within the triangle of Maydan Ikbiz and Azaz. The fact that the safe haven covers this province and it is open to attack can be evaluated as an opportunity in terms of breaking the effectiveness of PKK.

In Ayn al Arab district, which is located right across the Mürşitpınar border gate, the total population is some 200.000 people, 75.000 of which live in the center. In Afrin, on the other hand, the total population is around 350.000

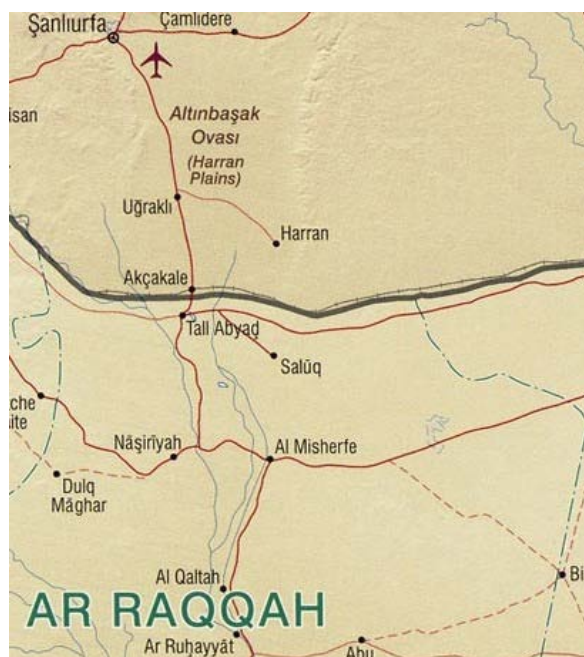
people, 80.000 of which live in the center. Yezidis and Sunni Arabs also live in Afrin, where Kurdish population is in majority.

The safest area throughout the Aleppo province – Turkey borderline is the area between Azaz and Jarabulus. The fact that the regional geography is level here (this factor can also be a disadvantage in military terms), that the majority of its population is composed of Sunni Arabs and Turkmen, and that the Syrian opposition is powerful in this province makes here advantageous. In addition to this, the province of Aleppo is located in an area that can be reached more easily in mass migration movements, as it is close to places with dense population and located in the central part of the country. But it does not have convenient geographic conditions for the military opposition to become organized.

The demographic state of the area situated between Azaz and Jarabulus is as follows: Azaz is a settlement, where the Sunni Arab population is in majority and the Turkmen live in small numbers. Also in Mera, the Sunni Arab population is in majority and the Turkmen live in small numbers. There is a Sunni Arab settlement in Tel Refat. In places situated in between are generally found Turkmen villages. Kandora (Gavureli), where Sunni Arab and Turkmen population lives, comes next after Turkmen Çörtenhöyük (Tchoretne). And lastly in Jarabulus as well, Sunni Arab and Turkmen population lives. Sunni Arab and Turkmen population in this area is closer to the opposition camp. In many settlements from Azaz to Çörtenhöyük, the control is seized by the dissidents. While not many opposition events take place in Jarabulus, most of the population supports the opposition. Kurdish and Sunni Arab villages are located on the line from Jarabulus to Ayn al Arab.



#### d. Raqqah Province – Turkey Borderline



The entire Akçakale village and a part of the Harran village in Şanlıurfa is situated right across the province of Raqqah. All along the borderline is found settlements such as Tel Abayad (Turkmen, Sunni Arab and Kurdish population is almost equally distributed), and Saluq (Turkmen and Sunni Arab population). Sunni Arabs live across the Raqqah province and throughout the borderline. The tribal structure among Raqqah Arabs is very strong. While some of the tribes support the uprising, some of them chose acting along with the regime. In case the safe haven covers this area, there might be a change in the position of tribes. It is not possible to consider here as an area with high risk in terms of security. There is a Kurdish population on the Western border of the province. Sunni population and small number of Turkmen population live in the rest of the borderline. PKK influence among Kurdish population is weak in this area. While Sunni Arabs and Turkmen are in the opposition camp, Kurds do not much participate in the demonstrations.

It is easy to control this borderline as it is level. However, it is difficult for the people living in other provinces of the country to access this area. In this respect, the safe haven to be established in this province might not give the expected result. It is necessary to pass over the Euphrates River in order to reach the northern part of the Raqqah province from other provinces. The number of crossing points on the river is quite limited. Therefore, it would be difficult for the people to access the northern area both because of the long distance and also because of the river cross.

#### e. Hasakah Province – Turkey Borderline



The Hasakah province is located across the borderline starting from Ceylanpınar village of Şanlıurfa, covering the entire Mardin, and ending in Silopi village of Şırnak. Kurds, Christians, Armenians, and Sunni Arab tribes in majority, live across the Hasakah province. On the borderline is found settlements such as; Ras Al Ayn (some 50.000 population composed of Kurds, Sunni Arabs, Arabs, Yezidis and Chechens), Tel Tamr (almost the whole population is composed of Kurds), Aş Şafih, Aradah, Qabirah, Tal Aylun, Darbasiyah (some 100.000 population mostly composed of Kurds), Amudah (100.000-150.000 population composed of Kurds and Yezidis), Qamishli (some 70 % per cent of the population is composed of Kurds. Kurds are the majority in the center. 20 % of the population is composed of Sunni Arabs. Arabs are in majority in rural areas. 10 % of the Qamishli popula-

tion is composed of Christians. In total, some 300.000 population lives in the area), Qubur al Bid, Al Qantaniyah (some 100.000 population composed of Kurds, Assyrians, Sunni Arabs, Yezidis and Armenians), Al Malikiyah (some 150.000 population composed of Sunni Arabs, Kurds and Christians), Ayn Diwar (almost the entire area is composed of Kurdish population).

The Kurdish population is in majority on the borderline. Kurds living in this area have a negative approach towards the safe haven. While some of the Kurdish population opposes to the regime, they are against the establishment of safe haven to include Turkey. Another part of the Kurdish population, on the other hand, supports PYD and do not take part in the opposition demonstrations. PYD is effective in Kurdish settlements, other than Malikiyah. While the Kurdish population is in majority in the center of the aforesaid settlements, Arab tribes are in majority in rural areas. Jubur and Shamar tribes are the leading ones. Sunni Arabs in this area were migrated afterwards. Thus, in case of a possible author-

ity gap, there is a possibility that a conflict can break out between Kurds and Arabs.

It is known that PKK and KDP led by Massoud Barzani are in competition to establish influence on Kurds in Hasakah. KDP might support Turkey for her to enter in the region and put an end to the PKK efficiency. Similarly, Turkey would probably want to give the control of this area to Massoud Barzani, in case the Hasakah province includes the borderline to the safe haven. However, this might come to mean that Turkey creates a new Northern Iraq herself. In this area, there is already a balance between Kurds and Arabs. Sunni Arabs are in majority across the province. The Kurdish population, on the other hand, is in majority in settlements located on the borderline. Sunni Arab tribes live in rural areas of the borderline. Maintenance of Arab – Kurd balance in the area could be better in terms of preserving the stability in Hasakah. Establishing safe haven could change the balance on the borderline, and could negatively affect the outlook of Sunni Arabs on Turkey.

### 3. Possible Safe Haven Lines

#### a. The Safest Line



#### Advantages

- The threat originating from locals is at minimum level.
- The area has convenient conditions for Syrian civilians to take shelter, as it is level.
- The cost of military operation would be lower.
- The fact that it does not include Latakia, which is of critical importance for Syrian regime, it can be suggested that the Syrian army attack threat against the safe haven is at a lower level. (But it is necessary to indicate that there is a risk in any case.)
- As the safe haven is close to the leading up-rising centers, it is more convenient for the transformation of Syrian civilians.

#### Risks

- This line will not have an exit to sea, as it does not include the Latakia province.
- As it does not include the areas with possibility of Sunni – Nusayri and Arab – Kurd – Turkmen conflict, its function to prevent possible sectarian and ethnic conflicts would not be strong.
- Although the borderline of Raqqah Province is safe, it is difficult for the Syrian people to access the area, in terms of location. The expected utility might not be provided from the safe haven to be established in Raqqah.
- As it does not include the areas with PKK efficiency, it won't be necessary to break force of the organization.



***b. The Line with the Highest Risk***



### Advantages

- The safe haven will have an exit to sea. Thus, aids will reach to the Syrian opposition and civilians more easily.
- It might assume the role of preventing ethnic-sectarian conflicts, as it covers Sunni - Nusayri and Kurdish – Arab – Turkmen possible conflict areas.
- There may be a chance to break the effectiveness of PKK, as it covers the areas, where PKK is active.

## Risks

- The threat originating from locals is at maximum level.
- Besides the people supporting the regime, armed groups such as Shabihah and PKK

acting along with the regime are more effective in these areas.

- It is open to attacks, as the area is close to settlements, where Nusayris live, in Latakia.
- Latakia province is critical for the Assad regime. The scenarios of establishing a Nusayri State including Latakia and Tartus are on the agenda as the last option for the regime. Therefore, the possibility that the Syrian army respond to an intervention in its own vital interest area is higher than the other regions.
- The military control is more difficult, as a considerable part of the region is mountainous and forestry.
- The sea connection might lead the Syrian opposition and the safe haven to get out of Turkey's control and to get in the control of other actors.

### c. Low Risk Maximum Benefit



#### Advantages

- The safe haven will have an exit to sea. Thus, aids will arrive more easily to the Syrian opposition and civilians.
- It might assume the role of preventing ethnic-sectarian conflicts, as it covers Sunni - Nusayri possible conflict areas.
- The threat originating from locals is at a low level, other than Latakia province.
- As the area is generally level except for Latakia and Idlib provinces, it is convenient for the accommodation of Syrian civilians.
- As the safe haven would be close to the leading uprising centers, it is convenient for the transformation of Syrian civilians. As particularly Aleppo borderline is level, it is more convenient in terms of meeting humanitarian purposes, and accommodating civilians. In addition to this, the fact that it is close to the regions, where orga-

nized opposition is strong, the aforesaid groups might be provided with protection.

- As Latakia and Idlib borderlines are mountainous and forestry, this area might provide the military opposition to become organized more easily.

#### Risks

- It is open to attack both because it covers settlements, where Nusayris live, in Latakia and also because it is close to those areas.
- Latakia province is critical for the Assad regime. Even the scenarios of establishing a Nusayri State including Latakia and Tartus are on the agenda as the last option. Therefore, the possibility that the Syrian army respond to an intervention in its own vital interest area is higher than the other regions.
- The sea connection might lead the Syrian opposition and the safe haven to get out of Turkey's control and to get in the control of other actors.



#### d. Alternative Line



#### Advantages

- The safe haven will have an exit to sea. Thus, aids will arrive more easily to the Syrian opposition and civilians.
- It might assume the role of preventing ethnic-sectarian conflicts, as it covers Sunni - Nusayri and Arab-Kurdish possible conflict areas.
- The PKK activity area can be broken in the Hasakah province, and this might pave the way for the Northern Iraqi groups to take the control over the region. (But as it was mentioned before, this approach that can be considered as an opportunity might result in Turkey's creating a new Northern Iraq herself in the long run.)
- The threat originating from locals is at a low level, other than Latakia and Hasakah.

- As the area is generally level except for Latakia and Idlib provinces, it is convenient for the accommodation of Syrian civilians.
- As it covers Aleppo and Idlib provinces which are geographically close to dissident people, the access of the people would be easier. As it is also close to the areas, where organized opposition is strong, these aforesaid groups might be provided with protection.
- Idlib province might provide broader opportunities for the Syrian military opposition to become organized more easily.

#### Risks

- Safe haven to be established in Hasakah province will be open to PKK attack or the reaction of locals.

- There is a possibility that Turkey might create a new Northern Iraq herself. The current balance between Kurds and Arabs across the province might be disturbed. An Arab-Kurdish conflict might be triggered in Hasakah.
- If the balance in Hasakah is disturbed, it might negatively affect the outlook of Sunni Arabs across the country on Turkey.

## Conclusion

Establishing safe haven to be created in Syria in a very limited area might lead to trouble in terms of providing both humanitarian accommodation and military protection. Therefore, safe haven should, at least, be 20-kilometers deep; if it is going to be established. However

the borderline of this area in Syria will not be straight line. Considering geographic conditions and settlements, the borderline might be drawn inside Syria or to areas that are closer to Turkish side. Of course, military protection will be required for the region both by land and by air. The safe haven will serve, above all, for reception of Syrian civilian people escaping from the operations of Syrian army before entering in Turkish territories and for their accommodation without any security risk. Thus, Turkey will try to prevent economic and social problems to be created as a result of mass migration waves. The answer to the question regarding what the ultimate goal of establishing safe haven will be should shed light on where and how the safe haven will be created.

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