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Berk Köksal

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**Comparative Negotiation Analysis of the
Syrian Peace Process**

Master's Thesis

Author: Bc. Berk Köksal

Study Program: International Relations (MAIN)

Supervisor: doc. PhDr. Jan Karlas, M.A., Ph.D.

Year of Defence: 2020

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 13.05.2020

Berk Köksal

References

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Abstract

Syrian Civil War has been occupying the international agenda since the year 2011. Despite the fact that most of the attention is paid to the conflict itself, peace processes are part of the international competition on Syrian arena, as well. For this reason, the thesis attempts to examine two major peace tracks: Astana and Geneva processes. The former is established among Russia-Turkey-Iran trio in late 2016 and functions as a regional mediation ground while the latter is led by the top world organization, the UN, as a ground for international actors with substantial interest in the Near East. Astana's relatively better performance in reaching certain outcomes is analyzed with hypotheses derived from three core International Relations theories: Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism. In this regard, those assumptions analyze actors that are involved in the conflict within the framework of their relevant peace track. According to the conducted analyses, findings indicate that realist hypothesis is better at explaining Astana's "fruitfulness" than the other assumptions— especially field-level agreements but not the broader cooperation among the Astana trio. Hence, Geneva track with higher level of international participation carries greater importance for an ultimate resolution to the conflict.

Keywords: Syrian Civil War, International Negotiations, Middle East, Theories of International Relations, United Nations, Astana Talks, Geneva Talks

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Action Group for Syria.....	(AGFS)
De-escalation Zone.....	(DEZ)
Demilitarization Agreement.....	(DMA)
Demilitarized Zone.....	(DMZ)
Free Syrian Army.....	(FSA)
International Syria Support Group.....	(ISSG)
International Relations.....	(IR)
Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.....	(IRGC)
Middle East and Northern Africa.....	(MENA)
National Liberation Front.....	(NLF)
Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan.....	(PKK)
Syrian Arab Army.....	(SAA)
Syrian National Army.....	(SNA)
Syrian National Council.....	(SNC)
United Nations.....	(UN)
United Nations General Assembly.....	(UNGA)
United Nations Security Council.....	(UNSC)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The subject “Syria” has had a wide coverage across the global media, international relations and academia over the past nine years. It has become salient mainly due to the ongoing civil war and the atrocities committed by various group of actors during the course of events emerged after the Arab Spring. Especially the European and neighbouring countries have been facing indirect consequences of lack of a state authority— and to a certain extent the ferocious actions of that very state, as well. Mass migration, lack of humanitarian needs, terrorism and warfare are now interlocked concepts which have direct impact on one another when covering the conflict. There are tens of parties and proxy groups each of whom is designated as legitimate or terrorist by the other, global and regional state actors with different geopolitical interest, international companies and institutions implementing their own agenda; and supranational platforms where actors further their policies.

Even though the centre of attention of the academic works is generally either to the causes and current factors of the civil war or on the related areas (e.g. 2015 migration crisis), attempts to resolve the conflict are nevertheless just as significant and vital as the mechanisms influencing it; since the future state structure and position of the Syrian Arab Republic will depend on not only when but how the peace is reached. Therefore, this thesis aims to study the peace-building process by evaluating two main tracks¹; one being under the auspices of the UN which is commonly referred as “Geneva peace talks”, and the other conducted at Astana, the former name of the capital of Kazakhstan under the supervision of the guarantor countries Russia, Turkey and Iran. It primarily focuses on the period of Syrian Civil War (post-2011) and limited with the latest rounds of the peace negotiations by the end of 2019.

At this point, two momentous points regarding the peace talks which allow us to reach the research questions are need to be mentioned. Firstly, the *Geneva track* is

¹ Here, the term “peace-building” is used as one of the 3 types of operations embraced by the UN (the others are: “peacekeeping” and “peace enforcement”).

emerged directly from the negotiations in the United Nations Security Council— or, more correctly, the controversy between 3 western and 2 non-western permanent members of the UNSC (Lundgren, 2016, p. 276). The United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) is established in April 2012 and the political process under the supervision of the UN is initiated by the *Geneva Communiqué* of 30 June 2012 (Action Group for Syria, 2012; UNSC, 2012b). The UN-backed process has witnessed 8 successive talks and 4 special envoys during the period of 2012-2017 before it has finally reached a stalemate. On the other hand, the *Astana track* is initiated on the 20th of December, 2016 after a joint meeting of the foreign ministers of Russia, Turkey and Iran at Moscow. The countries delivered their aspiration for a joint solution through efforts on expanding ceasefire and commencing the further talks on Astana (MFA RF, 2016). This initiative, contrary to Geneva, has been successful in reaching agreements on implementation of short to mid-term ceasefires, transfer of civilian population away from frontlines, establishing mutually agreed military posts to observe the conditions and disarmament of certain areas from heavy weapons. The parties generally meet quarterly and maintain a guarantor status for the groups/parties they represent.

Hence, the thesis takes on the task of analyzing those two separate tracks of peace negotiations and attempts to reveal the mechanisms, facts and concepts behind what cause the success of one track and stalemate of the other. The term “fruitfulness” is used in order to elucidate such success by focusing solely on its level of productiveness.² In this regard, the main research question is as follows:

Q1: Why Geneva talks of Syrian Civil War have been less fruitful than the Astana-Sochi talks even though the former was initiated priorly and supervised by the UN *while* the latter has been conducted by countries with historical rivalry and more conflicting interests in the region?

² The term “fruitfulness” is used as a measure for the level of productivity. It does not imply any normative perspective i.e. solely focusing on how many agreements are reached, how many decisions are implemented or do the talks actually lead to stalemate or possess continuity in de-escalation before the political solution.

To do so, the structure of the narration is divided into 3 main parts that are mutually complementary. The first main part goes through empirical sections relevant to the case of Syria after the outbreak of mass protests that subverted the authorities of the Middle East in 2011. In this regard, a brief historical section introduces the circumstances that played a part in the process leading to the civil war. Following that, relatively established conditions that framed the features of the civil war take place. These are geography, demography and economy of the pre-civil war Syria. These information are supplemented by a section dedicated to the political structure of the Syrian Arab Republic which primarily focuses on the Ba'ath Party administration and its subsidiary institutions. Thereafter, the narration reaches the actual features of the Syrian Civil War and— though concisely— the main blocks of groups and proxies along with their patrons, proponents and adversaries are specified. In this particular section the aim is not only to form a pro/anti diagram but also to include ideological stances, interests and characteristics of the parties. Finally, the last two sections of empirical part describe the negotiations in Geneva and Astana; their timeline, agenda and participants along with structural features.

After providing relevant information, second part introduces the theoretical framework upon which the analysis is conducted. The primary aim of the thesis is to answer the aforementioned research question by different theoretical perspectives. To be more precise, prominent theories of the International Relations are put to use in order to enable an explanation on the contrast between Geneva and Astana tracks. The first section of the chapter attempts to define international negotiations before the realist, liberalist and constructivist theories are associated with them by their relevant approaches to the topic. Thus, the third Analytical Part brings the empirical and theoretical knowledge together. In other words, the analyses are conducted in realist, liberalist and constructivist perspectives. The main research question is elaborated with two supplementary questions regarding the theoretical framework. These are as follows:

Q2: Which one of the main International Relations approaches fits better to explain those peace talks?

Q3: Do the domestic *or* supranational conditions of the parties involved play a larger role in their negotiations with each other?

Both primary and secondary sources possess certain weight in the thesis. First of all, primary sources are acquired from relevant party-provided information and mainly used in the Empirical Part since the civil war is short-dated and ongoing.³ These particular sources are either in actors' original language and translated by the author or the English versions (if available) are used. As concerns the secondary sources, it is possible to divide them into 3 categories. The first type refers to a limited number of resources which deals with issues such as Syria's history, economy or demographics. These are taken in general framework and attempted to be specified by the aforementioned primary data. The second category refers to literatures where different theories and concepts can be found. For instance, Walt (1998) explains grand theoretical arguments and paradigms while Odell (2009; 2011) provides general information on negotiations from different perspectives such as negotiating behaviour, coalitions and institutions; and theoretical stances. The third category includes self-contained theoretical works by numerous authors and related to the international negotiations where specific theories, concepts and methods are found and utilized by the author within its relevant section (realist, liberalist and constructivist).

For the purpose of enhancing the argumentation, the thesis employs 3 different hypotheses— one for each theoretical approach that attempts to answer the main research question through its particular point of view. The rationales behind the hypotheses are thoroughly discussed in the Theoretical Part and they are tested in the light of empirical data in the Analytical Part. However, they are needed to be briefly mentioned for the sake of introduction.

Our first hypothesis is grounded in realist argument (not a clear cut realist hypothesis but derived from it) and puts emphasis on the power capabilities of actors who accordingly influence the process of reducing the intensity of the conflict and negotiations

³ Statements, official webpage, state/group documents and, group or member individual-provided information

phase of the peace processes. It claims that the Astana parties have been better able to exercise their capabilities on negotiations than Geneva parties; and that is the reason behind former's fruitfulness. Secondly, the main concept selected for the liberalist hypothesis is "preferences"; but more specifically, how convergent they are for the parties of those two peace tracks. The liberalist hypothesis asserts that the level of convergence has a direct impact on the level of cooperation which leads to Astana process to get ahead of the other. This approach will be enucleated by referencing to the gains-maximizing attitude of actors and its impact on cooperation. In this regard, concepts of harmony and conflict are essential to be discussed in chapter 3.3 since, as Moravcsik argues, "*liberal theory seeks to generalize about the social conditions under which the behaviour of self-interested actors converges toward cooperation or conflict*" (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 517). The last hypothesis based on the constructivist approaches is attracted toward the notion of justice and its effects on producing better outcomes in international negotiations. According to the assertion, exercising justice in Syrian peace negotiations in Astana better than Geneva is the factor of effectiveness. Albin and Druckman's ideas in this regard constitute the fundamentals of the constructivist hypothesis; which are to be clarified on chapter 3.4.

Last point to mention is that the thesis concludes with concerted results of the testing of these 3 hypotheses in the light of the provided empirical data— whether they are falsified or verified. A general summary will also be present not only about the events previously occurred but also possible directions that the peace process is moving through.

2. THE SYRIAN CONFLICT & PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

2.1 Historical Facts of Syria

Even though the region of modern-day Syria has been home to numerous ethnicities, kingdoms and empires, its current profile is primarily characterized by the Arab-Islamic expansion in the mid-7th century. During the early Muslim conquests, Levant region under the rule of the Byzantine Empire witnessed dramatic changes in a relatively short period of time. Arabization and Islamization of the newly conquered territories are two segments which generally refer to administrative, cultural, economic and military changes. Historian David Nicolle remarks on the migration of large number of people towards Anatolia during the early Muslim conquests and resided under the Muslim rule who eventually converted to Islam. For example, the Christian tribes who fought alongside the Byzantines often supported the Umayyad army⁴ and became known as *musta'a'riba*⁵ (Nicolle, 2009, pp. 30, 33).

The second historical milestone is the Turkish rule which partially started by the Seljuk expansion towards the west from the Transoxiana region that sets on the frontier of the Iranian lands with the Central Asia. Due to their military capabilities, Turkic “slave soldiers” were started to be incorporated into the Abbasid Army by the late 8th century. This first contact with the Islam however, is of secondary importance for the Turkish states that ruled in Syria due to their affinity more towards the Persian than the Arabic-type-of statecraft and sovereignty (Bosworth, 1996, p. 956). Thus the Turkish rule on the non-Turkish (and non-Muslim) lands represents more pluralistic and tolerant administration on the contrary to the Arab expansion which privileged the Arabic language and culture and gave more security to those who are Arab (Al-Ali, 1996, pp. 718–720).

⁴ Umayyad Caliphate (661-750): The Islamic Empire stretching from Iberian Peninsula to Afghanistan. Established by Muawiya I. who was the governor of Syria under the previous Rashidun Caliphate.

⁵ (Ar.) “Those who became Arabs”

The Ottoman rule of Syria is a better example on such conditions. Following a series of war against Shia Safavids of Persia, Sultan Selim I. conquered Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt and Arabia thereupon, acquiring the title “Servitor of Mecca and Media” which consolidated Ottoman dynasty’s claims of Caliphate (“SELIM I.,” 1997, p. 127). The highly centralized provincial system of the Ottoman Empire opposite to those of the European states met with a pluralistic and tolerant yet, scrupulous local administration which, when combined with religious authority and prestige, allowed the Turkish rule to last until the 1st World War.⁶ Ottomans, administered modern-day Syria by four separate divisions that are called *Eyalet* (province), each with a governor directly appointed by the Sultan: Aleppo, Damascus, Tripoli and Sidon (Lebanon). These provinces are not random divisions. On the contrary, they are created by taking demographics and trade routes of the region into account— which will be specified on the following chapters.

The Ottomans followed a different path in expanding their cultural influence than the Arabic Caliphates as the former chose to settle the nomadic Turks to the newly conquered lands— especially on the roads thus securing the trade routes and ending the nomadic culture; while the latter was privileging its own culture, language and religion (Collelo, 1987, p. 85; Şeker, 2013). The principal outcome of such different policy which is called *İskan* was that by the end of the Great War which resulted in the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, there were significant numbers of Turks living outside of the new borders of the Turkey; and Syria has been no different. The historical Antioch (Antakya/Hatay) province which was populated by majority of Turks but lost after the war to the French-mandated Syria provides with a clear example on the conditions. After gaining its independence in 1937 and joining the Republic of Turkey shortly before the outbreak of the 2nd World War, the irredentism for the mindset of Turkey gained the first foothold for the other areas with Turkish population which needs to be kept in mind when analyzing the Syrian Civil War.

⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli points the difference between “the Turk’s” and “the French’s” governing systems. According to him, all principalities are either governed by the French way which is decentralized thus more vulnerable to external threats and hard to retain; *or* the Turkish way which is centralized thus hard to be conquered yet, easier to hold onto (Machiavelli, 2005, pp. 16–17).



Figure 1. Map depicting the administrative divisions of the Ottoman Empire in Syria⁷

Syria’s independence period marks the third milestone after the French mandate ended in 1946. This newly established Syrian Republic represents a contrast which is still visible as the Ba’athist coup d’état in 1963 overthrow the previous and not only led to a governmental but also a regime transition. Thus, it is not bewildering to witness the FSA— the main armed opposition faction of the civil war to use the “Republic’s” flag while opposing the Ba’ath rule. The leader of the coup, Hafez al-Assad who was succeeded by his notorious son, Bashar created an autocratic state structure based on organs of security, selected minority and *el-Mukhabarat*⁸ that have been used in various occasions of internal turmoil⁹(Bar, 2006, pp. 356–357). It wouldn’t be wrong to state the fact that such tightly organized network of organs with a particular ideology on the

⁷ Huber, R. (1899). Empire Ottoman: division administrative. Retrieved August 8, 2019, from Library of Congress website: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2007633930/>

⁸ A common name used for the Syrian intelligence services

⁹ e.g. Muslim Brotherhood uprisings in 70s and 80s.

background is one of the major causes of the failure of a scenario in Syria similar with the other toppled Arab regimes in the MENA region during the Arab Spring.

2.2 Geography of Syria

The Fertile Crescent is the term used to describe the agriculturally productive region between Mesopotamia and Nile Valley. Syria is on the north western part of this region between Mediterranean Sea and Euphrates-Tigris Valley. Set of mountain range separates the coastal areas from the inner lands where, due to the desert climate, proximity to water sources plays a crucial role in settlement of people and agriculture. The Euphrates River originates from Turkey and crosses into northern Syria where middle Euphrates valley functions as the mother lode for irrigation along with its tributaries and dams¹⁰ (Collelo, 1987, pp. 130–131). Since the majority of the country is arid and water is scarce, cultivable land ratio is around one third while the forests are concentrated on the coastal areas and contribute to 2 percent of total (Collelo, 1987, p. 134).

These facts have a bigger role in Syrian Civil War than one might consider in the first place. First of all, the diverse set of conditions gives less mobility to people thus, increasing the differentiation in time. As the following chapter will demonstrate, different ethnicities and religions are concentrated on certain areas of the country due to geographical circumstances which, in return hardens creation of a unitary country that has never been composed of a single nation throughout the history. This isolative function of Syrian geography also leads fractions of the civil war to primarily focus on key geostrategic areas such as fertile lands, dams, power plants and main roads. As the country's resources are scarce, access to sea and control of the roads has been principle aim of parties seeking to increase their capabilities and having sustainability in the lands they control.

¹⁰ Tabqa and Tishrin Dams have a critical part in Syrian Civil War as both provide with electricity and irrigation for the households and agriculture of the Northern Syria where half of the population is located.

Apart from all these facts, there is a negative vegetation productivity trend in Syria following the 2007-2009 droughts. The research conducted by Eklund and Thompson indicate that Syria and Iraq show significant resource management differences in comparison with Turkey. Furthermore, in Syrian case the conditions are progressed further. The visualizations that was conducted through Enhanced Vegetation Index (EVI) calculations demonstrate that *“the drought occurred at a time when land and water resources were already under stress, especially in Syria, which had the most extensive problems with agricultural land degradation.”* (Eklund & Thompson, 2017). Such circumstances are visible on the figures below which they provide.

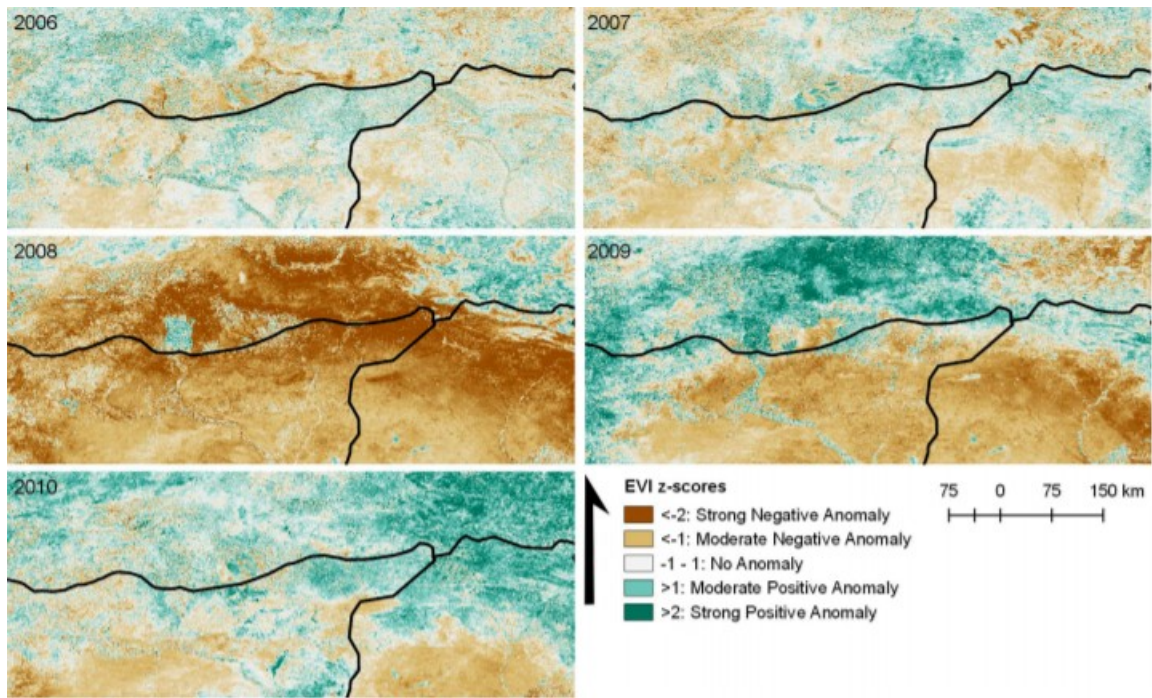


Figure 2. Drought represented by vegetation anomalies 2006–2010 based on EVI for 2001–2015¹¹

Besides the interstate variance, Syria depicts a much momentous contrast where, as it is visible on the figures of 2009 and 2010, north-eastern and north-western Syria differs from middle Euphrates valley. By the beginning of the civil war, these two areas have been out of the control of the SAA forces and the other parties of the civil war—

¹¹ Acquired from Eklund, L., & Thompson, D. (2017). p. 5

international anti-ISIL coalition led by the USA, Turkey, Iran-backed Shia forces and ISIL have all set their main focus on those areas. As Bauman and Kuemmerle asserts that densely-populated/urban and agricultural systems are especially affected by the armed conflicts, it is once again remarkable to witness that both these two types of systems are characteristics of the aforementioned parts of Syria where Aleppo, Idlib and al-Hasakah governorates are epicentres of the Syrian opposition and other radical terrorist groups (Baumann & Kuemmerle, 20116, p. 680).

Another essential point is the effect of the neighbouring geographies on Syria's internal dynamics. Firstly, the Euphrates River springs from the Taurus Mountains on the southeast Turkey and has a southward flow towards Iraq. Therefore, the current of the water is controlled by Turkey by 5 dams built after 70s— which also created crises between Turkey and Syrian state.¹² As Olson puts more simplistically, Turkish-Syrian relations had 2 principal concerns before the Gulf War: 1939 annexation of Hatay and distribution of the downflow of the Euphrates from Turkey to Syria by building those dams under the GAP Project¹³ (Olson, 1997, p. 169). Nevertheless, the relationship had several issues under the second concern specifically. The GAP Project initiated by Turkey was a measure to enhance its hand in negotiations with Syrian government on the use of water while the opponent had substantive support to PKK terrorist militia in Beqaa Valley and blocking the international investments in the project through NGO activities and appeals made to various institutions such as World Bank or credit agencies in order to counteract (Daoudy, 2009, pp. 377–379).

These ventures were part of Syrian linkage strategies in negotiations with Turkey on the waters of Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. On the other hand, the official Centre for Strategic Research of Ministry of Foreign Affair of Turkey remarks on a difference of 17.34% between water potentials and consumption targets of countries that Euphrates and Tigris Rivers pass through (Turkey, Syria and Iraq). Due to that, the paper argues on

¹² These dams are Keban, Karakaya, Atatürk, Birecik and Karkamış respectively.

¹³ (Tr.) “South East Anatolia Project”. The project aimed at regional development through establishing infrastructure and means to agriculture as a non-military action to combat PKK terrorism. See Daoudy. (2009). p.379

“distribution relative to contribution” where 88.7% of water contribution of Turkey in comparison to 11.3% of Syria’s downplays the latter’s demands of utilizing 22% of the total (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of Regional and Transboundary Waters, 1994, p. 3). Today, these numbers also comprise the tangible issues regarding the civil war where the parties pursue their interests on the middle Euphrates Valley.

Countries	Water Potential	Consumption Targets
Turkey	31.58 (88.70 %)	18.42 (51.90 %)
Syria	4.00 (11.30 %)	11.50 (32.30 %)
Iraq	0.00 (0.00 %)	23.00 (64.60 %)
Total	35.58 (100.00 %)	52.92

Figure 3. Water potential of the Euphrates Basin and consumption targets of its riparians (in billion cubic metres per year)¹⁴

2.3 Demographics of Pre and In-War Syria

As indicated before, the ethnic composition and social structures of Syria are indispensable when analyzing the dynamics of the civil war. The isolation arising from the geographical conditions cause concentrated ethno-religious distribution across the country. There are numerous groups of people whose individual loyalties lie primarily at their ethnic or religious identities instead of the Syrian nationality (Collelo, 1987, p. 63). When combined with the fact that those groups are generally majority in their particular area regardless of whether or not they are minority within the country, the rapid fall of the

¹⁴ Acquired from Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of Regional and Transboundary Waters. (1994). p. 3

central authority by the beginning of the civil war is more comprehensible. Moreover, such ethno-religious distribution corresponds with civil war's progress from mass protests to territorial control. This is evident in many occasions in the beginning of the conflict where primarily the Sunni areas revolted against the ruling Alawite-Nusayri minority¹⁵ and some other either collaborated with the Assad regime or joined the rebellion (Balanche, 2018, pp. 3–17).¹⁶

At this point, it is necessary to depict the demographic structure of the Syrian Arab Republic in order to reveal the relationship between the civil war and the communities who are more strongly tied to each other than the broad concept of nation. Firstly, Syria is a predominantly Muslim country with a small Christian population of Assyrians, Armenians and Arabs along with Druze communities. However, specific social triggers that led to imbalance during the Arab Spring occur mainly among the different branches of Muslim population. On the contrary to Ottomans who divided the administration of modern-day Syria into 4 provinces by taking the aforementioned concentration of ethno-religious groups into consideration, Syrian government under Nusayri minority have privileged a small proportion of the country over the majority Sunni population.¹⁷ The Nusayris generally inhabit the coastal part of the north-western Syria with approximately 1.4 million of population and follow a idiosyncratic belief where Islam and Middle East Christianity is harmonized (Collelo, 1987, pp. 96–97).

On the east of Tripoli, Idlib and Aleppo provinces are located where today predominantly Sunni-Arab population inhabits just as any other part of the country. Nevertheless, there are other Sunni communities such as Turks/Turkmens, Kurds and Circassians located in and on the periphery of Aleppo, as well. Since it neighbours Turkey

¹⁵ The name Alawite is used to identify general groups of people in Syria and Turkey, yet Turkish Alawite beliefs are substantially different than Alawites of Syria. Due to these, the name Nusayri will be used to mention the Syrian Alawites.

¹⁶ Sunni neighbourhoods revolted in cities such as Latakia, Baniyas, Homs, Aleppo or in the countryside such as Raqqa, Idlib, Deraa while the Alawite's residents of the cities did not participate along with Druze minority in Jabal al-Druze or Armenian and Christian minorities in Deir ez-Zor and al-Hasakah.

¹⁷ The Ottoman Tripoli province is designed to mainly host the Christian, Nusayri and other non-Sunni communities therefore; the social structures were carefully scrutinized.

and has large numbers of Sunni population by the majority of the region, the opposition stronghold is naturally created by the beginning of the protests and the rebels reached their peak in Spring 2015 within predominantly Sunni regions (Balanche, 2018, p. 79).

Next, various small Christian communities such as Assyrians and Armenians are located on the north eastern Syria— mainly in al-Hasakah and Deir ez-Zor governorate while Kurds inhabit north western and eastern tips of the country, Afrin district of Aleppo and al-Hasakah along with central parts of the northern border around Ayn al-Arab (famously known as Kobane). Differing loyalties of these communities have played a crucial role on the past 9 years of the civil war where the SAA soldiers managed to cling on small portion of strategic territories¹⁸ due to public support on the east of the Euphrates River. As these isolated pockets resisted attacks from opposition forces, radical elements and ISIL, the importance of the local forces for the SAA has increased due to collaboration and nonaggression agreement among them (Khalaf, 2016, p. 8). A similar “contract” continues to be actual between SAA and Druze communities of the south in the governorate of as-Suwayda. Due to its proximity to Deraa city where the first protests started to appear and to the Syrian Desert where the insurgency and geographical conditions inhibit the governmental forces to establish control over the lands, as-Suwayda has been critical to retain a foothold on the further south of the country (Sterling, 2012). The Druze population with a different belief system than Islam— despite being adapted to Arab customs and language, avoids direct confrontation with any group that may endanger their entity. Therefore, it is deducible that a community of only 3 percent of the population remains loyal to the authority of another minority of the country they live in (Collelo, 1987, p. 97).

One last point to stress is that even though the countryside shows different types of population located in certain areas, the same situation is not applicable to the city centres— especially to the big ones. Instead, cities where the population density is high

¹⁸ Since the beginning of the civil war, SAA has held Deir ez-Zor city centre, a military base in al-Hasaka and al-Qamishli airport on Turkish border.

demonstrate a mixed-type of settlement¹⁹ (Balanche, 2018, p. 3). Such conditions increased the potential of urban warfare thus, the level of destruction and mass migration from the cities.

2.4 Economics of Pre-War Syria and Current Conditions

When evaluating its economic factors and conditions, Syrian Arab Republic provides two distinct pictures. The first of those is deeply pertinent with a country that has been negative in trade balance since 2003 until the onset of the turmoil in 2011 (OEC, n.d.-e). This particular period needs to be separated from the economics of the civil war since the circumstances that depict economic imbalance and inequality are generally the catalyst of the unrest. Therefore, factors as what are those trade products imported and exported, which country they are imported from and to which country they are exported to are need to be under scrutiny in further detail in order to elaborate on those preconditions. On the contrary to such clear data, the second picture is much more blurry due to the lack of reliable info. Nevertheless, examining civil war parties' economic activities provides an indirect route to current conditions— which is also essential when detecting interests of any party to have sustainability on its influence area. Hence we must go ahead with specifics in order to have a general framework.

Syrian economy draws a conservative picture as of 2006, a short period after the son of Hafez al-Assad, Bashar is inaugurated. As Bar remarks, around one third of the GDP and one fourth of the employment are procured by the government and “*the Syrian economy is largely dependent on revenues from oil production. Oil presently contributes 20 percent of GDP, two-thirds of exports, and half of government revenues (about 15 percent of GDP).*” (Bar, 2006, p. 392). Due to the highly centralized political-administrative structure of the state with a socialist ideology behind, such image is apprehensible even though there were minor attempts to liberalization of the economy

¹⁹ See figures 8, 10, 11 and 23 for the sectarian divisions of several cities of Syria in Balanche. (2018).

during 70s and 80s under the senior al-Assad's rule (Collelo, 1987, p. 160). Nevertheless, the liberalization struggle in the 80s resulted in income losses for the lower and the middle strata as a foreign exchange crisis hit Syrian economy while the solutions adopted by the Ba'ath regime led to a new rich class due to newly arrived "austerity", "private sector revival", "export promotion", but not "privatization" (R. Hinnebusch, 2008, pp. 271–272). Yet, Bashar al-Assad followed a gradual but less risky path as he recruited technocrats of economics and engineering who had education in West as a way to integration into the world economy. Thus, the middle way approach which suggests that following the neo-liberal trend, global/regional integration²⁰ and gradually shrinking the public sector (yet with continuous precedence over the private sector) has been followed (R. Hinnebusch, 2008, p. 275).²¹

At this point, it is essential to look into civil war conditions. Oil and gas surely constitutes a large part of Middle East economies' revenues thus, state interests. However, Syria is not among the energy rich countries of the Middle East and was surrounded by a hostile environment prior to the Arab Spring which undermines not only gaining revenues from energy production²² but also the transfer of the extracted material especially when you lack the ability to work it into more complex sectors such as petrochemical industries. Nevertheless, the presence of gas and oil makes their reserve areas vulnerable and open for competition for the parties of the civil war. According to Turkish state-run Anadolu Agency, the US-backed SDF forces control one third of the oil reserves of Syria— which altogether with the hydroelectric dams makes 70 percent of whole energy production capabilities after recent developments and territorial defeat of ISIS (Temizer, Tok, & Misto, 2019). Since the main reserve area for oil and gas are *Badiyah al-Sham* (Syrian Desert) located on east of the Homs province and around Deir ez-Zor, the remaining reserves from the SDF are located at the hands of the Syrian regime. In this particular

²⁰ e.g. Euro-Med partnership

²¹ The reason of how such shift was possible politically and ideologically, especially under Bashar but not his father is explained in the following chapter 2.5.

²² There are natural gas reserves apart from the crude oil.

regard, Syrian opposition forces and other radical elements lack the control of both energy-rich areas and transfer/connection routes of the pipelines.

As for the civil war period, Russian politics are indispensable since there are both direct and indirect economic interests ramified into energy, military, political and several other sectors. Surely, energy security is crucial for the Russian actions which is concentrated on its supply therefore, not only the production but also having safe markets and transfer zones through which the products can be sold. Hence two different elements, security of supply and demand, comprise the backbone of the Russian Middle East policies (Nakhle, 2018, p. 29). Considering the geographic access of Syria to the Mediterranean coast where Russia acquired the use of Tartus Naval Base and Hmeimim Air Base²³, the importance of securing an energy route which is indirectly auspicious for their allies is more salient.

For that reason, the Iranian economic interests are also present and aligned with Russian and Syrian interests in general framework. However, the practice of Iranian interest-seeking behaviour tends to follow “boots on the ground principle” as compared to Russian actions which resides more on the side of diplomatic support²⁴. Therefore, the areas that possess economic activities (e.g. oil-gas fields, pipelines, harbours, trade routes and etc.) witness heavy Iranian presence. According to Hassan, the parts of the Deir ez-Zor governorate that are in control of the Assad regime groups purports conflict of interests between Assad troops, Iran-backed militia and Russia. The economic potential of the area combined with the fact that it borders the US-backed SDF explains why such conflict among the parties on the same side of the civil war occurs. As he accurately deduces, *“Iran (...) has directed its energies into spreading its influence through religious*

²³ The original agreement between Russian Federation and Syrian Arab Republic on the use of military bases: Техэксперт. (2017). Соглашение между Российской Федерацией и Сирийской Арабской Республикой о размещении авиационной группы Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации на территории Сирийской Арабской Республики (с изменениями на 18 января 2017 года). Retrieved September 1, 2019, from <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/420329053>

²⁴ The exact number of groups backed by Iran varies; nevertheless, the recruited Shia militia from all around the MENA region is a well-known phenomenon that enhances the position of Iran. For further info, see chapter 2.6.

doctrine, and through the presence of militias operating outside the official military institution (...). These militias (...) became groups of mercenaries that live off looting, smuggling and trafficking in banned goods. Iran also tried to pursue policies promoting demographic change (...). These moves have contributed to instability in Syria in the short-term, which is not in Russia's long-term interest.” (Hassan, 2018). Hence, due to the economic potential and being on the route to Iran, Deir ez-Zor governorate is to host potential conflicts.

2.5 Political Structure of Syrian Arab Republic

Syria is a country where a Cold War pan-Arab socialist ideology continues to pin the state structure together. The political contestation between the Ba'ath Party, the Syrian Social National Party and the Muslim Brotherhood resulted in the prevalence of Ba'athism as the 1963 coup d'état conducted by the Ba'ath Party members was successful (R. Hinnebusch, 2008, p. 264).²⁵ The Alawite minority is the key element of the structure that has been consequently established ever since not only over the state administration but also to the army which the members of the community constitute around 90% (Bar, 2006, p. 393). Its foundations lie over a complex web of the military, intelligence and domestic politics which has been created in order to keep the structure intact. Bar demonstrates the principles of that establishment as follows (Bar, 2006, p. 360):

- National Command
- Strict mechanisms and stages for controlling membership of the party
- A hierarchical structure
- Formal electoral mechanisms
- Committees/organizations for mobilization of the party membership

²⁵ The contest between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Ba'ath Party is still evident as the social roots of the current conflict lie in moderate Islamism that FSA follows and pan-Arabic socialism that SAA has originated from.

The National Command is the transnational body of the Ba'ath Party—not particularly the Syrian branch but the Ba'ath in MENA (especially Iraqi, Lebanese and Libyan parties) which functions as a superstructure that connects region's pan-Arabic and socialist groups that were dominant especially during the Cold War. However, as the parties are more deeply established in the countries they conduct their operations, the ideology became of secondary importance and drifted away from the original doctrines (Bar, 2006, p. 361). Hence, we see parallels among actions of the Ba'ath-ruled countries without perfectly coordinated international actions.²⁶

Secondly, as Bar asserts, the type of mechanisms that have been used in order to allocate the human resource show a substantive difference from the other ideological regimes of the Cold War— particularly Communist one-party states. 7 years after the coup d'état, Hafez al-Assad altered the Syrian Ba'ath's perspective on the role of the party in governing the state. The elite who led the masses before gave their position to the Party itself in order for the mass mobilization. Those newly established functions of the Party, in return, paved the way for a lack of ideological roots of the Ba'ath ideology in the eyes of the masses that were recently recruited. Such new conditions demonstrate the sharp contrast between the role of the Ba'ath and the Communist regimes; as the latter is much more ideologized (Bar, 2006, p. 361).²⁷

Nevertheless, once we interpret the Syria under Bashar's rule it is evident that the drift from the ideological background as a consequence of the actions of his father allowed him to sustain the state structure which he inherited even under certain ideological changes. In other words, it wouldn't be possible without the reduced weight of the Ba'ath ideology for Bashar to implement the economic liberalisation or regional integration attempts mentioned in the previous chapter.

²⁶ e.g. (parallels): Aggression against Israel (Yom Kippur War is the most evident example of coordinated Ba'ath actions) *or* suppression of Islamist fractions; (differences): conducts related to Saddam Hussein (Invasion of Kuwait, Iran-Iraq War, American Invasion of Iraq)

²⁷ Bar afterwards indicates that the transformation can be explained through pragmatic and Machiavellian autocracy of al-Assad; which evaluates whether that transformation was effective.

As for the hierarchical structure, the power bases definition used by Bar is key to understand what lie between Assad on the top and the Party on the below.²⁸ According to him, there is a complex patronage system that includes certain power bases in the Syrian Ba'ath regime (Bar, 2006, p. 358). These are *family*²⁹, *party/bureaucracy*³⁰, *communal or region-based*³¹, *military protégées*³², *economic*³³ and *foreign relations*³⁴ power bases which the regime procures and sustains its influence through. In the light of Bar's explanations, it is deducible that those bases function as a linkage between the close circle around the leadership of the Syrian state and the Ba'ath Party and its organs that have certain levels of influence on the Syrian society and institutions (see figure below).

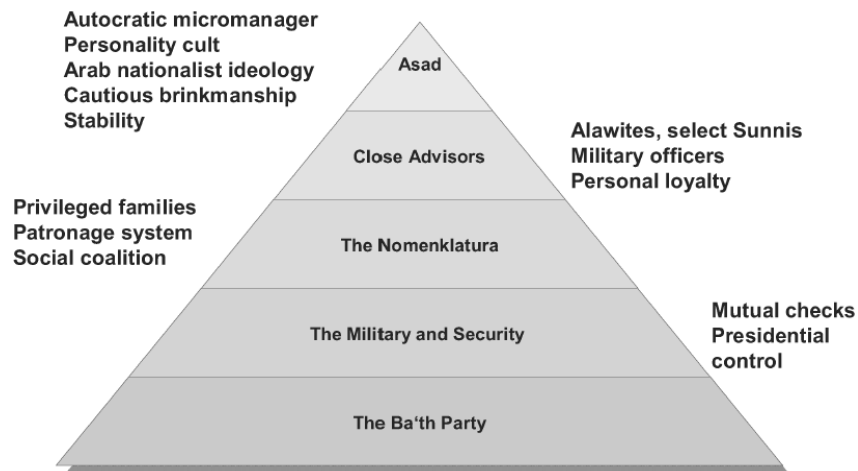


Figure 4. The power bases of the Syrian regime³⁵

²⁸ The hierarchical structure which is about to be presented is not a decision-making body but an instrument for public control (Bar, 2006, p. 356).

²⁹ Mainly among Alawite, Druze and Shia communities

³⁰ Branches of the party, bureaus and popular organizations

³¹ The power bases that senior figures of the party built

³² The old members of the Syrian military and security services who use their influence on their old subordinates

³³ The old members of the institutions (mainly security) who acquired wealth and control different sectors of the Syrian economy— important for Sunni non-military leaders who lack the former two channels

³⁴ The countries that have leverage over the present leadership; in Syrian Civil War case, Russia and Iran

³⁵ Acquired from Bar. (2006). p. 356

The operations of different power bases have a much significant impact on the internal and external dynamics of Syria due to more closed relationship between people who carry authority than in democratic countries— as their connections are usually based on kinship, patronage or favouritism. As Hinnebusch indicates, this was evident under the first years of rule of Bashar al-Assad when the old roots of the Ba’athist ideology and inner structure (clans and patronage) couldn’t compete with new dynamics of the world. Therefore, Bashar’s enacting certain reform attempts concerning the political and economic sectors reduced its capacity to “*sustain his power over society*”.³⁶ (R. Hinnebusch, 2012, pp. 98–99). Also, transborder connections of those power bases such as in energy sector, arms trade or family clans spread across the neighbour countries directly concern the regional politics and diplomacy due to the very same reasons. In the Syrian Civil War case, these factors became more significant for the Ba’ath regime in the beginning of the conflict as the power bases were the key to resist the opposition. For this reason, it is necessary to look into the parties of the conflict at this moment.

2.6 Syrian Civil War: Its Progress, Parties and Proxies

After several major protests across Syria has turned into armed clashes at a rapid pace in the beginning of 2011, the civilian population found itself amid severe conflict which was initially occurring between Syrian opposition and forces loyal to the regime (Sterling, 2012). The loss of state authority was not only occurred within cities but also in regional basis which enabled radical groups to reorganize themselves as filling that gap (in parallel with Iraq) thus, expedite the role of becoming artificial state actors. Therefore, parties of the Syrian Civil War differ in their typology: there are *opposition* to regime who aim to gain control over the state, ethnic *separatists* who enjoy the autonomy since the central authority is vanished, *religious fundamentalists* who aim to expand their influence and to

³⁶ e.g. Uprooting the influence of the old guards in 10th Syrian Party Congress (2005), moving towards a more liberal “social market” economy, changing the weight from the Party to the family

gain control not only in Syria but also over MENA and *loyalists* who aim to eliminate their foes.

Wallensteen defines the conflict as a “*social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources.*” (Wallensteen, 2012, p. 16). Despite his particular emphasis on the societal aspect of the concept, the definition needs to be elaborated regarding the civil war conditions to what level the conflict is intra or inter-state. Our third research question that inquires whether the domestic or supranational conditions of the parties involved have a larger part in the conflict thusly can be answered. In order to do so, theoretical framework of “stages of conflict” provides us with the basis upon which we might put the Syrian case before actually depicting the timeline of the civil war. Brahm describes 6 stages between a “no conflict” and the “post conflict peace-building and reconciliation” which are as follows (Brahm, 2003):

1. Latent Conflict
2. Emergence
3. Escalation
4. (Hurting) Stalemate
5. De-escalation
6. Settlement

According to him, there is always a potential for conflict among people arising from their difference in needs, values or interests. Therefore, the conflict is hidden (latent) in this stage while awaiting a triggering event to lead to emergence of the obvious dispute. Such dispute is either followed by a quick resolution or escalation— which, in the second case, is destructive. Nevertheless, the conflict has no indefinite potential to escalate. The situation that leads to a balance among the parties is identified as the stalemate phase where neither of them can outmanoeuvre the other. Here, Brahm also refers to Zartman’s

concept of “hurting” stalemate which is explained by the ripeness theory.³⁷ Parallel with that, the hurting stalemate is an “ideal opportunity” for initiating negotiations since, at this point, the *“pain of continuing the conflict exceeds that of maintaining the confrontation”* (Brahm, 2003). Henceforth, the conflict slides into a natural trend towards dispute settlement by mutual de-escalation and allows negotiations to take over the previous violent phases (see figure below for Brahm’s illustration).

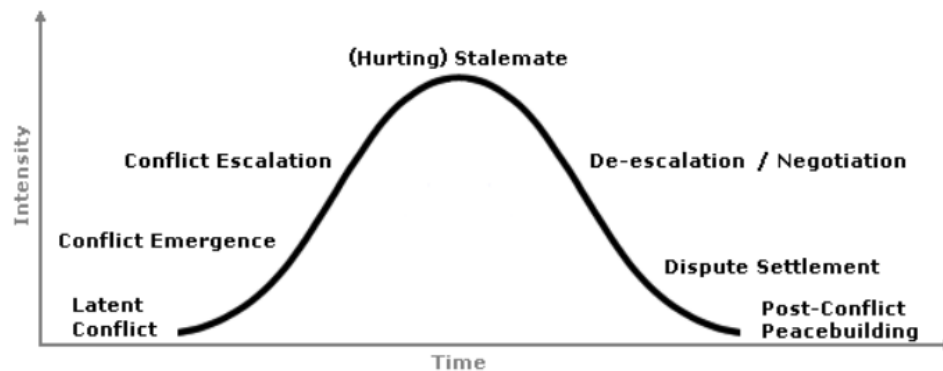


Figure 5. Conflict Stages³⁸

These stages of conflict may also be found in the Syrian Civil War when the timeline of the conflict is periodized under necessary segments. In this regard, the protests that were part of the turmoil in MENA and started by the January 2011 plays the role of that trigger until the initial armed conflict began across the country in July of the very same year thus leading to “conflict emergence”. Surely, the roots of the conflict are “hidden” in the background of the parties as the aforementioned ethnic, economic, historical and political conditions bear the potential. Therefore, the borders that separate “no conflict” from “hidden conflict” are vague. Nevertheless, the Arab Spring provided the favourable setting for emergence of an armed conflict while the protests that were

³⁷ According to Zartman, ripeness in practice refers to a situation where the parties are ready to exploit opportunities and make mutual concessions to engage in negotiation. The success of negotiations therefore, is not attributable to the chosen procedure but to that “readiness”. For further information, see Zartman. (2000). p. 226–228.

³⁸ Brahm, E. (2003). Conflict Stages. In G. Burgess & H. Burgess (Eds.), *Beyond Intractability*. Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Retrieved September 17, 2019, from https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/conflict_stages/

initially happening in big cities such as Deraa, Aleppo and Damascus were spread into the periphery in the form of uprising that was concentrated in villages to medium-sized cities (Hinnebusch, 2012, pp. 106–107).

At this point of events, attempts from the Arab League marks the first conflict management efforts in the Syrian Civil War which were resulted in an “Arab Action Plan” that was also agreed by the Syrian government in suspense on 30th of October, 2011. Since the Assad government saw this mediation as an interference of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, it used the dialogue period to implement further measures on the uprising. Thusly, this process became futile (Lundgren, 2016, p. 275). Following the initial attempts of the Arab League, the negotiations were hosted in the UNSC where 3 Western permanent members of the Council— the US, UK and France endorsed the Arab Action Plan against the complaints of Russia and China who stood against a regime change in Syria.

Hereby in 2012, the previous UN Secretary General Kofi Annan was appointed as the Joint Envoy of UN and the Arab League on April, 12th which led to a UN-mediated ceasefire that lasted for 2 months. When the UN mission ceased its operations in June due to rescission of commitment of important opposition elements, a contact group is assembled in Geneva through efforts of Annan with states that have interests and influence in Syria. the Geneva Communiqué is adopted through the efforts of that group on 30th of June and the Geneva process which is to be referred in the following chapter is officially initiated (Lundgren, 2016, p. 276).

Consequently, the civil war entered the conflict escalation stage. This one and a half-year period is particularly represented with the formation of opposition bodies— not only of armed groups but also deserted army fractions and their respective political bodies that gradually became umbrella organizations. National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces is established in November 2012 by incorporating former Syrian National Council and either recognized as sole or legitimate representative of Syria/Syrian people by the EU, Arab League, USA, Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia (Carnegie Middle East Center, 2013; “Guide to the Syrian Opposition,” 2013; Syrian Coalition, n.d.; Talmon, 2013).

The escalation phase lasted until the beginning of 2014 when opposition forces started to be marginalized and separated from each other which led to inter-rebel conflict and emergence of radical Islamist groups as a consequence. This new period is named after Violent Phase I in the thesis as the first part of the Stalemate stage because of the fierce clashes that took place among rebel ranks. However, rebels continued to expand their territories against the SAA and its affiliated militia despite diverting their focus on them until the Russian Intervention on 30th of September 2015 fundamentally changed the dynamics of the civil war. Due to these reasons, Violent Phase I is highly characterized by the decline of the central authority across the country. The Syrian National Coalition backed FSA took full control over Idlib province and Raqqa, 95% of control over Deir ez-Zor province (except the city centre and the airport) and partially controlled urban and rural areas of Deraa, Quneitra, Hama, Homs, Aleppo provinces and the countryside of the Latakia province. However, infighting led to a dissociation of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups (Nusra Front); Saudi, Qatar or the US-backed radical or moderate groups and Turkish-backed FSA elements—which, combined with the turmoil in Iraq, set off the formation of ISIS (Lister, 2015; Robinson, 2017, pp. 78–79).

There are two critical points to be stressed at this point. Firstly, the fractioned organization of the opposition suggests that the units, corps, battalions and regiments of ex-members of the SAA or newly recruited militia have certain autonomy in their control zones, checkpoints and bases. Therefore, when analyzing the situation, the opposition forces (including Nusra Front and other Islamist groups) should be approached by considering the merger of various other groups instead of an organized army from which it propagated. Secondly, the rapid fall of regime control over the aforementioned areas was accompanied with increased reliance of Iran-backed militia that were recruited among the Shia population across the Middle East “*as the war has grown increasingly sectarian*” (Smyth, 2015, p. 7).³⁹ Thus, when analyzing SAA, a similar approach is necessary to be taken since the same fractioned structure is present.

³⁹ Smyth outlines the main Shia groups who are of Iraqi, Lebanese, Afghan, Iranian and Syrian origin. The most influential of those groups in the Syrian arena are Lebanese Hezbollah (and its subgroups), Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade, Iraqi Harakat al-Nujaba and Badr Brigades, Iranian IRGC and its Quds Forces. For

On the contrary to Violent Phase I, new course of events that were initiated by the Russian intervention after receiving an official call from Damascus marked a total opposite process (Walker, 2015). The Cold War Russian naval base in Tartus increased its activities along with the newly assigned Hmeimim Air Base; thus being the headquarters of Russian operations against rebel groups. Until the initiation of Astana Talks on December 2016, SAA forces regained security around the capital, main highways (Deraa-Aleppo and Damascus-Deir ez-Zor) and gas/oil areas near Homs desert. Decline of ISIS control, Turkish intervention in Northern Syria and US support shifting from the FSA to PKK-affiliated YPG also characterized this second violent phase.

By the time that Idlib DMA was signed between the Astana parties on September 2018; thus, ending the Violent Phase II, the US-backed SDF⁴⁰ controlled the east of Euphrates River, Turkish-backed FSA groups controlled northern Aleppo, Turkey built 12 observation posts in Idlib, US-backed coalition forces controlled small portion of Syrian Desert on the border crossing between Syria, Iraq and Jordan; and the territorial control has been reasserted over rest of the country by the SAA. Therefore, de-escalation phase has been undertaken despite continues actions against former Nusra Front (group reorganized in 2017 and acquired its own umbrella organization called Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (Lister, 2017, p. 8)) and minor skirmishes around demarcation lines. These facts allow for negotiations to be conducted in more preferable conditions which are to be examined in the following two chapters.

further information, see Smyth, P. (2015). Appendix 2: Understanding the Organizations Deployed to Syria. In *The Shiite Jihad in Syria and Its Regional Effects*. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

⁴⁰ Umbrella organization that consists of majority YPG militia.

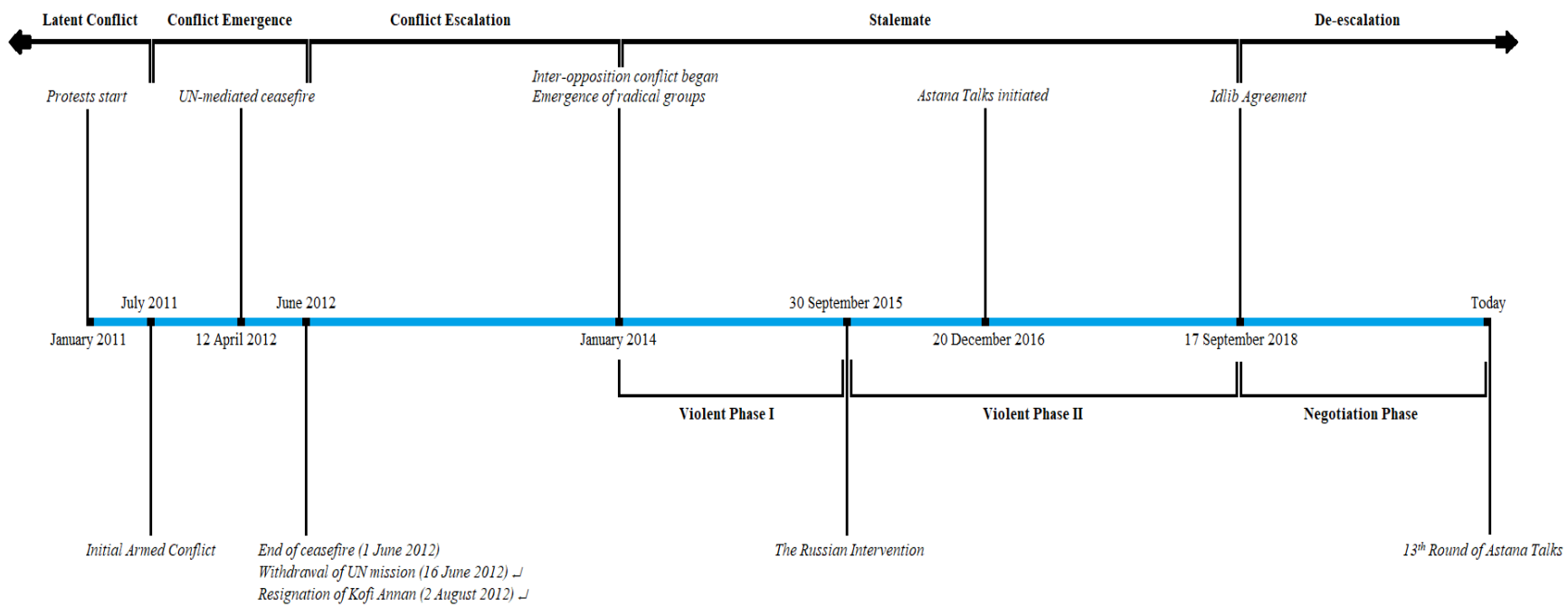


Figure 6. Timeline of the Syrian Civil War with regards to Brahm's Conflict Stages

2.7 Peace Negotiations in Geneva

As mentioned above, peace negotiations in Geneva date back to June 2012, when the UN mission led by special envoy Kofi Annan failed to sustain the ceasefire that was initiated in April. The contact group⁴¹ that he assembled issued the Geneva Communiqué— a declaration that includes guidelines for a peace process along with a transnational government (Lundgren, 2016, p. 276). Apart from the strong emphasis on sovereignty of Syria and essentiality of peaceful transition, the implementation of the six-point plan is put forward (Action Group for Syria, 2012). According to the plan which was laid out on 21st of March, 2012, the Security Council commits to (UNSC, 2012a):

1. Appoint an empowered interlocutor when asked by the Envoy
2. Achieve urgently an all out effective UN-supervised ceasefire by all parties in order to protect civilians and stabilize the country
3. Ensure timely provision of humanitarian assistance
4. Release of arbitrarily detained persons involved in political activities
5. Ensure freedom of movement throughout the country for journalists (related to transparency on the observation of the peaceful transition)
6. Respect freedom of association and the right to demonstrate peacefully as legally guaranteed

These endeavours are named after “Geneva I” and significant due to being the first international efforts to end the conflict in Syria. By taking the communiqué as a basis for his further conducts, the newly appointed UN mediator Lakhdar Brahimi adopted “*a more cautious and consultative approach*” by constantly referring to the dreadful humanitarian consequences of the civil war (Lundgren, 2016, p. 277). His attempts to reaching a ceasefire by the help of regional and international potent figures undermined his position of impartiality thus, led to mistrust from both sides of the conflict. As the process that he re-initiated became complicated, the Geneva II could be assembled by the period of January-February 2014; when, as explained above, the conflict had already reached its

⁴¹ officially Action Group for Syria; abr. (AGFS)

limits on escalation. Despite minor success on humanitarian aid, Lundgren asserts that Geneva II is marked by being the first instance of direct negotiations between the conflict parties since 2011.

At this point, a brief comparison of these attempts is essential. The first aspect is the context in which Geneva I and II proceeded. The former took place during the Conflict Emergence phase which meant that the ripeness of the conflict had not yet compelled parties to negotiate since their highest potential wasn't reached. This factor reveals itself for the unwillingness of the Assad regime (and his supporters e.g. Russia and China) to enter into formal negotiations (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016, p. 6). However, the context was different for the Geneva II under Brahimi since the conflict was in escalation phase. Therefore, he sought out to include the Security Council support that was absent in the previous efforts under Annan. For that reason, the Geneva Communiqué constituted the basis of a possible solution in his mind while he was, by following a dissimilar path than previous, engaging with actors who had a saying in the conflict. Indeed, he professed in August 2013⁴² that *“there is no military solution to this devastating conflict. Only a political solution will put an end to it. And the basis for such a solution does exist. It is the [Geneva] Communiqué.”* (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016, p. 13).

Another distinctive aspect between Geneva I and II arises from that contextual difference. As, on the first case the conflict didn't reach the hurting stalemate, the parties were not keen to come to the negotiation table. Annan therefore had a broader plan that includes prevention of the conflict ever reaching those higher ripeness levels. In order to do so, he aimed at having a ceasefire as soon as possible by enlisting Russia officially to have the Assad regime conform to the plan (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016, pp. 7–8). Therefore, his strategy would work as long as the violence was kept low and the ceasefire lasted long enough for the negotiations to achieve certain steps towards a peaceful transition. However, the field conditions (interests of parties of regional or global scale,

⁴² For further information on Brahimi's perspective, see Makdisi, K. (2014). Brahimi Resignation Signals Geopolitical Shift Favoring Assad. Retrieved September 22, 2019, from IPI Global Observatory website: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2014/05/brahimi-resignation-signals-geopolitical-shift-in-favor-of-assad/>

armed groups that sought more gains *or* radical groups started to come in sight gradually) did not allow him to have that precious time period to settle the issues.

On the other hand, Brahimi put more emphasis on actors that he believed to be the keys of the conflict resolution. He correctly interpreted the field conditions which were stressed in previous chapter that the fragmented structure of the Syrian opposition is the main obstacle for having a national movement. Thus, he averted his efforts from the individual groups to main actors that had an actual influence on the conflict. His strategy included three circles. The first one was the inner circle strategy which aimed at reaching the actual parties of the conflict. However, unwillingness of the Assad regime and the fragmented opposition prompted him to search for bridges between those parties. Therefore, the second circle strategy alternated the gaps of the previous through regional connections. Those actors were Qatar and Saudi Arabia; (therefore indirect Arab League support) and Turkey— by each representing a certain group of opposition elements.

As for the Assad's part, Brahimi resorted to engagement with Iran which he thought to be retaining more influence than Russians. The Iranian perspective endorsed a solution through negotiations and allowance of Assad's future stay after free elections take place. The solution of Iran was presented by Brahimi to the UNSC without notice to Arab League which created a setback in the process; as the Arab League voted to give the Syrian chair to the opposition on 6th of March, 2013. After incompetence of the regional parties in resolution of the conflict became evident, the third "outer" circle strategy of orienting the efforts towards great powers followed the previous attempts. Similar to Annan, Brahimi appealed to Russia and the US for their patronage over two main blocks of civil war parties and their patron countries (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016, pp. 13–15). Nevertheless, playing on great powers did not yield expected results either. According to Lundgren, this was mainly result of pragmatism that arose after the emergence of the ISIS since the central issues of the conflict remained inflexible for each party (Lundgren, 2016, p. 277).

Hence, after the failure of talks in 2014 we witness the Violent Phase I which altered the conditions of the conflict field and increased the chances to reinitiate the

negotiations. Surely, the Russian Intervention that reversed the situation for the opposition parties had the actual effect on ensued Geneva III that commenced under new UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura. The new conditions also included an extra ripeness factor: ISIS and its spread both in regime and opposition controlled areas. When meeting with de Mistura's distinct approach on the contrary to his two predecessors who attempted to implement top-down measures (e.g. UN-pushed ceasefires), the new track was more promising than before. Small confidence building measures such as limited truces as it was in the Aleppo battles *or* indirect talks between parties who were keener to conform to minor ceasefires through which they can recure their strength enabled mutual stances on Russian and American sides on siding with "Cessation of Hostilities in Syria" which was originally proposed by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) that was created after those indirect talks by de Mistura's efforts (Lundgren, 2016, p. 278; UNSC, 2016). Nevertheless, Geneva III was insufficient to adopt an all out ceasefire, as well. Judging by the level of participants of the talks who were direct parties of the conflict, the reason for that failure was that the actual fighting groups such as ISIS, YPG, al-Qaeda-affiliated or other radical fractions were not part of the dialogue (naturally) since they were either objected by the participant states (as it was in the YPG case for Turkey) or enlisted by the UN as terrorist organizations.

By the fourth round at Geneva, the UN-led peace process steered away from being the principal forum. The talks initiated in February 2017 remained focused on technical issues such as accountable governance, the constitution elections, counterterrorism and security governance (Talukdar & Anas, 2018). The goals set by the UNSC resolution 2254 for the political transition and the process of drafting a new constitution along with UN-supervised elections within 18 month as set forth in 14 November ISSG statement remained covenanted in this new track, as well (Dobbins, Gordon, & Martini, 2017, p. 5; UNSC, 2015). Nevertheless, the Astana process started 2 months before Geneva IV opened another framework for the parties thus, undermining the former that lasted for 6 years without any concrete solutions. Astana parties' specific measures lead Geneva track to "shadow" this more promising forum and remain latent until now (Heller, 2017).

2.8 Astana-Sochi Talks

The second peace track is not facilitated by an international organization as it has been under the UN *but* the triologue is summoned in the former capital of Kazakhstan, Astana on equal grounds. In short, each party had different state of affairs as Russia recently had an incident with Turkey⁴³ which resulted in suspension of diplomatic ties and joining the MENA arena with hard power; Turkey realized the national security threat arising from the increasing YPG control across south of its borders; and Iran recently secured a nuclear deal with the west and now about to lose one of its allies on the Mediterranean: the Assad regime.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Astana table has been under the right to guarantee for each country to represent the designated groups of the conflict. The trio agreed on distinguishing opposition groups from radical ones which allowed Turkey to formally back several FSA factions and to defend their interests. The articles 5 and 8 of the initial statement of the Astana process indicate such differentiation (MFA RF, 2016). Another point is that in all of the joint statements from December 2016 to August 2019, the political solution put forward by the UN Security Council Resolution 2254 has been emphasized and committed on to be advanced by the Astana parties.⁴⁴ Thus, by referencing the UN efforts on solution of the crisis, the trio aims to both legitimize their actions in Syria but, more importantly, they can reflect the reached solution among their ranks to the UN table so that the deadlocked negotiations may continue in their mutual favour.

Furthermore, Astana process has had three milestones since its inception; as the third round of the meetings on 4th of May, 2017 resulted in an agreement on De-escalation Zones across the country (TASS Russian News Agency, 2017). This agreement was put into practice after the sixth meeting on December 2017. In accordance with the

⁴³ Downing of Russian warplane on November 24th, 2016 near Turkish border

⁴⁴ See relevant documents on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation website: http://www.mid.ru/en/main_en ; search: "Astana joint statement".

agreement, Turkey as the guarantor of the opposition, was given task to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire regime by creating 12 observation posts around the Idlib area (thus, having a DMZ belt enforced by its own troops) to oversee the activities of the opposition and other radical groups *while* the other two states, Russia and Iran, set to practice the same task on the regime-held areas in order to “*prevent the occurrence of hostilities between the regime and the opposition*” (MFA TUR, 2017b). Apart from Idlib, three other DEZ’s were established; yet without any direct connection to Turkish-backed rebel areas which ended up with the Assad forces gradually regaining control over them and sending rebels along with their families to Idlib (MFA RF, 2017c).⁴⁵ Thus, the green bus phenomenon which firstly appeared on transfer of rebels from Aleppo city battles in 2016 once again came into sight (Denselow, 2017).⁴⁶ This transfer of populations towards Idlib not only allowed the Assad regime to reassert its control over those former rebel-held areas but also complicate the demographic and military situation within the Idlib DEZ by bringing in other groups which were used to operate on different military fronts.

The second milestone in Astana talks followed the eight meeting on December 2017 and was finalized by another joint statement. However, this time it included a decision of “*convening of the Syrian national dialogue congress*” in article 4 which was determined to take place at Sochi on January 2018 (MFA RF, 2017b). Sochi Memorandum enlarged the DEZ regime through adaption of peace-building measures such as withdrawal of heavy weapons from the aforementioned DMZ belt established by Turkish presence, reopening of M4 and M5 highways⁴⁷, reclaiming the border gates from radical groups under HTS⁴⁸ and transferring them to newly established National Liberation Front⁴⁹ and evacuation of militia from besieged areas from Idlib to regime-held areas or vice versa

⁴⁵ These other de-escalation areas are: Northern Homs/Rastan pocket, eastern Ghouta and Deraa countryside

⁴⁶ Thousands of fighters and their families were evacuated from those three de-escalation areas by green buses into Idlib.

⁴⁷ M4: Aleppo-Latakia highway; M5: Aleppo-Damascus highway

⁴⁸ The attempts were unsuccessful to take the border gates from HTS. However, the radical fighters withdraw and left their positions to civil administration under their control.

⁴⁹ The armed umbrella organization under Syrian National Coalition which was established to encompass various FSA units in 2018

(Baresh, 2019, pp. 8–9, 19; The University of Edinburgh, 2018). The convened congress is important due to furthering the de-escalation process into dialogue which was unattainable in other attempts in Geneva track. Therefore, the Sochi Memorandum is seen and committed by the counterparts of the agreement as a concrete outcome of the trilateral dialogues.

The meeting at Sochi is also directly relevant to our third milestone: the constitutional committee. The Syrian National Dialogue Congress, apart from emphasis on a non-sectarian, democratic and pluralistic Syrian state, resulted in the agreement on formation of the constitutional committee; of which sketched out as being composed of government and opposition representatives along with experts and tribal leaders. It is also stressed out in the statement that the decision is “*a contribution to the political settlement under the UN auspices in accordance with Security Council Resolution 2254*” (MFA TUR, 2018a). Such appeal can be considered as an attitude similar to the abovementioned legitimization efforts from Astana trio and targeting to reflect their reached solution on the UN level. Nevertheless, this transition of process from the Astana table to the UN table lasted nearly one and a half-year despite relative success of sustaining the de-escalated conflict especially on the north-western Syria except operations conducted against HTS units. As of September 2019, the agreement on final composition of the Syrian Constitutional Committee has been reached according to UN Secretary-General Guterres which opens a new chapter in Syrian peace process: the transitional governing body (UN News, 2019).

However, it is not particularly clear how do those events condition the US behaviour whose presence has been based on the anti-ISIL coalition that remains in Syria to defeat the defeated ISIS as of September 2019. The article written by former US officials Dobbins, Gordon and Martini in 2017 successfully envisage the future problems which will occur due to that military presence in Syria after the military operations reach to an end (both because of diminished legitimacy of the US presence once the ISIS is defeated and pushing Turkish concerns into the background for the sake of YPG which will increase the uncertainty of US access in eastern Syria as it requires either Turkish or

Iraqi assistance). Therefore, they are aware of the importance of the UN resolution 2254 as well as the regional support to their (the US) operations (Dobbins et al., 2017, pp. 2–5). By giving a way to the Astana process, the US tackles those problems over its NATO partner Turkey’s actions, which are in contrast with the Assad regime and recognized by its patrons, Russia and Iran, through the Astana statements and Sochi agreements.

Hence the Astana process is not fully separate from the US concerns and interests. The intertwined nature of events obliges one actor to act considering the acts of the others— as it has been clearly visible both in Geneva and Astana tracks. Due to these facts, a theoretical framework is required in order to untangle those nods. The following chapter will serve that function by presenting that theoretical background before the events are placed into that framework during the analysis.

3. THEORETICAL PART

3.1 Defining International Negotiations

The international system that states engage in relationships with each other is often demonstrated with complexity in the academic field. Bargaining, as a part of those relationships, has a widespread ground across international institutions and regimes, diplomacy; and negotiations. By specifically targeting the last, the narration as of this point looks into features of international negotiations with regards to different IR grand theories.

Avenhaus and Zartman define a negotiation as a “*purposeful communication consisting of strategies developed and implemented by two or more actors to pursue or defend their interests*”. As they stress, the interaction between those actors is a **process** performed over a **structure** of background factors that change slowly in the long term and the outcome is the results attained in that negotiation (Avenhaus & Zartman, 2007, p. 5). However, as those background factors have substantial effects on the process as well (as mentioned on the previous chapters), their definition can be elaborated into “*(...) a process which has effects on the structure and vice versa*”. In fact, the conditions that were altered after the Astana process was initiated had tremendous impact on the field conditions, increased bilateral cooperation between the Astana trio and thusly, furthered the negotiations into a political transition period that is conducted within the Astana negotiations, as well. Such reciprocity is needed to be beared in mind in all three theoretical approaches.

So, how do the parties come to the points where they stand? — Or, to put it differently, what do their positions emerge from in general? Druckman and Mahoney, provide with two alternative points by which nations arrive at their positions; and which both emphasize that domestic factors determine the positioning of states. These are the national attributes and the policy making process. To begin with, the former is defined as

“fundamental societal factors that underlie national interests” (Druckman & Mahoney, 1977, p. 63). The logic behind those attributes is articulated with the phrase *“what nations are” is related to “what nations do”*— as those societal factors on the background along with factors external to state influence negotiating behaviour. Therefore, national interests are key elements that states seek to accomplish. Furthermore, by drawing attention to the relationship between states and those two types of societal contexts i.e. domestic/internal and transnational/external, Andrew Moravcsik also asserts that *“socially differentiated individuals define their material and ideational interests independently of politics and then advance those interests through political exchange and collective action”*. Even though his particular discipline, the liberal theory will be clarified on the chapter 3.3, collective action and political exchange are two concepts that international negotiations comprise of once we overlook whether they arise from automatic harmony (as in liberal theory) or anarchy (as in realism).

The second alternative point, policy making process which Druckman and Mahoney points out is the organizational aspect of the components of nations. According to them, the interactions among those components which are semi-independent organs influence the essence of national positions. Such influence on policy positions is a more dynamic approach to the structural and behavioural aspects of organizations, as compared to the previous which focuses on more static societal features. Two closely related type-of dynamics are referred by them as the organizational process which *“refers to the way in which the structure and activities of organizations affect the policy process”* and bureaucratic politics which *“pertains to the bargaining that goes on among component organizations concerning the position that a nation will adopt and the relative ability of agencies to influence this decision in line with their own organizational perspectives”* (Druckman & Mahoney, 1977, p. 64).

Consequently, bargaining ensues the positioning of actors once their interests are palpable to be negotiated. Bargaining can be defined as a process through which the players seek to reach an agreement; which is typically time consuming, and involves the players making offers and counter-offers to each other (Muthoo, 2000, p. 147). Similarly

to the main research question that is looking for the reason behind the ineffectiveness of Geneva as compared to Astana process, Muthoo asserts that the “*main focus of any theory of bargaining is on the **efficiency** and **distribution** properties of the outcome of bargaining. The former property relates to the possibility that the players fail to reach an agreement, or that they reach an agreement after some costly delay, (while) the distribution property relates to the issue of exactly how the gains from co-operation are divided between the players.*” (Muthoo, 2000, pp. 147–148). The distribution (not only gains but also costs of a deal) is separately analyzed in the constructivist approaches part; however, as he argues, there are several determinants (or “frictions”) of a bargaining’s outcome after which its efficiency can be judged accordingly. Those determinants are as follows:

1. Impatience
2. Risk of breakdown
3. Outside options
4. Marital bargaining
5. Commitment tactics
6. Asymmetric information

Impatience affects the bargaining in an inversely proportional way: the more patient one actor is relative to the other, the greater the bargaining power s/he has. This situation arise from the fact that the actor who is less patient tends to *accept almost any share of the surplus in order to strike a deal quickly*” while the other awaits for further profits (Muthoo, 2000, p. 151). **Risk of breakdown** refers to the perception of players that the negotiations may incline towards a disagreement due to exogenous and uncontrollable factors. It is their perception that drives one of them to be less risk averse than the other so that the payoff for his/her is higher— which results in less bargaining power for the other. Therefore, the player with higher risk aversion is keener to minimize the risk of breakdown (Muthoo, 2000, pp. 152–154).

Two types of options are hereby included by Muthoo. Firstly, **outside options** in negotiations mean that a player has an alternative to which s/he can resort in order to

increase his/her bargaining power. However, having such an option does not decrease or increase one's bargaining power on its own; but only having it more attractive than the existing circumstances (such as another job offer with a higher salary) increase the bargaining power. This conditionality is called as *outside option principle* (OOPS) (Muthoo, 2000, p. 155). **Marital bargaining** is a metaphor used for the inside options (due to the used analogy to married couples) for parties of bargaining. Muthoo clarifies the principles of inside option with regards to the OOPS as follows: "*When both players' outside options are sufficiently unattractive, then a player's bargaining power is higher the more attractive is his/her inside option, and, the less attractive is the other player's inside option. But, when one player's outside option is sufficiently attractive, both players' inside options have no impact on the bargaining outcome; the player with the attractive outside option gets the more favourable deal. And, if both players' outside options are sufficiently attractive, then it is mutually beneficial for the players to exercise them.*" (Muthoo, 2000, pp. 158–159).

Commitment tactics refer to bargaining situations in which players take actions prior to and/or during the negotiation process that partially commit them to some strategically chosen bargaining positions or demands; which are surely revocable yet, at a certain cost. The commitment will increase when cost of backing down for a party is larger. Therefore, a party's bargaining power is higher if the cost for him/her to back down is larger (since the commitment would be higher) or the other party's cost of backing down is smaller (since the commitment for the opponent would be smaller) (Muthoo, 2000, p. 161). Lastly, **asymmetric information** adds up to absence of complete information for at least one party which leads to inefficient bargaining outcomes due to costly delayed agreements or simply because of not having the necessary information to continue the process (Muthoo, 2000, p. 162). Even though Muthoo doesn't state, asymmetry is innate to negotiating parties since neither of them can have access all the information that the other possess; which needs to be included in the analysis of Astana trio's goals.

3.2 Realist Approaches to International Negotiations

Ba'ath ideology which was a by-product of Soviet-American struggle in MENA during the Cold War still makes one half of the Syrian Civil War as the Assad regime sustains the one-party tradition since 1963. Realism with its multiple sub-theories had been the widely-accepted theoretical tradition in IR during the Cold War— as indicated by Walt to be arising from the fact that it provided simple yet, powerful explanations for war, alliances, imperialism, obstacles for cooperation and etc. (Walt, 1998, p. 31) —and can account for the current conflict between the Ba'ath rule (*and* its patrons) and the opposition (including separatists, jihadists and moderates).

To begin with, realism is rooted in the logic that the imperfect world is the result of forces inherent in the human nature. These forces are manifested in Thomas Hobbes' famous work *Leviathan* as innate and pessimistic.⁵⁰ In order to improve the world, “*one must work with those forces, not against them*” (Morgenthau, 1948b, p. 3). It sees the world as innately composed of conflicts arising from different interests of actors. Mearsheimer clarifies 5 basic assumptions of realism about the international system. These are (Mearsheimer, 1995, p. 10):

1. The international system is anarchic (i.e. sovereignty belongs to states with no authority above them).
2. States inherently possess some offensive military capability, which gives them the ability to hurt and possibly destroy each other. States are potentially dangerous to each other.
3. States can never be certain about the intentions of other states (specifically regarding the use of military first)
4. The most basic motive driving states is survival (referring to the first assumption, they are the sovereign actors and seek to remain so)
5. States think strategically about how to survive in the international system. They are instrumentally rational.

⁵⁰ i.e. a state of nature in which men live in solitary to preserve their own against the others.

Due to these assumptions, a system of checks and balances is essential to sustain the relationship between states who are considered to be the “privileged” actors of world politics. Their actions are directed towards the principle of self-help i.e. they express egoistic behaviour because of the reason that the absence of central authority in world affairs leads them to give weight to survival. Thus, their relative capabilities compared to the others’ are fundamental in a system of distrust. Balance of power is the term used in this regard in order to explain those actions within an anarchical⁵¹ structure of the international politics that runs in an antagonistic arena.

As mentioned above, there are other branches under (classical) realism in which aspiration for power constitutes the basis for rivalry among states. In defensive realism (*or* structural realism as commonly referred), security is more of a concern than survival for states. Waltz who was the founding father of this branch elucidates such argument as follows:

“The survival motive is taken as the ground of action in a world where the security of state is not assured, rather than as a realistic description of the impulse that lies behind every act of state. The assumption allows for the fact that no state always acts exclusively to ensure its survival. It allows for the fact that some states may persistently seek goals that they value more highly than survival; they may, for example, prefer amalgamation with other states to their own survival in form.” (Waltz, 1979, p. 92)

Unlike Morgenthau’s classical realism which emphasizes the inherent aspiration for gaining more (relative) power due to imperfect knowledge about intentions of others and unregulated/anarchical system of world affairs, for Waltz it is inherent for the states to maintain the balance of power as the anarchical structure drives them to defend/sustain their position within the international system primarily. Mearsheimer briefly explains the argument of defensive realists and states that *“Efficient balancing coupled with the natural advantages of defence over offense should discourage great powers from*

⁵¹ Mearsheimer states that anarchy here has nothing to do with the conflict or chaos, but rather it refers to the situation of which states are the independent political units therefore, there are no central authority above them (Mearsheimer, 1995, p. 10).

pursuing aggressive strategies and instead make them 'defensive positionalists'."(Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 20). Similar to the defensive, in offensive realism he, too, advocates for the fact that great powers are concerned with survival in a world with no overarching authority to appease their security concerns and with no assurance of compliance of other actors to the agreed compromises. However, unlike defensive realists who accredit the international system to drive the states to maintain the balance of power (i.e. *"preserving the power but not increasing it"*), offensive realists attach credence to the fact that *"the international system creates powerful incentives for states to look for opportunities to gain power at the expense of rivals"*. Therefore, it is to be the hegemon of the system what the states' ultimate goal is (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 21). These realist theories are summarized below by the table that Mearsheimer provides.

	Human Nature Realism	Defensive Realism	Offensive Realism
What causes states to compete for power?	Lust for power inherent in states	Structure of the system	Structure of the system
How much power do states want?	All they can get. States maximize relative power, with hegemony as their ultimate goal.	Not much more than what they have. States concentrate on maintaining the balance of power.	All they can get. States maximize relative power, with hegemony as their ultimate goal.

Figure 7. "The Major Realist Theories" by Mearsheimer⁵²

From all these approaches above, realist explanations on international negotiations set their main focus on states and consequently, their features. Power is the term used to describe the combined capabilities of one nation, as explained by Morgenthau to be comprising of several elements such as the geographical situation of the state in question; its natural resources that enables self-sufficiency (food, raw materials and their industrial usage); its military capabilities and readiness that support foreign policies; its population,

⁵² Acquired from Mearsheimer. (2001). p.22

national character and morale; and the quality of its diplomacy which is highly dependent on the quality of its government (Morgenthau, 1948a). It is the hegemonic power that determines the outcome of negotiations and provides the necessary conditions for the parties to “remain seated”. Despite other incentives undergo in the background during the negotiations (e.g. aforementioned distrust, security concerns or obscurity of compliance), the concept of influence which arises from the power capabilities of actors who are the parties of negotiations determine the outcome of talks. Nevertheless, as Dimitrov argues, this hasn’t always been the case for international negotiations as hegemonic power with high military and/or economic power had little effect on environmental talks and a small country such as Netherlands was better able to exercise its diplomatic power and influence over European and global negotiations (Dimitrov, 2013, p. 342). This suggests that typology of negotiations also matter for the outcome— which *is* the case for our analysis topic, Astana versus Geneva as political, economic and military capabilities and arising influence have strong effects on both the process and outcome of these negotiations.

At this point, it is needed to talk about our first hypothesis. The realist hypothesis regarding the contrast between Astana and Geneva’s fruitfulness focuses on power capabilities indicators of actors involved. However, the hypothesis is not derived from a clear cut realist theory but grounded in realist thinking.

According to Waltz’s defensive realism, a state’s power arises from its capabilities and there are several categories of “capability”; of which that particular state can be strong or weak in some. Even though those separate categories do not necessarily make each other present or strong for one nation, ranks of states do not depend on how they score separately but on all of them (Waltz, 1979, pp. 130–131). These 5 categories accounted by Waltz are as follows: military strength, economic capability, size of population and territory, political stability and competence. The hypothesis accordingly asserts that the actors of the Astana talks have been better able to realize their capabilities on implementing a common agenda during negotiations based on their performance on capabilities in general as compared with the other Geneva parties. This means that their influence are based on those capabilities precisely on the course of talks (how well the

capabilities serve to their own benefit) instead of evaluating their individual general positions. The reason for this is that many actors have different levels of impact of their certain capabilities when it comes to Syrian arena. For instance, geographical size of Russian Federation is by far the biggest therefore, would be evaluated with the highest score if not considered with how effective it is to Russian policies in Syria.

However, we are looking at the influence of actors' power capabilities in realization of their political agenda rather than how influential they are to sub-actors of the conflict which they represent. Due to these, certain amendments of those capability categories are needed in order to fully integrate them into the analysis. Firstly, each actor's military and economic capacities are to be analyzed with regards to their positioning in the Syrian conflict with minor contributions by their general capabilities in economic and military areas (since those also increase their potential independently of the Syrian Civil War). Secondly, the category "size of population and territory" needs to be taken from the isolated level where it only matters to have a numerical advantage and consequently to be implemented into the Syrian arena. In order to do so, demographic role of the "population" and geostrategic role of the "territory" are to be involved; and the name of this category is thusly changed into "societal capacity". Thirdly, the categories "political stability" and "competence" are terms that require an analysis independent of the Syrian conflict unless they are both matched with their influence on peace negotiations. In this regard, a separate category is to be formed under the name "political capacity" which incorporates each actor's political stability and competence. As a result of these adjustments, there are 4 capacity categories which are going to be evaluated throughout the analytical part: military capacity, economic capacity, societal capacity and political capacity.

In the light of these, empirical analysis based on realism-grounded hypothesis attempts to reveal each of the actors' power capabilities separately, then scoring their individual and collective positions; and at last making a final comparison of Astana and Geneva parties' total scores to find out whether the assumption is correct or not.

All these methods seek to measure the reason behind the fruitfulness of Astana and Geneva tracks. Hence that “fruitfulness” becomes our key dependent variable which is evaluated via different types of capabilities of actors. These “types” thusly function as independent variables for the realist approach that is formed as follows:

H1: Russia, Iran and Turkey as the guarantor countries of the Astana peace process have had better power capabilities regarding their positions in Syria as compared to the US-backed actors of the Geneva talks.

3.3 Liberalist Approaches to International Negotiations

On the contrary to the negative perspective of realist school on the possibility of cooperation in an anarchic world where actors primarily consider self-preservation, relative power & gains and security; liberalism offers for potential means through which mutual cooperation is achievable. As Kant argues, peace is not solely and ideal but achievable thanks to human nature which is impelled by rationality of individuals. Such opposite perspective to Hobbes’ pessimism inclines towards construction of cooperative and harmonious society owing to the innate state of nature of rationally having faith in progress in social life. Even though they both accept the rationality and conflicting nature, *“the difference between the two traditions is that Kant sees democratic government, economic interdependence, and international law and organizations as means to overcome the security dilemma of the international system”*. Therefore, for Kant, war and conflict can be mitigated through reshaping domestic and international governance structures (Russett, 2013, p. 95).

Moravcsik defines three core assumptions of liberal theory which account for how the state behaviour is shaped by underlying preferences that are the outcomes of relationship between the state and domestic and international environment in which it is embedded. These are as follows (Moravcsik, 1997, pp. 516–521):

1. The primacy of societal actors
2. States or other political institutions represent a part of domestic society
3. The configuration of interdependent state preferences determines state behaviour

In liberal theory, actors are rational, risk-averse and resort to collective action within an environment in which interests are in conflict, resources are scarce and societal factors vary. According to Moravcsik, politics are perceived as “bottom-up” where individuals and societal groups define what is in their best interest independent of politics and advance them through political exchange and collective action. Therefore, interests stand in the core of dispute between cooperation and conflict. Firstly, liberal theory rejects an automatic harmony of interests among actors and addresses that collective action arises from the incentives which those interests drive them to cooperate rather than clash. Secondly, interests are products of societal/domestic factors. As the behaviour of actors are either directed towards cooperation or conflict, those factors play the key role. For example, divergent fundamental beliefs, scarce material goods or unequally distributed political power promote conflict whereas complementary beliefs⁵³, abundance of goods or equal social power promote cooperation and harmony (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 517).

The second assumption particularly focuses on how states or other political institutions define their state preferences. According to Moravcsik, the state interests are derived from the domestic society whose preferences and interests it represents. Instead of being *the* actor, in liberal theory states are representative institutions. Therefore, state policy originally consists of social power of individuals or groups (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 518). In this regard, identities and interests that reside on the background are crucial since they both shape the domestic factors. Nevertheless, as he, too stresses, state preferences which are shaped by societal factors and transmitted by representative institutions and practices into policies are different than national strategies or tactics. Preferences come “*prior to specific interstate political interactions*” and causally independent of the strategies of other actors whereas strategies and tactics are intermediate policy options with political goals. Due to these, Moravcsik is right when he asserts that “*liberal theory*

⁵³ e.g. democratic systems

focuses on the consequences for state behaviour of shifts in fundamental preferences, not shifts in the strategic circumstances under which states pursue them” (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 519).

At last, the third assumption reflects on how those preferences are influenced or restrained by taking other states’ preferences into consideration. In liberal theory, the link between preferences and behaviour is the policy interdependence which is defined as “*the set of costs and benefits created for foreign societies when dominant social groups in a society seek to realize their preferences*” (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 520). Therefore, the configurations/patterns of state preferences are restrictive on state behaviours. These patterns can be realized in 3 categories: (1) harmonious preferences with strong incentives to coexistence with low conflict in case of unilateral actions, (2) deadlocked preferences where endeavours of one country to achieve its goals impose costs for other countries that lead to zero-sum; and (3) cooperation among states where policy concessions mutually beneficial for each and increase their welfare as compared to the unilateral actions⁵⁴.

After talking about core ideas and assumptions behind the liberal theory, it is beneficial to clarify its similarities and differences with realist school of thought. As Grieco argues “*differences in the realist and neoliberal understanding of the problem of cooperation result from a fundamental divergence in their interpretations of the basic meaning of international anarchy*” (Grieco, 1988, p. 497). The former, since it depends more on to state power, sees international cooperation harder to achieve and to maintain than the latter.

This optimistic view of world politics gains ground by three theories under liberalist thought: economic liberalism, republican liberalism and institutional liberalism. Despite being a (neo) realist, Mearsheimer simply explains that complex economic interdependence (i.e. globalisation) among states makes them less likely to get into conflict with each other as military conflicts have a negative impact on international trade

⁵⁴ Keohane argues that cooperation doesn’t imply the absence of conflict but rather it is mixed with conflict and reflects on successfully overcoming real or potential conflict. This argumentation reflects on the difference between Moravcsik’s categories number 1 and 3. See Keohane. (1984). p.53-54

and economic growth leading to a welfare state bolsters peace. Secondly, democratic domestic institutions and perspectives reduce the conflicts in republican tradition as democratic peace theory suggests that the democratic states are reluctant to get into armed conflict with each other. Thirdly, international institutions are able to mitigate collective action problems since they enforce rules which help to address the possibility of non-compliance in an anarchic international system. Being that these rules are prescribed to states yet not enforced on them means that negotiations in international institutions have a crucial role in determining the state behaviour instead of solely relying on self-help (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 16–17).

Hereby, we reach three core differences between realism and liberalism. The first and the major one is their perspectives on cooperation in an anarchical international system (former being pessimistic and the latter optimistic about it). Secondly, despite sharing a similar position on the role of states, domestic factors in liberalism are incontrovertibly as important. Thirdly, neorealists are sceptical about the functionality of international institutions in mitigating collective action problems and anarchical international arena whereas liberals are favourable. Nevertheless, there is another fundamental distinction between approaches of these two theories to gains. It is mentioned on the previous chapter that realists are more concerned with their relative capabilities and gains due to various reasons such as insecurity arising from the anarchy.⁵⁵ However, by furthering cooperation among states, liberal institutions enable them to put their focus less on their relative positions. Thus, intentions and interests are more significant for liberalists than distribution of capabilities (Baldwin, 1993, p. 7). By bringing in a possible regulation of the international arena (i.e. prescribed rules as aforementioned), liberalist theories emphasize absolute gains from the international cooperation (Baldwin, 1993, pp. 5–6). To put it simply, interest-based (neo)liberalism “*depicts states as rational egoists who are concerned only with their own gains and losses*” whereas power-based realism stresses

⁵⁵ Waltz explains this by following “*Even the prospect of large absolute gains for both parties does not elicit their cooperation so long as each fears how the other will use its increased capabilities. Notice that the impediments to collaboration may not lie in the character and the immediate intention of either party. Instead, the condition of insecurity— at the least, the uncertainty of each about the other's future intentions and actions— works against their cooperation*”. See Waltz. (1979). p. 105

that utility functions of states are at least partially interdependent; meaning that gains and losses of one depend on the other's (Hasenclever, Peter, & Rittberger, 1997, p. 26).

Due to these reasons, the central concept that is to be the backbone of evaluating the effectiveness of Astana and Geneva processes is "preferences". As Moravcsik asserts the fact that "*the relationship between states and the surrounding domestic and transnational society in which they are embedded critically shapes state behaviour by influencing the social purposes underlying state preferences*"; one who wishes to evaluate two separate negotiations of numerous actors has to consider the domestic and transnational society surrounding those actors since behaviours which are formulated by the preferences of states are directly influenced by them (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 516). Furthermore, the classic rationalist approach, which both neorealism and neoliberalism are part of, stresses the utilitarian characteristic of states who strives for gaining the maximum out of conducting cost benefit analyses. Actors make these calculations by taking the preferences into consideration (Hasenclever et al., 1997, p. 23).

However, as Keohane asserts, "*cooperation occurs when actors adjust their behaviour to the actual or anticipated preferences of others*" (Keohane, 1984, p. 51). Therefore, the comparison between fruitfulness of negotiations requires detecting how are the behaviours of actors adjusted to each other's "actual or potential" preference. The liberalist hypothesis is selected in this regard. It assumes that the efficiency of one and stalemate of the other negotiation is directly related to that level of adjustment. In order to measure it, the aforementioned domestic and transnational circumstances for each actor need to be determined in order for the preferences are identified.⁵⁶ Thus, whether their behaviours are adjusted to the other's preference can be detected. This is hypothesized as follows:

H2: Astana negotiations have been more fruitful than Geneva talks because preferences of Russia, Turkey and Iran are more convergent than those of Geneva parties.

⁵⁶ These circumstances and preferences are explained throughout the Empirical Part and tested within the theoretical framework in the Analytical Part.

3.4 Constructivist Approaches to International Negotiations

Up to this point, rationalist explanations of realism and liberalism are referred to. Apart from these two—who share the same assumptions about agents of the international system that states are the privileged actors who act upon the concept of self-help based on the exogenously given identities and interests of actors—reflectivist explanations are concerned with the “*construction of subjectivity*” regarding the issue of identity and interest formations (Wendt, 1992, pp. 391–393). Constructivists share the same commitment to human capacity’s reflecting has its effect on the way in which societal actors attach meaning to the physical world i.e. “*framing the world that they know, experience and understand*” (Adler, 1997, p. 322). Therefore, the subjectivity is interconnected with the social environment where the perception of actors are shaped. This mutual *constitutiveness* of social structures and agents lies in the heart of many social constructivist work (Risse, 2009, p. 145).

When we further the argumentation to the construction of state interests, identities or even policies, the rationalist premises substantially differ from reflectivist ideas. To begin with, Weldes emphasizes that national interest are important in international politics since it is through this concept that policy-makers “*understand the goals to be pursued by a state’s foreign policy*” and “*the legitimacy of and political support for state action*” are created by using it as a “*rhetorical device*” (Weldes, 1996, p. 276). According to Wendt, “*a fundamental principle of constructivist social theory is that people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them. States act differently toward enemies than they do toward friends because enemies are threatening and friends are not. Anarchy and the distribution of power are insufficient to tell us which is which*” (Wendt, 1992, pp. 396–397). Weldes, clarifies his arguments by stating that generation of security-oriented behaviour of states is not deductible from the systemic condition of anarchy (as rationalists take as a starting point) but rather the interest of states and identities on which those interests are based also rests upon the collective meanings which constitute the structures that organize state behaviour (Weldes, 1996, p. 279).

Therefore, norms are crucial to be explained since they are “*standards of an appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity*”. Norms are different than institutions as the former refers to individual standards of behaviour while the latter stresses the way of collection of practices and rules (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 891). By citing Ulbert and Risse, Odell mentions that shared norms shape the negotiation process in an international organization. Presupposed norms differ across organizations and empower certain actors as legitimate in the process, rule certain arguments out of order; and determine which discursive strategy will be effective (Odell, 2013, p. 12). In this regard, the “norm life cycle” helps us to understand norm influence— which asserted to be a three-stage process by Finnemore and Sikkink. Firstly, emergence of norms phase is characterised by the acts of *norm entrepreneurs* who promote their norms in organisational platforms. It is typical that these agents are driven by altruistic and ideational motives through construction of cognitive frames that (re)interprets the phenomenon out in the world. Logic of appropriateness stands in between the promotion of a new norm and established standards of the older one. Therefore, persuasion is the dominant mechanism in this stage. After entrepreneurs’ efforts prosper, tipping point is being reached as the critical mass is now supportive for the new norm (both in numbers and important actors) (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, pp. 896–901).

Following the tipping point, new dynamics occur as numbers of actors (states and/or organizations) now more rapidly adopt the new standards and norms. The primary mechanism of such norm cascade is international socialization which aims at persuading all actors to adhere to new norms. The reasons behind such compliance are mainly reputational: peer pressures lead to legitimacy concerns and drive actors to be “approved” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, pp. 902–904). Lastly, norms that are widely accepted— in so much so that they took the form of taken-for-granted— are internalized and not controversial anymore. This phase is represented with norms moving into bureaucratic level and transforming into laws. Actors are motivated by conformity and act in habitual behaviours (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, pp. 904–905). These are the stages of norm influence (see figure below).

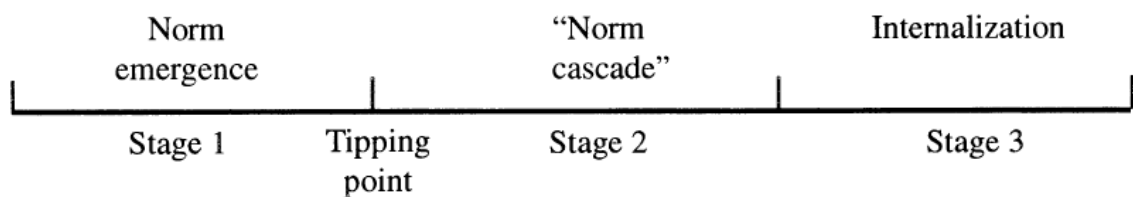


Figure 8. Norm Life Cycle⁵⁷

The thesis employs the concept of justice in order to hypothesize about the Astana's prevalence which is similarly measured as the reason behind the effectiveness of negotiations by Albin and Druckman. They define Procedural Justice (PJ) as *"justice of how the negotiations are conducted, and how the parties relate to each other and are treated in the process"* and assert that it consists of 4 principles. These are:

1. Fair representation
2. Fair treatment and fair play
3. Voluntary agreement
4. Transparency

Their research indicate that PJ has a direct effect on effectiveness of the agreements which is stronger than DJ since DJ has impact on effectiveness indirectly only through adherence to PJ principles. We can seek out those abovementioned principles of the PJ in the Astana process due to the relative similarity of norms and values between Russia, Turkey and Iran more than the Geneva actors who are more diverse; by which we may assume that fair representation and treatment principles lag behind. However, it is going to be analyzed whether due to being less democratic (as it is often perceived in the western world), principles of voluntary agreement and transparency in fact drives Astana parties to drop behind the UN-led Geneva.

⁵⁷ Acquired from Finnemore & Sikkink. (1998). p.896

From another angle, Distributive Justice (DJ) as “*the justice of the allocation of benefits and burdens between parties, as these are discussed during the negotiation process and reflected in the outcome*” and it, too consists of 4 principles which are as follows (Albin & Druckman, 2014a, pp. 429–430):

1. Equality
2. Proportionality
3. Need
4. Compensation

As mentioned above, DJ has an impact on negotiations conditionally— despite the fact that its 4 principles are present in different levels in both cases (equality and proportionality in distribution of resources and burdens, meeting the needs and compensation). As Albin and Druckman argues, PJ has a direct and DJ an indirect effect only when it is adherent to PJ. Similarly the reason behind the fruitfulness of Astana as compared to Geneva is asserted in the constructivist hypothesis as that the former precedes the latter in justice. In order to measure such difference, the principles of both PJ and DJ are needs to be evaluated in terms of the peace negotiations in the following part. Nevertheless, our constructivist hypothesis is as follows:

H3: Geneva process has been less fruitful than Astana process because Russia-Turkey-Iran trio perform better in “Justice” in terms of both PJ and DJ as compared to Geneva parties.

4. ANALYTICAL PART

4.1 Application of Realist Approaches to Syrian Peace Process

On the previous chapters, we asserted that Astana trio precedes Geneva parties in realizing their capabilities on negotiations. Before jumping to the conclusion on whether such claim is correct, it is necessary to respectively evaluate actors by their 4 capability categories that have different impacts on their Syrian agenda, as mentioned on chapter 3.2. We take the influence of those capabilities precisely on their own efforts in Syria instead of how successful they are in influencing the sub-actors they represent. In this regard, following paragraphs where their positions are revealed serve as the basis of numerical rating at the end of the chapter.

To begin with, Russian **military capacity** is best demonstrated in its military actions after involving in the Syrian Civil War in September 2015. By not focusing from sole doctrinal perspective or technical capacities in quantity, we need to have a glance into broader Russian strategic military actions. For this reason, the first strategic aspect regarding Russian military alignment with Assad and Iran is that it has remained on the strategic level instead of getting involved into combat with its own troops except for high ranking officials that are masterminding the dispersed SAA and irregular Shiite militia.

During the first phase of their involvement, regime forces instructed by Russians set their focus primarily on elimination of the opposition and terrorist factions around the capital Damascus and securing the main access points, border areas and highways from south of the country, Deraa city to the north, Aleppo. With the help of newly established and improved Russian naval and air bases near the Mediterranean coast, those connection points allowed for the transfer of military material, weaponry, gasoline and foodstuff across the country. After securing these objectives, the military supervision centred upon regaining gas facilities on the Homs desert and reaching to besieged Deir ez-Zor city while eliminating opposition within Deraa and Aleppo cities (Lavrov, 2018). These

actions prove the fact that Russian military has been successful in working in circles: the first narrow circle around the capital and a second larger circle encompassing the cities on the perimeter. Another concise but significant point regarding Russian military capacity in Syrian arena is that it gave them the ground to test and develop new arms systems as well as facilitating the environment for Russian troops to gain experience in different circumstances such as fight against irregular militia in urban or open areas (Majumdar, 2018). Therefore, its established military capacity influenced the course of events not only in the beginning of its involvement but also during the conflict— which doubles the salience we put on the strength of Russian military.

Secondly, Russian **economy capacity** which is strongly connected to the extraction and exportation of energy resources carries pros and cons regarding the Syrian conflict. The events in Syria led to favourable situation for regional Russian energy policies (except for the expenditures made to sustain the Ba'ath rule over Syria), as control of energy depots is not only significant to give sustainability to Russia's junior partner but also to have the grasp of regional energy for Russia as an energy rich country whose economy is largely based on its exportation. By having sea access points under its control and gas facilities on Homs desert, Russia has been able to secure both the energy production through the hands of its partner and its possible access routes via Mediterranean ports. By enabling presence of the Iran-backed militia on further south east (thusly exposing the US and Iran against each other) Russia has been actively putting pressure on the remaining energy rich areas in order to gain the upper hand.

However, a non-diversified economy is open to global price fluctuations which brings up the issue of how long can Russia endure being actively involved into the conflict. This uncertainty particularly arises from the fact that as of 2017, nearly 4/5 of Russian exports are natural resources (OEC, n.d.-c). However, by increasing its gold reserves, Russia takes ensuring reserve-diversification measures from dollarization of its energy-indexed economy that balloons with high level of dollar returns from exportation (Daily Sabah & AA, 2019). Due to these reasons, subsidizing Assad forces both militarily and economically is an encumbrance which needs to be lowered into a sustainable and

predictable level. These facts indicate that Russian economic capability comes after its military strength and stands at a rather moderate level.

As for its **societal capacity** in Syrian conflict, Russia ranks as the lowest among Astana trio despite being the largest country of the world and nearly having a population of Turkey and Iran combined. Except for a small Orthodox Christian population, Russia has no demographic connection with Syria *and* its geographic position compels usage of Turkish straits. Due to that, the conditions propel taking advantage of Muslim Chechen forces as military police to establish that loose connection (Hauer, 2017). Nevertheless, being a foreign force that is supporting the side that is in conflict with the vast majority of the population (Sunni Arab) carries negativity more than advantages from the perspective of the regional dynamics. Yet, when evaluated from the Russian perspective, a large population with vast territories provides with necessary means such as a large armed forces, source of necessary materials to sustain ground operations and manpower— which enables Russian strategic interests to be realized in practice. Therefore, it allows Russia to catch up with its counterparts through a moderate influence on this category.

Another strong capability of Russia apart from its military strength is its **political capacity**. As mentioned in theoretical chapter, there are two legs of this category: (1) political stability and (2) competence. To begin with, it needs to be stated that *political stability* is more related to Russian domestic factors and has a strong correlation with geostrategic ambitions. After the post-Soviet turmoil gave way to administrative stability under Putin's governance, Syria represents the first instance of a pro-Soviet country which is not within the direct hinterland of Russia to become heavily instrumentalized for Russian strategic interests once more. The long-term governing personas within the Russian state are also responsible for continuous state policies— which allows their counterparts to become more certain about what to expect from them. Since the start of the civil war, significant figures at the government, foreign affairs and military which are responsible for carrying out talks with states that are engaged in Syrian arena remain unchanged (e.g. Putin, Medvedev, Lavrov, Shoygu and Peskov). Therefore, Russian long-

standing drive to access to warm water ports goes parallel with its recent political stability; where Syria is crucial as it hosts Russian Mediterranean bases.

Secondly, these political conditions enhance the *competence* of Russia as well since continuity enables long-lasting and more complex strategies to be materialized. However, the importance of previously established political ties is incontrovertible. These ties do not necessarily help Russian influence to gain momentum parallel to Assad regime's recapture of territories and regression of the opposition but it was one of the factors that allowed such involvement into the civil war in the first place. For instance, the Russian Naval Base in Tartus that is dating back to Ba'ath party's takeover of Syria is one of the most solid linkages between two countries. As those existing ties and facilities provided a function of springboard for Russian involvement, diplomatic value of Russia as the protector of Ba'ath regime on the international arena has increased reciprocally—not because of the Assad's recapture of critical areas of the country. Apart from that, Russian diplomatic power is crucial in legitimizing its actions as well. Being a permanent member of UNSC not only blocks any international counteraction against Russian efforts but also allows for the agreed terms under Russian supervision in Astana to be transferred to the UN table in Geneva. Due to these, Russian competence is nourished by all the previous aspects mentioned above and highly influential. As a result, Russia holds high political capacity arising from stable long-term politics and influential competence.

Turkey as another party of that table almost totally has a security perspective on the Syrian arena and its influence is directly connected to how successful it is in implementing necessary measures. Consequently, its **military capabilities** are determinative. Sharing the land border with Syria enhances its military influence where certain opposition factions which are ideologically and ethnically in tendency to align with Turkey are in close proximity. Since the ground operations are initiated in August 2016, hybrid warfare has been the key feature of Turkish transborder operations. Similar to Russia, Turkish military mostly remained on the supervisory level where limited numbers of professional units have been involved into direct combat. Furthermore, new domestic armed-UAV systems which were purchased into inventory in previous years

have been heavily used and developed according to operational feedback (Daily Sabah & AA, 2018; Lake, 2019). Therefore, Turkish proximity to conflict area along with its operational allies keeps its military capabilities up with the level of Russia although its capacity per se remarkably lags behind its counterpart's.

Secondly, **economic capabilities** are the first weak aspect of Turkey. After its rapid GDP growth from 2001 to 2013⁵⁸, economic trends became negative (World Bank, n.d.). As an energy-poor country, Turkish economy is focused more on to secondary industries where the imported petrochemicals utilized in industrial production of textile, industrial machines and metal products (OEC, n.d.-d). Due to this characteristic, regional turmoil had unfavourable effects on Turkish economy as transborder exports with Syria, Iraq and Iran shrunk 7% from 2011 to 2017— which, when combined with migration of over 3 million Syrians to Turkey, created a burden of 40 billion US\$ (OEC, n.d.-f; Yildizalp & Gundogan, 2019). These conditions matched with indirect economic consequences of regional turmoil such as rising energy prices, risk premium, interest rates and inflation thus, reduced economic activity and purchasing power (Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Turkish currency crisis in summer 2018 is one of the proving factors of those consequences. It can also be asserted that any move towards reducing armed conflicts in Syria and Iraq is to create positive inclinations for Turkish economy directly and indirectly as certain amount of refugees may go back to their hometowns. Therefore, even though Turkish economic capacity is resistant to immediate instabilities to some extent, it shows fragility in the scenario of disrupted peace processes.

Thirdly, Turkish **societal capacity** is the highest despite both its population and size rank last among Astana trio. The reason is that there are common ethnic and religious groups residing both in Turkey and Syria while the majority of both countries share affinity from historical and sectarian backgrounds. Two conditions that occurred after the civil war started prove this aspect. Firstly, Idlib, Aleppo, Raqqa and al-Hasakah provinces became the epicentres of Syrian opposition with their Sunni majority and Arab-Kurdish-Turkmen populations. Secondly, these groups are vastly cross-border blood relatives who

⁵⁸ From 200b US\$ to 950b US\$

were organized under certain armed groups as opposition factions— which enabled Turkey to penetrate into Syrian opposition and to direct those groups according to its own benefit for the past years. While both Russia and Iran didn't have any option but to depend on the political alignment with Damascus government, Turkey has been enjoying the advantage of keeping not only diplomatic (as it has been in the case of Syrian National Council) but also low-level connections with Syrian communities. Its territorial size also indirectly increases its geostrategic salience as through the Turkish straits Russian naval units and logistics have to pass and, on the east, the country is positioned to reach Iran. The geostrategic position of the country obliges any other actor that is competing in the Syrian arena cooperate certain moves with Turkey.

Lastly, the first aspect of Turkish **political capacity**, its *political stability*, is rather ambiguous to examine due to two contradicting factors. Primarily, election of conservative Erdoğan government 5 consecutive terms since 2002 upholds a certain level of political stability as the time allows for longer-term state policies to be implemented (similar to Russia). On the other hand, 2016 coup d'état attempt demonstrates that unofficial within-state organisations are disruptive of that stability as such action requires rooting within the state for decades. After elimination of that domestic menace, post-2016 period indicates activeness of Turkish security apparatus regardless of that recent domestic turmoil. By acquiring the official guarantorship of the Syrian opposition at the first Astana meeting 5 months after the coup attempt, bettered domestic political stability enabled Turkey to further its policies less cautiously. 3 transborder operations on Syrian soil are apparent outcomes of its activeness. Nevertheless, obscurity of Turkish political future leads to a negative evaluation of its political stability regarding how its national strategic interests on Syria are going to be implemented.

Secondly, Turkish *competence* is dependent on its two strategic state interests: (1) to directly establish border safety in order to prevent migrant flow and unlawful trespassing and; (2) to execute necessary strategic actions in order to perpetuate the integrity of the countries on its south east. In this regard, we witness the military actions conducted in Syria and Iraq to fulfil the first goal and engaging diplomatic connections

with Russia and Iran who have substantial influence on both the countries for the second. Astana table is no different. In order to maintain integrity of Syrian state, Turkey has given commitments on political transition (e.g. Sochi memorandum) and making concessions to maintain and legitimize its military presence on the Syrian soil indirectly with the help of those compromises to Russia. Hence, Turkish influence on Astana negotiations is tied to how successful it has been on (1) establishing direct border security and (2) the status quo beyond that borders. In other words, not only the administrative integrity of the Syrian state but also a friendly and stable government is crucial for maintaining the militarily achieved ends. In order to ensure both of those achievements, Turkish actions are complemented with diplomatic consummations; in which, since December 2016, Russia is involved as the sole actor to provide that necessary connection between Turkey and the Syrian state. The transition of military capabilities to diplomatic grounds is the key element of Turkish competence that takes part in Astana process. However, as we witness incomplete talks and partial success in implementation of ceasefire regime (especially around the Idlib pocket)⁵⁹, competence is another weak aspect that diminishes Turkish capabilities. Therefore, when evaluated together, obscure political stability and adverse competence keep Turkish political capacity at the below-moderate level.

The last of Astana guarantors, Iran, differs in typology of its **military capabilities** than its counterparts. After 1979 Islamic Revolution, administrative structures of Iran are intertwined with its security institutions: primarily two separate military as one being the recruited regular army and the other Revolutionary Guards who are linked to command chain of religious hierarchy. Iranian Ministry of Intelligence is another power base that executes its agenda concerning the recruitment of Shiite militia across MENA for the operations in Syria and Iraq apart from its typical clandestine operations. When the turmoil hit Syria and Iraq in 2011, Iran seized the opportunity to make itself militarily indispensable for the states that it provides militia against ISIS threat and political support in the interregional level. Due to these facts, Iranian actions in Syria cannot be separated

⁵⁹ Partial success in establishing direct border security due to incomplete ground operations (1) and less success in establishing the status quo beyond its borders (2).

from its broader regional policies which also encompass Iraq and Lebanon. Without direct Iranian involvement into the civil war, neither the Russian assistance which remained on the decision making and aviation-support level nor the shattered Assad forces that were unceasingly losing ground to the opposition and other radical groups could have succeeded in stabilizing the situation. However, decentralized and multi-headed structure of Iranian-backed militia keeps its level of capacity behind Russia and Turkey.

Secondly, Iranian **economic capacity** is heavily restricted by international embargos led by the US which narrows options to fulfil its potential. Similar to Russia, its energy-indexed economy (around 80% of total exports) is highly sensitive to price fluctuations and the ability to sell resources (OEC, n.d.-a). As a result of ongoing regional turmoil, both these factors are prominent— whether considering Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Hormuz Strait or more recently Syria where, due to renewed energy embargos initiated by Trump administration, its petroleum-based economy has shrunk from 2.7 million barrels per day to 380 thousand per day within a span of 15 months (Vakhshouri, 2019). This downsizing is critical for the Iranian economy which sustains its military and political activities on MENA mainly by exporting energy resources. Its direct presence in Iraq and Syria; and indirect influence in Lebanon, Yemen and Palestine creates remarkable economic burden while, as a consequence, inflation levels reach 40% annually (Barbuscia, 2019). Due to these facts, Iranian economy after the reinitiated US embargo is in a fragile position to sustain further activities and the weakest by far among the compared actors.

Thirdly, Iran carries a substantial **societal** potential from its large population and territorial size when both these factors meet with Shia-Nusayri populations within Syria via Iraq. Its smaller size compared to Russia is balanced up with direct ethno-religious connections similar to Turkey. The Shia crescent (a term that is often used for Shia populations located outside of Iran) thusly functions as the linkage of Iranian societal influence to Syria— where Iraq plays the key role to connect those two countries. On the contrary to negativities of extensive size of Russia (diversion of focus on MENA and being affected by other global incidents), Iran is better able to direct its energy on Near

East via that linkage. However, lack of influence over a vast share of total Syrian population because of predominantly Sunni-Arab demographic structure limits Iran in implementing large-scale policies concerning Syrian peace process and leaves it in a moderate level for this category.

Lastly, Iranian **political capacity** resembles more to its Turkish counterpart's because of *instable domestic politics* that are particularly influenced by economic conditions which prevent their domestic persistence outlast for a longer period of time. Internal discomfort in Iranian case, on the other hand, is much higher than its neighbour. Anti-regime protests that occur periodically carry high potential to turn into ethnic conflict when multi-ethnic structure of Iran is taken into account. As strong Shiite homage belief system deterred such disintegration until now, increasing economic problems and international pressures makes the circumstances more fragile. Therefore, power bases outside of Iran (such as Iraqi Shiite paramilitary groups, Lebanese Hezbollah, Houthis of Yemen or Assad government itself) are means to counterbalance external pressures before reaching to Iranian territory— and to those bases Iran invests most of its resources.

These suggest that Iranian *competence* in MENA is correlated with its political stability (which shows significant inadequacies). Syria is no exception. Implementation of Iranian regional policies where Syria is only a part of gives us the hint on how competent Iran is. Even though latent characteristics of the Iranian regional policies prohibit exact analysis, its influence areas on Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Iraq indicate the importance of the corridor which connects Tehran to Mediterranean through main trade arteries and possible energy corridors. The safety and maintenance of this connection is crucial for the Iranian influence to endure international pressures. Therefore, asserting political dominion and having a military presence of its militia and IRGC are two key preconditions required to keep that corridor open. So far the route is kept open despite constant disturbance by US troops located on eastern Syria and western Iraq; which proves the fact that Iranian competence has certain grounds despite economic turbulence, global sanctions and domestic political instability. However, it is highly fragile because of economic and social

conditions. These factors suggest that Iranian political capacity with low political stability and slightly better competence is at below moderate level.

As for the Geneva part, the US and EU need to be evaluated together. The reason for that is not only lack of hard power in Syria except for the US-led international coalition against ISIL but also the inability of actors to drive the regional affairs towards western interests such as France and Great Britain who used to had regional potentate. In other words, the complementary role among western Geneva actors for each other's inadequacies compels them to be taken together in the analysis.

Firstly, the US **military capabilities** on Syria largely stand out by operations conducted alongside local paramilitary or their connected administrative organisations since the beginning of the armed conflict. Several opposition forces were given political and logistics support in order to topple the Ba'ath rule in that period. However, the US alignment has shifted from the main opposition and its representatives on the peace process (SNC and its sub armed groups) to YPG. Anti-ISIL operations on eastern Euphrates in Syria and Mosul in Iraq demonstrate high US military capabilities due to two factors: (1) conducting overseas operations 6000 miles away for a long period of time; (2) organizing military proxies of which supplied and trained up to the number of 50 thousand. On the contrary, EU actors only have liaison officers in this coalition with no direct participation to operations. Due to these, the proven US military strength (not only in Syria but long-lasting armed conflicts since 20th century) puts their efficiency at the maximum within this conflict (i.e. above all the previously mentioned actors) while EU ranks as last with its nonexistent military power in Syria.

Secondly, the US and EU's **economic capabilities** precede their Astana counterparts as their total GDP reaches above 40% of the globe *and* main export partner of Turkey and Russia are EU countries (IMF, n.d.). American and European production abilities, high-value products, research and development, economic diversity and export ratios are matters of public record for both parties. However, the proximity of Syria to Europe as a main access route to Mediterranean (both for migration and trade) puts more importance over content of the EU actors for Astana trio than the US. Nevertheless, both

of their collaborated economic abilities make sustainment for diplomatic and military policies possible— especially regarding containment of mass migration, energy security and return of ISIL foreign fighters. The non-military priorities of the EU actors thusly enable different dialogue subjects emerge with Turkey in issues of migration and foreign fighters; and with Russia in energy security while connection with Iran remains on the nuclear deal grounds. The only economic upper hand that one of the EU’s counterparts has is Russian energy monopoly over the EU market which is attempted to be reduced by renewable energy, other possibilities such as LNG or North African resources and reduced energy need in time due to technological innovations (Buck, 2018; Eurostat, 2019). Therefore, we witness economic power of different EU actors leading to preservation of minimal cooperation grounds despite substantial positional differences in the Syrian conflict. Due to their supplemental alignment with the US, western Geneva parties share a very strong economic position as compared to Astana trio.

On the contrary to their high economic capacities, their **societal positions** lag behind the Astana trio because of relative distance to Syria, lack of mutual ethnicity and religion; and almost non-existent state affairs with the UN-recognized Assad regime while Russian and Iranian ongoing contacts/contracts enable representation of Assad’s interest on negotiations table. On the other hand, issues such as migration and return of ISIS fighters that are citizens of EU countries create that very link which doesn’t increase European influence on Syrian conflict but, on the contrary, put them to inconvenience and compel to engage with Turkey to prevent further distress. As these factors are not applicable to the US-Astana trio relations, size of its population and territory only has impacts on other capabilities such as larger economic activity and military quality. This indirectness and distance to the conflict area puts the US efficiency above the EU’s even though they are merely capable of catching up with Astana’s non-contiguous countries, Russia and Iran let alone Turkey who is highest among the compared actors.

As for their **political capacities**, democratic culture which is a strong characteristic of the US and EU prevents any systemic *political instability* while events that occur domestically carry potentials to jeopardize their Syrian policies. To be more

specific, arguments about the Trump's official impeachment process during Violent Phase II, his constant rhetoric to withdraw US troops from MENA and trade wars with China all have had negative domestic implications for American political stability. Similar to that, migration and ISIS terrorism gave rise to right-wing populism in the EU and the rise of Eurosceptic and anti-Islamic parties puts the relations with Turkey in a critical position because of halted migrant population thanks to previous mutual efforts. On the other hand, both the US and EU are surely more stable than Turkey and Iran who have been dealing with systemic issues. When it comes to Syrian arena, their long-term domestic political stability and recent discussions about migration and terrorism have led to static positions in peace negotiations due to unchanged state interests and ability to coop with external threats by using their distance to conflict zone. Therefore, with their long-term democratic experience, external issues are to have minimal effects on their political stability.

Furthermore, European level of *competence* goes parallel but not reciprocal with the US' since having non-military priorities in the resolution of Syrian Civil War such as prevention of mass migration, energy security and return of foreign fighters (ISIL, HTS and YPG), create no other option but to "bandwagon" to the US military presence in Syria in order to share a military solution favourable to them as well. Their economic and political capabilities surely are essential to complement the US' influence that is primarily rooted in having military presence across the region. However, actors within the EU are unable to implement their own agenda on Syria singlehandedly; since the other scale of the balance of power (either Russia or Iran, or Turkey) has strong influence on the field by exercising their actual military power and control over certain parts of Syria. Therefore, their neutral position in this category needs to be attached to US'.

From another point of view, aforementioned change of US alignment from the main opposition towards YPG have undermined the its role within the Geneva process as those various opposition factions that are in fact fighting against YPG perceive them no more differently than Assad-supporting groups. Therefore, if the immaturity of the conflict in terms of ripeness obstructed Geneva I and II to encompass all parties' ultimate interests and led to failure, then the changing position of the US averted the talks led by

de Mistura to have an impact on a possible peaceful solution. On the other hand, extra ripeness factor that came by the rapid metastasis of ISIS across the region obliged all the actors of the conflict (not only the US) to crawl back into their shells to observe who is going to be affected by the new field dynamics. Due to those factors, it shouldn't come as no surprise that the power of opposition groups across the country has declined after the emergence of ISIS and US alignment has consequently shifted from them. These new dynamics obscured the Geneva III and IV processes since, now the balance of power gained weight for the Assad's part also because of the Russian involvement. These demonstrate the declining US competence throughout the course of events while its rivals were acquiring relatively better positions. As a result, political capacity of the US is supported by its political stability and hampered by declining competence which, when evaluated together, remain at the moderate level. As for the EU actors, both factors are supportive to their political capacities thanks to democratic tendencies despite recent right-wing/Euroscptic rise and ability to include themselves in the negotiations table by utilizing the issues of the civil war such as migration and terrorism. Therefore, the EU is positioned in "political capacity" at the above-moderate level.

In the light of these assessments, it is necessary to score each of the abovementioned capabilities in order to specifically measure and compare Astana parties' positions with US-backed actors of Geneva Process. Numerical assessment is conducted below within the span of 6 points; as 0 representing "nonexistent" value, 1 indicating to absolute ineffectiveness, 3 to moderate and 5 to maximum effectiveness of the respective capabilities (see figure below).

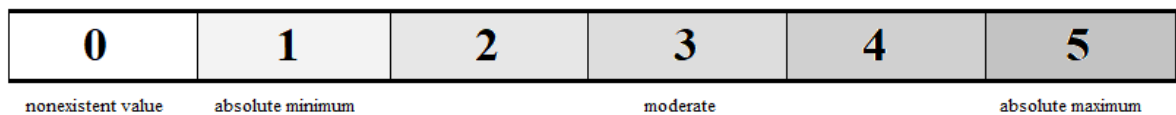


Figure 9. Evaluation Scale

Parties receive the following values based on this numerical scale according to the analyses conducted on previous pages.

	Military Capacity	Economic Capacity	Societal Capacity	Political Capacity
RUS	4	3	3	4
TUR	4	2	4	2
IR	3	1	3	2
USA	5	4	3	3
EU	0	4	2	4

Also, their total scores in each of those categories along with scores added up altogether are given below.

	Astana Trio	Other Geneva Parties
Military Capacity Total	11	5
Military Capacity Average	3.6	2.5
Economic Capacity Total	6	8
Economic Capacity Average	2	4
Societal Capacity Total	10	5
Societal Capacity Average	3.3	2.5
Political Capacity Total	8	7
Political Capacity Average	2.6	3.5
	Total Score: 35	Total Score: 25
	Average Score: 11.6	Average Score: 12.5

These numbers demonstrate that Astana trio surpasses US-backed Geneva actors in 3 out of 4 categories *and*, most importantly, in total score as well (40% higher). Despite the fact that other Geneva parties are at better position marginally in total average

scores, such small difference is negligible since it cannot distinctively outmatch its counterpart (e.g. they share 50:50 of each average score for respective categories). In fact, even the category which western Geneva parties are better off in total score (economic capacity) demonstrates close results. These results draw a clear pre-eminence picture of the Astana trio in Syrian arena which explains Astana tracks fruitfulness.

As a result of realist empirical analysis, these numbers can be accounted for by the fact that the initiative of Russia, Turkey and Iran which led to memorandums has given outcomes in defiance of the rivalry among Russia, Turkey and Iran while Geneva track lags behind it due to lack of strong implementation mechanisms (arising mainly from comparable military incapacity that encompasses whole of Syria and proximity to the conflict area). In conclusion, actors of the Astana talks have been better able to realize their capabilities on implementing a common agenda during negotiations based on their performance on capabilities in general as compared with the Geneva parties. Therefore, our first hypothesis is correct.

4.2 Application of Liberalist Approaches to Syrian Peace Process

In this subchapter, it is necessary to determine preferences (both actual and potential) of actors of two separate peace talks before evaluating how well they are adjusted to others'. The scrutiny of their surrounding domestic and transnational environments will help us to grasp the rationale behind those preferences.

Russian interests regarding the Syrian conflict is often perceived through military security and energy dimensions. Nevertheless, the intersection of Russian concerns with the Syrian Civil War paves the way for understanding of another threat which can be categorized under the name "radicalization" and carries a domestic importance with itself. After the conflict has transformed into the violent phase, Syria (along with Iraq) has become the magnet for thousands of radical foreign fighters including Russian nationals from North Caucasus; with no specific data on their numbers as of 2019 (up to 11.000)

yet, there are formations as either brigades and battalions subjected to HTS or individual groups such as Ajnad al-Kavkaz from Caucasian Emirate; and also fighters from Russian hinterland e.g. Uzbek fighters from Katibat Imam al Bukhari or Turkestan Islamic Party (Rich & Conduit, 2015, pp. 120–122; Steinberg, 2016). This third dimension is related to traditional Russian self-restriction paradigm which was shaped around the support to pro-Soviet Arab countries and has altered substantially after the Russian involvement into the civil war in September 2015 (Gaub & Popescu, 2018, p. 18). By having direct military and political support to its Mediterranean ally, Russia encounters not only geostrategic ruptures from a distant region rather than being solely concerned with conflict areas around its hinterland but also engages with radical terrorism that has been a major problem on the North Caucasus or carries a potential to spring up in post-Soviet areas indirectly through Syrian soil.

This, when approached from the Russian perspective, is surely a matter of interest since putting a distance between itself and an area of conflicting interests enables Russia to opt for more flexible options. Therefore, its state interests are built from bottom-up instead of only being influenced by global geopolitics which Syria is a part of. However, issues such as energy safety also imply significance for the domestic conditions: economic sustainability. Since having an economy largely based on a single-type-of exportation (minerals, crude oil & gas and petroleum-based products), Russian economy is highly affected by global price fluctuations (OEC, n.d.-b). Therefore, content of Russian societal actors and power bases are another essentiality not only when looking at the energy from a security angle but also from the domestic angle.

Another interest of Russian foreign policy regarding Syrian conflict ensues from how adherent the Syrian central authority and its domestic proponents are to Russia. In other words, it is a transnational society surrounding as mentioned in the chapter 3.3 which directly influences the successive preferences of the Syrian state. Therefore for Russia, it is vital to retain Nusayri rule over the Syrian government in order to make those policies beneficial for the Russian interests during and after the civil war. Furthermore, it brings conspicuous partiality to Russian preferences that are often observed in the

international arena; mainly UNGA and UNSC meetings against the violations of human rights conducted by Assad forces. In a nutshell, mainly 3 types of preferences reside in the Russia's Syria policy: (1) Distancing itself from Russian-national Islamist fighters coming mainly from North Caucasus but also post-Soviet hinterland; (2) Maintaining the energy security in Syria to handle energy safety for the Russian domestic economy which is on big scale based on natural resources; (3) Putting the necessary support behind pro-Russian Nusayri government.

Turkish interests and preferences on the Syrian arena are not in stark contrast to those of Russia's but deeply dissimilar in origin— particularly arising from the fact that the actual security concerns of Turkey cannot be distanced as it is for Russia since the country is on the other side of the land borders. Due to this fundamental difference, buffering instead of distancing is the most prominent policy choice of Turkey since the beginning of the Astana talks. Starting from the first ground operation on northern Aleppo in 2016 until today, a 30 mile safe zone has often been voiced by Turkish authorities for both the anti-ISIL coalition and Russia-Iran duo which have clear intentions to exploit Turkish concerns to secure their own positions.

However, there are other sub policy preferences that have branched out of the concept of buffering (i.e. encountering the conflict beyond the borders) that complements this policy choice. First of them is maintaining an administrative integrity of state of Syria in order to respond and work with a central authority that is vital for the region when considering the bitter effects of an administrative gap during the ongoing turmoil. In fact, Turkish post-2016 actions have repeatedly tended to opt for another state actor both to engage in anti-terror campaigns and to continue the peace talks. For the former, Turkey's choice of action was to cooperate with Russia and Iran which also indirectly reaches to Assad's part. And, as for the latter, there have been efforts to legitimize FSA by turning it into a regular army that responds SNC and local administrative civilian councils, establishing police force in order to take militia out of the civilian areas; and separating the newly created Syrian National Army (SNA) from other opposition forces so that it

becomes a formal party of both the Astana and Geneva tables rather than being constantly targeted by Russia, Iran and Syrian regime for being a terrorist organization.

The second of those sub policy preferences is exertion of influence over the population which primarily inhabits those buffer areas and also whole of Syria. This aspect arises from the need not only to assert military dominance but also to nurture social influence over the controlled areas. Syrian refugees that are currently residing in Turkey are thusly become key elements of such interest. Their future relocation on those buffer areas increases the Turkish potential by having a friendly population within Syria but remaining under Turkish zone of influence. However, achieving the social support is where interests of Syrian regime and Iran clash with Turkey's since their presence are rooted in either ideological or religious/denominational backgrounds. Due to these facts, this second preference is perhaps the key in maintaining the buffer area from the Turkish perspective.

And, at last the third policy preference is complementary of the previous two in order to form the ultimate pro-Turkish buffer area: a friendly government. Both an integral administration and a Turkey-friendly population need to be governed by a friendly government so that the influence of other major actors that are to reside in Syria for a foreseeable future is restricted. This is another area of clashing interests; yet this time between Russia and Turkey due to a future legitimacy problem which is possible to arise when a population that has escaped from Assad regime and Russian attacks doesn't want neither to cooperate nor allow their presence. In this regard, Turkish and Russian preferences are in direct conflict with each other at the administrative level unless a shared policy is implemented cooperatively.

As the last actor of Astana trio, Iran's interests are much more integrated to those players who paired their policies with them. These actors vary across MENA, however ideologically formed Shia military organisations on the field level, denominational groups such as Alawites/Nusayris, Druze and Shia on the societal level and anti-US Ba'ath party and its members on the governmental level are 3 spheres of Iranian interest bases. To put it more explicitly, understanding interests of Iran without determining of those above-

stated actors' is a futile attempt. Hence, it is necessary to look at them not individually but collectively.

First of all, Shiite armed groups that are gathered through the leadership of Iran are more ideological than they are political organisations. When analyzed more deeply, it is visible that those that we see in the Syrian arena are only minor pieces of a larger network that are strictly linked to Iranian Shia clergy that is currently in control of Iran's regional policies. Promotion of larger influential organisations and procurement of logistics in every necessary level such as Lebanese Hezbollah or Badr Organisation by Iran is a fact. However, this goes beyond a political activity that is conducted by the state of Iran. When being evaluated, Iraqi and Persian schools of Shiism needs to be thus segmented— which is also visible on Iraq based Najaf's absent support on Iranian clergy's call for jihad in Syria (Smyth, 2015, pp. 13–20).

As mentioned in chapter 2.6, there are numerous Shiite militia groups that joined the ranks of Assad forces. Nevertheless, it brought a duality in management of those groups since whether they fully serve to the benefit of Syrian state or Iran under the mask of Shiite jihad is ambiguous. Therefore, social support for their presence is the key in determining whose interests are stood up for at the end of the day. Despite being on the Assad regime's side in fight against opposition and terrorist groups, their social bases both rely on non-Sunni population that was mentioned in chapter 2.3. Therefore, the inner balance between interests of Assad and Iran is irrelevant to Sunni population's endorsement but rather the positions of Nusayri and other Shia denominations are key determinants whether Iran's interests are taken precedence over Assad regime. Moreover, these social groups work as a mean for Iranian regional policies to be taken up to governmental level, the state of Syria regardless of who governs it. However, when they fulfil their role— i.e. the policies now influence the government of Syria so as to serve the Iranian interests— Assad's governance is in direct competition with Iranian policies instead of going parallel under civil war conditions as often perceived.

On the larger scale, those 3 aspects also create rivalry confrontation between Russia and Iran about who will take precedence over the other in influencing the Syrian

state. In this regard, Russia and Turkey have a larger space to increase their cooperation than Russia and Iran since the latter duo work to acquire the same price while the former has yet to reach such engagement level.

At this point, the interest-based explanations move away from hard to soft power policies when European actors of the Geneva process are analyzed. Therefore, we need to start by separating those from the US' as the latter carries out military actions in order to further its interests while the former rely on their ally's operations to make room for their MENA policies.

Interests of European actors are shaped by economic, social and terrorism concerns respectively starting from the beginning of the Arab Spring. More specifically, Syrian Civil War has dominated the social sphere because of mass migration and its consequences for the European communities' economic lives, social triggers that came by the increasing Middle Eastern Muslim population and ISIS terror attacks that followed the radicalization of Muslims of Europe within the turmoil that created large potentials for spread of radical ideologies. These factors are intertwined inseparably for the European states during the ongoing peace process of Syria.

Hence, starting from the last aspect (elimination of ISIS territorial control and prevention of its resurrection) each powerful European actor such as France or Germany drew its red line. Their stipulations are primarily emerged from this essentiality while the following interest such as prevention of another great wave of migrants currently residing in Turkey fall behind it. Speaking from the practical sense, Turkish ground operations on north of Syria against YPG are not as much of a concern for European actors as an uncontrolled territory that has large potentials to spring ISIS cells back to life. Therefore, the underlying cause of the short-termed harsh objections against Turkey's actions is ISIS itself instead of "protection of Kurds" or reshaping the regional dynamics through creation of a European-friendly administration on northern Syria as it is often promoted so. However, from mid to long-term, the interests move towards those regional policy preferences that were stated just above.

On the other hand, US interests on Syria are reflections of its global policy preferences. In its 2018 Defence Strategy paper, China is taken as a potential challenger of US global hegemony, Russia as a challenger of its periphery and seeks to “*change European and Middle East security and economic structures to its favour*”; and two rogue regimes, Iran and North Korea are accused of destabilizing their regions through support of terrorism and pursuit of nuclear weapons (US Department of Defense, 2018, p. 2). 2 of these “top 4” treats are directly involved into the Syrian conflict, and therefore require attention for the US interests-based approach. Because of the reason that the Syrian arena itself provides the US with chance to engage with them, two epicentres of that approach are the areas where Russian and American interests overlap with each other regarding ethno-religious groups of Syria (notably Kurds and Sunni or Christian Arabs) and control of energy-rich areas; where two are coinciding with each other geographically— and the area where the “ethnic” and “energy” meet up is eastern Euphrates.

Due to these, American policy preferences are shaped by those two power bases which they own one and are in conflict with the other. Neither Russia nor the US is willing to forgo the Euphrates basin due to this very fact. Both the actors attempt to gain an upper hand by bringing in other regional actors for particular incidents from time to time— such as Turkey and Iran— so that the new dynamics can shift the status quo in their favours. These facts suggest that the US presence in Syria isn’t of capital importance on its own but it is a part of policies on the global scale that carry meaning only when matched with allied actors’ interests. Political backing of European actors is thusly indispensable for the American interest in Syria to serve its regional policies that consequently reach a broader, global level.

After depicting each of the actors’ actual or potential preferences individually, it is essential to analyze their adjusted behaviour according to their relevant counterparts’ positions. First of all, Russian and Turkish policies have interests that converge by topic yet, differ by their practical applications. To clarify this, a diagram is helpful:

3 pillars of Russia's Syrian policies

3 sub-dimensions of Turkish buffering policy

1) Economic (Energy) Security
(including domestic and regional)

→ a) influence on the population of buffer area

2) Regional Military Security
(including foreign fighters problem)

→ b) administrative integrity of Syria

3) Adherence of Syrian state to Russia

→ c) a friendly government

The first pillar of Russia's Syrian policies and sub-dimension "a" of Turkish buffering policy both carry societal factors with themselves. As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, energy as the major asset of Russian economy has crucial importance in Russian domestic content (society and other domestic power bases); which directs Russia to secure for itself the energy resources and supply areas of Syria. Russian coastal military built-up and advance through energy-rich Homs desert are part of this inclination. Within the social aspect, Turkish interests are thusly non-coincident with those of Russia due to assertion of soft-power on the population of a prospective buffer area on north of Syria; as it is far from threatening Russia's energy-oriented attitude.

Furthermore, the second pillar and sub-dimension "b" are two means through which Russia and Turkey may accomplish their larger goals. This second leg is the most open to compromise for both players since elimination of foreign fighters also increases the relative power of FSA/SNA's foes that subsequently would allow both SAA and SNA to direct their efforts to separatist groups that are threatening the administrative integrity of Syria. On the contrary to this, the last group of policies are directly confronting each other as a friendly government that would ensure a feasible buffer area for Turkish part cannot be formed without removing Assad from the office. However, the negotiations in Astana have primarily focused on first two pillars and this last part is initiated by the formation of the constitutional committee. Due to these, implementations of certain measures in Astana have been successful since the issues remained on lower levels until now.

Within the Astana process, Iran's 3 spheres of interests are supportive and obstructive for implementation of policy preferences of both Russia and Turkey. Even though Russia and Iran are mutually supporting the current Assad administration, heavy Iranian presence on the field restricts Syrian state authority to regain its sovereignty on the practical level on the areas regained from the opposition or ISIS. This situation is directly related to Iran's utilization of Shiite militia groups across the country. Nevertheless, the other two spheres (sectarian/denominational basis and anti-US/Ba'ath administration) are assistive to Russian policies that are competing with Turkey in Astana.

On the contrary, at Geneva side policy preferences of actors are much more parallel with each other as compared to actual or potential conflicting preferences of Astana trio. The US and its European counterparts are complementary in the sense that the former furthers its interests as a piece of broader global choices while the latter form their preferences out of actual confronted problems such as migration and terrorism. The remarkable point here is that the aforementioned European and US preferences do not contradict but align with each other. Yet, the problem arise from the fact that their strong implementation is absent in peace process in Geneva. When evaluated together, the hypothesis which assumes that Astana parties' preferences are more convergent than those of Geneva is thusly falsified. In fact, the conflicting nature of the former is the drive that pushes competitors of the Syrian arena to seek and find a common ground on the least possible level if necessary. This is made possible by giving concessions to others' vital interests instead of exhibiting a maximalist attitude.

4.3 Application of Constructivist Approaches to Syrian Peace Process

In this third analysis, normative affinity among Astana actors on one hand and Geneva actors on the other gives us the causal explanation in determining why certain actors have performed better in PJ and/or DJ as compared to others. Therefore, unlike the previous two chapters, this section needs to follow a negotiations-centric narration rather than

individually explaining certain theoretical aspects belonging to each actor and then relating them to others’.

First of all, Astana process has taken place among regional rivals for whom Syria carries a different and specific meaning. Russian Cold War presence in the country combined with earmarked naval and air bases are historical drives of the warm water port policies that contravene 800 year old Turkish zone of influence on Syria. However, Turkish perspective not only clashes in geographical sense with Russia but also on the societal basis with Iran for whom the non-Sunni Muslim denominations and ethnicities are tied to Iranian clergy within Shiite Imamate system that compel homage. As these mindsets are affected by the environment, it also shapes the ongoing attitudes of these countries vice versa since regional policies of each of those countries build upon above-stated a priori assumptions.

Secondly, authoritarian attitude of these actors is the method to assert their own agenda on Syria. In this regard, for all three actors we witness strong patronage over the parties they put their support behind. In Turkish and Iranian cases, proxy militia along with their institutional bodies (e.g. Syrian National Coalition, Syrian National Council, Lebanese Hezbollah or Badr Organisation) are heavily supervised, logistically supported and politically endorsed in international arena. However, Russian patronage over Assad regime is the most dominant among the trio due to the fact that it is a legitimate state body acknowledged by the UN.

Thirdly, as a regional dynamic, diplomatic efforts are subsequent to actual military presence in each country’s cases. This aspect is mostly in contrast with present-day European actors’ normative attitudes. Furthermore, hard power also functions as a sanction tool while continuing the negotiation process as it has been the case of 3 DEZ’s other than Idlib established by a memorandum on the fourth round of Astana meetings in May 2017 yet, regained by Assad forces in progress of time (see chapter 2.8) (MFA TUR, 2017a). As a result of these, salience of the negotiation process in Astana for each party is affected by how well either historical or current meaning of Syria (first aspect regarding ethnic, cultural, religious or political background) is matched with their common

authoritarian method of conducting negotiations (last two aspects that are above-stated). This matching can be best understood by evaluating PJ and DJ principles respectively.

Fair representation of the parties which have been directly advocated by their patron countries is the most explicit both in Astana dialogue and the formation of the constitutional committee. In dialogue itself, 3 countries with equal status as each of them are guarantors are represented by highest administrative level (namely presidents of Russia and Turkey, and prime minister of Iran). Tripartite nature of Astana thusly performed better than Geneva where actors are numerous and their status is ambiguous (as permanent members of the UNSC are in better position to determine the final resolution). In representation of the groups of the conflict, this principle is best represented with the agreed structure of the constitutional committee which will be composed of 50 proposed candidates both from the regime and opposition members. The trio share equal responsibility in representation of the groups and this constitutional committee will be transferred to the UN track under the supervision of UN Special Envoy— where Turkey will remain as the guarantor of the Syrian opposition and Russia and Iran as the Syrian regime (MFA TUR, 2018b). However, the problem arises from the impediment by each of the actors to include certain groups. The absence of radical groups other than HTS, HTS itself and YPG creates a systemic problem since different share of territories and resources lie under the control of those groups.

The duration of the process has a big role in *fair treatment/fair play* principle. Primarily, 13 rounds of talks took part in Astana process before it has reached its 3rd year since the beginning while the Geneva track was initiated nearly as soon as the conflict emerged (see Figure 6 for timeline); and has lasted until now with periodical interruptions. The noticeable fruitfulness in number of agreements in Astana therefore, cannot be related to the length of the process but it lies behind the continuity of the meetings on regular basis despite huge discrepancies arising from states' colliding regional interests and groups that are in ripe conflict with each other. In Astana, parties primarily focused on narrow-scope solutions such as DEZ and DMZ's in an attempt to de-escalate the ripeness of the conflict before initiating comprehensive resolutions such as

above-mentioned constitutional committee. Therefore, smaller agenda of Astana parties indeed allowed for a seemingly perpetual process— as Albin and Druckman asserts for one of the reasons behind WTO Geneva Agriculture, July 2004 package’s good performance in fair treatment and representation of members’ interests— yet the duration cannot be not a sole factor in that regard on the contrary to their argument (Albin & Druckman, 2014b, p. 1031).

Furthermore, this principle is abided by as far as the field conditions allow parties. For example, DMZ belt that is established and observed by the Turkish observation posts are far from a steady state due to constant attempts of regime and Iranian forces to gain territorial control and Turkish inability to supervise the withdrawal of heavy weapons from this 20km belt (due to strong HTS presence). Nevertheless, establishment of those outposts in front of each other at DMZ belt along with mutual monitoring mechanisms⁶⁰ by Russian and Turkish units according to Sochi agreement is a show of goodwill to abide the process and agreements (Karam, 2018).

Thirdly, *voluntary agreement* principle dwindles when looking from the procedural perspective because of high reliance of direct conflict parties to their guarantors. As the patronization of the parties is an actual feature of the Syrian Civil War, local actors have had perforce to follow instructions from their patrons. As a proving factor, it can be asserted that those three countries negotiating in Astana and Sochi on behalf of their parties have enforced narrow-scope solutions which include where and when to combat; and where to establish bases and create DMZ’s to secure their own interests. Assad’s almost 100% reliance on Russia and Iran’s military, diplomatic, economic, and logistics support has turned the central Syrian authority into a figurehead who is legitimate on the international arena. On the other side, the patronage of Turkey has become the last option that the opposition has (especially after the changed US support from FSA to YPG) on diplomatic and military levels. For both cases, lack of options removes this principle off the table.

⁶⁰ Joint Iranian-Russian-Turkish Coordination Centre

Lastly, *transparency* of Astana's decision-making is only formality. Necessary statements and documentations are only those that are mutually reconciled after a certain discussion period has passed. The content of memorandums or agreements are made public only after they are signed; in most of the cases the existence of such political consensus papers are declassified during public speech part at the end of the meetings *after* they are agreed on minutes before. Therefore, *quid pro quo* agreements among the trio are unrevealed until they actually occur. The underlying cause behind such attitude comes from typology of these actors that were mentioned in the beginning of this chapter.

A more strong position can be referred to DJ principles in Astana meetings. *Equality* in distribution of resources and burdens of agreed matters is partially correct when considering all three actors are being attributed the title "guarantors"; thus, sharing the same official responsibility not only to represent but also to take the encumbrances of agreements. Commitments made to DEZ/DMZ and observation posts in order to supervise a joint ceasefire are epitomes of this principle. Furthermore, procedural aspects enhance equal distribution of responsibilities. The established Joint Group to observe the compliance to ceasefire regime is supplied with information coming from each party and representatives of Syrian parties are given procedural allowances to be invited based on consensus of the trio (MFA RF, 2017a). These aspects indicate that Russia, Turkey and Iran engage in diplomatic talks on the same level.

Nevertheless, political liability of certain groups is a burden that consist problems for each actor (e.g. groups that have strong connections with Hezbollah or al-Qaeda). Therefore, the issue lies not under sharing the burden equally but that there are burdens which cannot be accounted for any actor— which prevents Astana talks to have absolute equality. Due to this fact, third principle *proportionality* is more of an issue than how equal the distribution is. The political weight is the most critical distribution instead of military control of the field as the Russia-Iran duo already has full dominance over regime and Turkey has control of majority of the opposition excluding al-Qaeda affiliated groups. However, holding Turkey liable for the neutralization of HTS within Idlib pocket is

impracticable and disproportional as, on the other side; Russia and Iran have all means to oversee regime's actions.

This creates a problem in meeting the *needs* of all three actors since an instable Idlib pocket doesn't serve any of their benefit. Attempts to localize crisis areas while meeting concerns of all three parties have been vague. Memorandum describing 4 de-escalation areas across the country signed in May 2017 is one of those attempts— as Idlib de-escalation area was needed by Turkey to divert its focus on YPG controlled areas and the other 3 areas on the south were essential to eliminate threat around the capital while fighting ISIL on Homs desert (MFA RF, 2017c). In this regard, efforts targeted prevention of any further deterioration of the humanitarian and military crisis. However, elimination of de-escalation areas by SAA except Idlib pocket demonstrates the failure of talks to achieve the needs. The reason is that shifting their focus on YPG controlled areas that are rich in water and energy resources along with arable lands towards each others' control zones disrupted to essence of Astana talks. On the other hand, the process that started from the field level cooperation and reached the constitutional level meets the need of a non-military transition under control of the trio (which is an ongoing process therefore, cannot be criticized by its success). Due to these reasons, this principle cannot be evaluated as genuinely negative or positive.

Compensation is also a problematic factor because of inexistence of any material resource that would make restitution of costs in mutual areas of activity. At the utmost point, actors negotiate on control or reopening of main highways such as M4 and M5; or allowing civilian mobility at certain zones in between opposition and regime held areas. Due to being a peace-building process, Astana talks doesn't primarily aim to compensate actors' spending or benefits but rather focus on the transition from conflict to resolution. Surely, parties uphold necessary measures to satisfy each others' needs such as the decision taken in 2018 Memorandum to restore the transit traffic on the M4 and M5 routes which attempted to re-initiate economic activity between regime-held and opposition-held areas (The University of Edinburgh, 2018).

Regarding the Geneva negotiators internalized norms, two Astana parties, Turkey and Russia carry different standards than the other western participants. Due to higher number of actors with divergent identities, the success of the process at Geneva has been heavily dependent on the skills of the UN Special Envoys throughout the years. Moreover, as Lundgren argues, a negotiation needs to be conducted at the right time (e.g. ripeness factor) if it is to stand a chance to success. This was the argument on chapter 2.7 behind why negotiations under de Mistura has been the most successful among the UN attempts (yet, inconclusive). However, the changed social environment after Violent Phase I lead to the inference that perceptions of actors are also changed because of mutual *constitutiveness* of social structures and agents. In this regard, we witness how the priorities of democratic western countries differ from pre and post-Violent Phases.

First of all, one of the changed perspectives is about the migration problem. The ripeness of the conflict had direct impact in this regard on the European society which, in return formed a concurrence on how to prevent the ongoing and prospective migration waves. In this regard, reducing the intensity of the conflict in an attempt to bring it back to an ultimately unarmed status quo has become a new priority as compared to previous ambitions which were shaped more around spreading democratic norms. In other words, looking from a normative perspective, toppling the Ba'athist regime and changing it with a democratic, workable, and liberal one lost its place of being the priority. Secondly, the new dynamics has affected both the European and US perception of Russia, Turkey and Iran who started to enlarge their foothold in Syria and confront the western interests— not only economically and politically but also from a value-based perspective. This led to a reciprocal instinctual confrontation from western actors to those Astana parties and still draws them together to get organized around similar agendas.

Lastly, it needs to be stated that despite standing on the same side of the negotiations table, the main friction resides between European and US parts. The changed attitude of Trump administration, not only regarding Syria but also on a global scale, to exercise introvert and rigid policies contrasts more pro-cooperative European policies. Nevertheless, such oppositeness haven't had the chance to rise to the surface as the peace

process has yet to reach the higher levels such as formation of the constitutional committee. Due to these, similarities still constitute a large portion of normative positions of western actors.

Evaluation of PJ and DJ principles is required again at this moment. *Fair representation* of parties and their interests are ambiguous since continuous and high-level talks couldn't be reached until the de-escalation phase in late 2018. However, on the practical level (e.g. attempts for short-term ceasefire), UN special envoys accomplished partial success by not bringing in conflicting parties on equal basis but by prosecuting them individually; thus, becoming a mediation ground on their own. 24 UNSC Resolutions until 2019 did not move beyond being recommendation reports as no formal declaration of a total ceasefire or identification of relevant parties of a peace-building mechanism under the Security Council exists. Consequently, there isn't any guarantorship rights on the contrary to Astana talks during the course of political transition apart from endorsement of short-winded April 2012 ceasefire attempt under Annan and the six-point plan mentioned in chapter 2.7.

However, *fair treatment* principle is more explicit since the mediators of the Geneva process purposefully aimed to include both the delegations from opposition and regime so that a comprehensive transition can take place by common consent of powerful actors. The agreed steps in Syrian-led transition in the articles 9(a) and (b) of the *Communiqué* put forward equality principles by stating that Action Group for Syria has agreed on: “*The establishment of a transitional governing body (...), exercising full executive powers. It could include members of the present Government and the opposition and other groups (...)*”; and “*(...) All groups and segments of society in the Syrian Arab Republic must be enabled to participate in a national dialogue process (...)*” (Action Group for Syria, 2012, p. 4). Yet, the *Communiqué* doesn't specifically designate neither social groups nor organizations. Due to this, the problem of fair representation of Astana process reappear from another angle since unrepresented groups with territorial control are prevented by certain actors or common will from access to UN-backed negotiations (HTS or YPG). Neither of the negotiations was able to offer a non-military solution to this

issue; and not having a consensus on which groups are terrorists or opposition has only complicated the process. Nevertheless, Geneva communiqué is important because of settling on wide principles of political transition.

The third, *voluntary agreement* principle is in sharp contrast with Astana negotiations as the process that was initiated by the UN dates back to early phases of the conflict when the patronage over the parties that were directly involved into the civil war was lesser and those parties were still able to accept or reject proposals put forward by mediators as it occurred in the case of Geneva I led by Annan. Furthermore, the *Communiqué* exhibited a different stance than Sochi Memorandum as the members of the Action Group for Syria reached a consensus in the article 9(a) that the established “Syrian” transitional governing body which exercises full executive powers “*shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent*” while Astana trio implements a top-down ceasefire regime as a basis for further transition which is stated to be conducted through joint Iranian-Russian-Turkish Coordination Centre in Article 9 of Sochi 2018 instead of endorsing Syrian parties working up their own process (Action Group for Syria, 2012, p. 4; The University of Edinburgh, 2018). Therefore, negative position of Astana talks in voluntary agreement principle is not found in Geneva talks where actual Syrian parties are given larger voice.

And, at last, *transparency* in Geneva process is again more ascertainable than Astana negotiations thanks to systemic factors such as the mediation that led by the UN itself and higher number of divergent actors that require a certain level of compliance to the process. There are 24 UNSC Resolutions published openly while Astana track remain more latent with one joint statement after each meeting and the statements are biased as Russian, Turkish and Iranian Ministry of Defence’s make relevant documents and statements public only after agreements are reached and from their point of view.⁶¹ Another reason for high level transparency is that the documentation revealing country positions can always be used as leverage over the counterparts’ actions directly or

⁶¹ The numbers are acquired from webpages of UNSC Report and Russian Ministry of Defence.

indirectly. This causes the process to move slower than bi/trilateral meetings which are innately more covert.

On the contrary to Astana process where DJ is stronger than PJ, in Geneva process the situation is total opposite. As none of the parties were given task to implement de-escalating measures according to six-point plan in Geneva even though they agreed on them in principle, we cannot talk about distribution of burden and resources in political transition. Hence, *equality* in their distribution was an overall failure in compliance with the *Communiqué* especially after the Arab League and Gulf Cooperation Council derecognized Assad regime as the legitimate Syrian authority and gave the chair to opposition in 2012-2013 period (Talmon, 2013, pp. 219–220). In fact, the actions of actors from different sides were unilateral and without any distribution of burdens which led to a “non-agreement- process” until 2018 except for 2 months of ceasefire period imposed by Brahimi Mission.

Due to these facts, we also cannot talk about whether the distribution of political burdens was *proportional* among US-backed sides and other parties involved in Geneva process. However, it is possible to argue about the proportionality among western actors of Geneva especially in military aspects. As the anti-ISIL coalition constitutes large part of the UN efforts to de-escalate the conflict, the shared burden within this coalition is significant. Primarily, military burden of fighting against terrorist groups which evolved into fight against ISIS as the time passed by were distributed over the US while European actors stood clear of directly getting involved into the conflict except for political support to Syrian opposition. In this regard, the US possesses a much greater share of burdens that increase its will to have a say about the future structure of the Syrian Arab Republic than its western counterparts. Nevertheless, just as in equality principle, share of burdens in political transition is absent for proportionality, as well.

The third DJ principle, *need*, is stronger than former DJ aspects in Geneva. As the spending of resources have been much more in the US case as compared to its European allies, this propelled it to have presence over the areas with geostrategic importance (e.g. trade routes or electric & water dams) and energy rich areas; potentially oil and gas fields.

The American urge to compensate the burdens of its military presence thusly have shifted from its shoulders to the proxy they use: YPG. Due to this, primarily legitimizing the YPG and having abovementioned strategic areas under its control have been two key methods to satisfy the American needs arising from the heavy expenses since the establishment of anti-ISIL coalition. In order to do so, the UNSC Resolution 2254 (which is considered by the UN as “*the first resolution focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis*” reiterates its predecessor Resolution 2249 in prevention and suppression of terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIL and former al-Qaeda groups (Security Council Report, n.d.). By doing so, the US-backed international coalition reaffirms its position in holding those two key aspects.⁶²

Lastly, *compensation* of US’ the previous 5 years’ efforts and expenditures exhibit a similar attitude to previous principle. In addition to this, the unilateral stance of non-western parties of the Geneva process is once again obvious in the case of compensation. Just as the US, Russia and Iran, too, have been attempting to receive the best outcomes of efforts— which directly confronts the US interests in the mid-Euphrates valley around oil/gas fields and Tabqa-Raqqa dams. Apart from the status quo on the field level about how to assert territorial control (which is de facto exercised by Russia-Iran-US trio), the situation remains fragile since there are no conclusive agreement on how to distribute the resources that are needed to compensate each of the actor’s expenditures. Therefore, parties who de facto hold those strategically valuable areas are better off without a final resolution to the conflict is adopted— which leads us to the conclusion that international coalition posses at least minimal resources *or* their control as a compensating factor.

Hence, we may look at how those two separate negotiations perform in justice as compared to each other. After accounting for each of the PJ and DJ principles on the previous paragraphs, the chart created below is based on how strongly do the negotiations perform (++ as very strong, 0 as neutral and – – as very weak) in order to compare them correctly.

⁶² (1) legitimizing its presence; (2) transferring the role of preventing and suppressing those groups to its Proxy YPG

	<u>Astana</u>	<u>Geneva</u>	
Fair Representation	+	0	
Fair Treatment	+	+	PROCEDURAL JUSTICE
Voluntary Agreement	--	+	
Transparency	--	++	
Equality	+	--	
Proportionality	+	-	DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE
Need	0	+	
Compensation	0	+	

As mentioned in chapter 3.4, Albin and Druckman asserts that “PJ has a direct impact on effectiveness of the agreements which is stronger than DJ; since DJ has impact on effectiveness indirectly only through adherence to PJ principles”. Therefore, DJ alone doesn’t have the capability to influence the outcomes of negotiations— which is the case of Astana process. In the light of the scorings above, Geneva process clearly precedes Astana process in PJ with +6 and falls behind in DJ with -3. Moreover, Geneva scores +3 while Astana receives 0 in overall evaluation. It would have been expected from the Geneva process to be more fruitful than Astana whether if based solely on evaluations of overall justice or procedural and distributive justices separately; which is not the case. In other words, the fruitfulness of Astana negotiations cannot be explained by its justice as Geneva has a stronger position in PJ and the overall score.

These facts suggest that the hypothesis number 3 which asserts that “*Geneva process has been less fruitful than Astana process because Russia-Turkey-Iran trio perform better in “Justice” in terms of both PJ and DJ as compared to Geneva parties*” is incorrect.

5. CONCLUSION

The thesis focused on the Syrian peace processes of Astana and Geneva tracks; former being led by Russia-Turkey-Iran trio since December 20th, 2016 and the latter initiated by the UN in early 2012 through the work conducted by 4 different special envoys. It attempted to find an answer to the question of why the Astana process has been able to produce certain outcomes (term “fruitfulness” is used to depict such characteristic) while Geneva track has been far from reaching any concrete solution to the conflict (including stable ceasefires) despite being led by and supervised at the UN level. The method to reach that answer was the evaluation of 3 separate hypotheses derived from 3 core International Relations approaches: Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism.

The hypothesis that is grounded in realism asserted that larger power capabilities of Geneva trio on Syria have led to more fruitful results while, according to liberal hypothesis, more convergent preferences of Astana trio relative to other Geneva parties’ are the reason behind that fruitfulness. The third constructivist hypothesis focused on the issue of justice in negotiations (derived from Albin and Druckman’s Procedural and Distributive Justice principles) in order to explain Astana’s precedence over Geneva. In this regard, the thesis poses 2 other complementary questions on the issues (1) which one of those International Relations approaches is better at explaining that fruitfulness and; (2) whether the domestic or supranational conditions of the parties have a larger role in negotiations.

At this point, it is necessary to briefly explain our process of reaching respective outcomes of these hypotheses. The first one attempted to explain the fruitfulness of Astana over Geneva by its better power capabilities that were indicated in chapter 3.2. According to the evaluation conducted over each party that represent sub actors of the conflict, power capabilities for each peace track is compared by their total and average scores in respective categories of each party. The level of influence arising from those general capabilities specifically for each actor’ efforts to realize their political Syrian agenda rather than their success in influencing sub-actors was the key dependent variable.

By evaluating respective power categories (i.e. independent variables), the empirical analysis demonstrated the following:

1. When compared by total scores, Astana preceded its counterpart with a margin of 40 percent and 3 out of 4 categories.
2. When compared by their average scores, both peace tracks shared same amount of categories (2 per each) and very close results in average scores (Geneva being 0.9 higher)

These results indicate that Astana's fruitfulness can be explained by our realism-grounded analysis. Hence, the hypothesis has been verified.

In order to analyze whether the second hypothesis is correct, each actor's regional interests regarding Syrian conflict were revealed. By detecting them firstly before drawing parallels among counterparts', this section has reached to the conclusion that Astana parties (especially Russia and Turkey) have had better grounds to engage with each other at the lower levels (on the field by practical applications of the commitments that were made) despite the fact that larger strategic positions tend to make these countries confront each other in the long run. Iran's case has so far demonstrated negativity for both Russia (despite their alignment in Syrian Civil War) and Turkey (due to less historical but more demographical reasons) as its alignment has been much deeper with regional Shiite groups that are being organized and directed by its security apparatus than Russia and Turkey. On the other hand, we have observed since the beginning of the conflict more parallel policies among the US and EU parties who have complemented each other at different levels and adopted similar policies regarding their interests in Syria. Due to these facts, Astana's conflicting and other Geneva parties' cooperative natures were stated to be the total opposite of the assumption made in the liberal hypothesis. Hereby, the liberalist hypothesis has been disproved.

Lastly, the constructivist hypothesis was analyzed by separately evaluating how successful have Astana and Geneva been in 4 PJ and 4 DJ principles. Those principles were accounted for in chapter 3.4 therefore, actual documentation and features of the peace tracks were only needed to be applied over the framework that had been drawn

previously. The key point in that evaluation was that high DJ requires similar performance in PJ to be effective as well (as Albin and Druckman asserts). Just as the empirical analysis demonstrated, Astana process have lagged behind in PJ and prevailed in DJ scores against Geneva track— which cannot justify the fruitfulness arising from being better at justice as the hypothesis asserted in the beginning. Therefore, the constructivist hypothesis has been disproved, as well.

In the light of conducted analyses based on three main theoretical approaches, there are several general implications arising from their mutual outcomes which we can further deduce. Primarily, interstate relationships and sub-state actors' presence form complex web of processes both in Astana and Geneva tracks. Especially among Astana trio, the level of engagement into talks which doesn't only aim to reduce the intensity of the conflict towards a possible ceasefire but doing so while maintaining their own state interests at the same time beclouds the process. Therefore, even among the parties who seem to be cooperating on the field level (such as Russia and Turkey), there is a large discrepancy at the larger strategic level as mentioned through the diagram that explains 3 pillars and dimensions of these two countries in the liberal analysis (see pg. 76).

As all three of those analyses indicate, Astana track depict significant inadequacies due to rivalry character of the trio with different types and degree of power capabilities (realist), competing larger state interests (liberalist) and low level procedural justice that annihilates the strong effect of distributive justice (constructivist). This suggests that Geneva track carries a larger potential to takeover Astana's role in peace-building; as presence of larger number of actors may balance the power on a more moderate level contrary to a tripartite process from a realist perspective, increase the level of compliance and practicability thanks to the UN from a liberal perspective, and take the distributive justice up to the level of procedural which, drives parties to conform to adopted resolutions from a constructivist perspective.

Mentioning these allow us to give answers to the research questions asked in the beginning. In short, three points from three analyses need be drawn that may answer *Q1*:

1. Conflicting but not cooperative nature of Astana talks **is the reason** for fruitful results (yet, not only on big picture but on practical/field level)
2. Preferences are not convergent but competing among Astana trio on the contrary to other parties of the Geneva process whose preferences and interests are much more aligned; which **cannot** account for the answer
3. Astana process lags behind Geneva in justice therefore, **no answer** can be drawn from constructivist analysis

Due to these conclusions, rivalry drives Astana trio to make certain commitments on lower levels without crossing each other's red lines. This attitude so far has been the main cause of fruitfulness of Astana process in adoption of resolutions such as DMZ/DEZ's, partial ceasefires and consensus on administrative integrity of the post-civil war Syria. However, as the process reaches towards broader resolutions such as constitutional committee, that fruitfulness can be expected to be underwhelmed and Geneva process to take over the primary role in a comprehensive settlement.

As for the *Q2*, it is not wrong to state that analyses themselves have already answered it. Even though liberal and constructivist hypotheses reflect a total opposite reality and realist assumption cannot account for success in higher levels of Astana/Sochi dialogue, ongoing practical agreements— which so far what we have only witnessed in Syrian conflict— are best explained by realism.

Q3, on the other hand, needs to be approached from a rather theoretical perspective. Unless realist hypothesis had been validated, domestic conditions would have played a larger role in negotiations since they carry a greater importance in liberal theory (which was assessed throughout the chapters 3.3 and 4.2 for each actor); and identity-based theories of constructivism also would have meant supremacy of domestic over supranational. However, realist hypothesis' precedence indicates that supranational factors such as balance of power and relative power capabilities (e.g. military) have a larger part in negotiations.

To conclude, it is essential to state that both peace tracks need to be analyzed according to the final resolution that is going to take place in the future. As the thesis predicted, Geneva track under the UN is the main course through which the conflict can ultimately end. Therefore, Astana's practical fruitfulness tends to give place to Geneva for the highest level of resolution. The success of actors that have been making effort in Astana is thusly dependent on how well they can transform their political agenda to the UN table.

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UNIVERZITA KARLOVA

Faculty of Social Sciences

Institute of Political Studies

MASTER'S THESIS PROJECT

Comparative Negotiation Analysis of the Syrian Peace Process



Author: Berk Köksal

Supervisor: doc. PhDr. Jan Karlas, M.A., Ph.D.

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Outline of the Topic

Since its inception, Syrian Civil War has been a major source of regional instability for both the Middle Eastern and European countries with different elements of influence. The factors directly intertwined with the armed conflict such as violence, humanitarian losses, terrorism or geopolitical concerns of various states exist in a very broad scale from the most individual to interstate level. On the other hand, the indirect consequences of the civil war need not be neglected such as mass move of people towards Europe in search of better living conditions, financial burden for the countries involved, lack of basic human needs in Syria or the secondary violence threats for the neighbour countries emerging from the imbalance within the Syria.

Those conditions are addressed in various perspectives within various scientific works for the past nine years (primarily by examining the topics of migration and terrorism since they are the most salient ones). However, the efforts to end the conflict are no less significant than the efforts dealing with the consequences of the civil war, whether direct or indirect. The peace negotiations on the Syrian Civil War provide an appropriate ground to draw the elements which have been affecting the various aforementioned issue areas together. The principle peace negotiations are conducted by the auspices of the UN in Geneva since 2012 and the indirect peace negotiations among Russia, Turkey and Iran have been carried out at the former capital of Kazakhstan, Astana (renamed to *Nursultan* on March 2019) since 2016. Both of those two peace tracks represent significance even though their participation, process and outcomes have been widely different.

Due to these facts, the thesis is going to be organized around the Syrian Civil War; however, specifically focusing those two highly important peace processes. The area of the research is the Syrian Arab Republic while the time framework is limited to the start of the protests in Syria as a consequence of the Arab Spring in March 2011 and the prospective 5th meeting of the Astana-Sochi parties in 2019. The actors who are going to be included in the analysis are both regional (e.g. Turkey, Iran and Israel) and global (e.g. the US, EU, Russia) *or* to some extent the other less salient but important actors such as China or specific EU countries per se (e.g. France and UK).

The Aim and Research Questions of the Thesis

The thesis primarily aims to prioritize the theoretical applications of the discipline of International Relations over the empirical knowledge on Syrian Civil War and Syrian Peace Process so that the factors affecting the negotiations positively and negatively are revealed. The comparison of those two peace negotiations are used in this regard as only means to achieve that goal. They both have distinct instruments and paths with different actors participating the talks. Therefore, the content and the process are going to be segmented to periods in order to ease the understanding of their implications while the actual aim remains to reflect those over the grand theories of International Relations. In this regard the following question is going to be asked primarily:

1. Why Geneva talks of Syrian Civil War have been less fruitful than the Astana-Sochi talks even though the former was initiated priorly and supervised by the UN *while* the latter has been conducted by countries with historical rivalry and more conflicting interests in the region?

Also, there are two sub-questions elaborating this main question:

2. Which one of the main International Relations approaches fits better to explain those peace talks?
3. Do the domestic *or* supranational conditions of the parties involved play a larger role in their negotiations with each other?

Literature Review

Syrian Civil War is a recent event which is generally examined within the framework of the Arab Spring. The studies conducted over this issue tend to focus on the conflict side of the war but not on the peace processes that are following different paths from each other with different actors. Even though there limited work on the background of the

negotiations due to the recentness and continuity of the conflict about the Syrian Civil War which might have served the need of core literature for the thesis, the theoretical framework of other negotiation analyses conducted over different issue areas may serve that purpose equally. For example, Zangl (2008) argues about the international dispute settlement procedures' (IDSP) effectiveness on trade negotiations under WTO and GATT between the US and the EU. He elucidates on the theoretical background of those mechanisms along with their "four causal mechanisms" which affect their functioning in dispute settlement. Such structural features of IDSP's can be benefited from during the explanation of the negotiations over the Syrian Civil War, especially because of their liberal institutionalist approach.

Another literature which will expand the frame of theoretical part is the arms control negotiations illustrated by Druckman and Albin (2014). They emphasize the justice and effectiveness in arms control negotiations and put forward the concepts of procedural (PJ) and distributive justice (DJ) which are defined by several principles that measure the effectiveness of negotiations. Also, they develop hypotheses on whether PJ or DJ yield more effective arms control negotiations. Their concepts and measurement techniques lead to a plausible theoretical basis (yet, not their topic) which helps with the constructivist explanations of the theoretical part of the thesis.

The two-level game theory asserted and developed by Putnam (1988) and Lisowski (2002) may further the examination of the win-sets and preferences of the actors involved in the peace negotiations due to the fact that it does not only embrace the inter-party relationships but also the domestic factors and the agenda of the constituents. The balance between the international and domestic which is phrased by the authors as "double-edged diplomacy" can constitute the liberal explanations' foundations.

In the theoretical chapter, Odell (2011) will be made use of due to provided general information on the negotiations in various levels and issue areas such as the aspects of negotiations and their theoretical backgrounds. He provides a framework for the negotiation analysis by talking about some core concepts such as problem solving, bargaining, tactics, issues and linkage; and etc. This literature, hence, will serve as the

backbone of the general frame of the second chapter which will also be supported by literature on interest-based theories and institutional bargaining by Hasenclever et al. (1997) and Stephen Walt's *International Relations: One World Many Theories* (1998) which generally describes those grand theories.

After setting the basis for the grand theories, the theoretical section of the thesis will dive into 3 core approaches; starting with the (neo) realism which has a primary focus on balance of power being reflected on the interstate negotiations (Haas, 2007), moving towards liberalism in economic, republican and institutional forms by using the explanatory work of Zacher and Matthew (1995) on the strands of the liberal international theory; and constructivism with emphasis on identity and norms by making use of Albin and Druckman's hypotheses on justice and effectiveness (2014) in arms control, as mentioned above but in international trade negotiations, as well. There are several other scholars who are going to be used when need occur to fulfill the argumentative gaps between theories (explained in the second half of the next chapter by their concepts within the theoretical framework).

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework with Research Hypotheses

The thesis targets to evaluate the two separate peace processes on Syrian Civil War not only by simply looking at their similarities and differences but also by using theoretical applications on the outcomes and successfulness of implementation of those outcomes—which is specifically related to the first research question. However, inquire of the other sub-questions requires relevant information on the theories of the International Relations. Due to these facts, the thesis is going to be structured to provide empirical knowledge on the conditions that affected and occurred after the Syrian Civil War. This empirical part includes concepts such as historical facts, geographical conditions, demographics, politics, economics and also various other aspects which are factors on the Syrian Arab Republic along with the features of the civil war itself such as parties, proxies and undoubtedly, the peace negotiations. The next part is planned to move into the discipline of International

Relations by forming a structure of grand theories and sub-theories classified by their affiliations to those theories. The first sub-chapter generally describes the international negotiations before the realist, liberal and constructivist approaches to the international negotiations are theoretically explained.

This second chapter is highly significant due to the reason that it connects the 1st chapter (empirical) to the 3rd (analytical), which is the application of the theoretical framework on the Syrian Peace Process. In that third analytical part, the knowledge on the discipline of International Relations are constantly related to the previously given empirical facts. In other words, there is an anchor dropped at the Syrian Peace Process (the civil war and the negotiations) and the theoretical approaches are applied over those information. Specifically, 3 main International Relations approaches are going to be specified in the matter of Geneva and Astana processes in order to find out which one of those fits better to explain the relative fruitfulness of one and ineffectiveness of the other.

After speaking of the chapters, it is essential to clarify the hypotheses that are going to be analyzed. Specifically speaking there are 3 hypotheses; as one for each of the theoretical approaches. For the realist approaches, the main focus is on the states which are taken as the primary actors of the conflict. Concepts such as balance of power which has been used by many scholars (from Thucydides in the early history to Stephen Walt) and Mearsheimer's "Tragedy" on hegemony, balance of power and bandwagoning behaviour of actors are all related to the power capabilities of actors who endeavour to have their preferences accomplished. Syrian peace negotiations are one area where such preferences diverge and converge among individual state parties, group of countries with similar agenda or, sometimes beyond well-accepted alliances. Nevertheless, power comprises different elements that are interrelated to each other. As Kenneth Waltz quotes from former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, there are different heterogeneous categories of power such as political influence, economic or military capabilities, or demographic conditions such as population. To be powerful, a nation needs to be strong in all categories (Waltz, 1979, pp. 130). By taking the logic behind power and influence, the realist hypothesis on Syrian peace negotiations assumes that the actors of the Astana

process have been better able to exercise their influence on precise de-escalating measures while Geneva process lag behind in that aspect. By conducting analysis over this hypothesis, the aim is to firstly detect the interests and preferences of actors before revealing whether they are capable of achieving them. Thus, by finding out their potential competences, their power capabilities also become evaluable. The key dependent variable is their level of influences which change as a result of their power capabilities. The aforementioned categories provide a general frame where the independent variables (e.g. military or economic power of countries) are used in order to conduct the analysis. Due to these facts, the hypothesis selected for realist approaches is as follows:

H1: Russia, Iran and Turkey as the guarantor countries of the Astana peace process have been better able to exercise their influence on negotiations as compared to the US-backed actors who are involved in Geneva talks.

The second hypothesis is derived from rationalist approaches where states are described as goal-seeking actors aiming to maximize their utility through calculations of advantageous outcomes. These calculations are based on actors' preferences i.e. utility functions (Hasenclever et al., 1997, pp. 23). Even though rationalists assume that actors have fairly fixed set of preferences over time, Odell rejects such argument by asserting that persuasion is an effective element in negotiations and it is a mistake to limit an analysis over negotiations to a narrow version of rational choice (Odell, 2011, pp. 17). He emphasizes importance of the process as well along with the preferences of the actors in the beginning of that very process. This interactive and more flexible approach can be found within the Syrian peace process due to the continuity of the courses in different tracks. Surely, the influence of the domestic factors, constituencies and altering economic and geopolitical conditions have had significant weight over how the actors started negotiating in the beginning and in time of the processes. Therefore, it is essential to identify those preferences likewise in the beginning and in time in order to find out the changing conditions. Only after that identification it would be possible to find out the roots of the cooperation among Astana and Geneva parties. As Keohene puts, *"cooperation occurs when actors adjust their behaviour to the actual or anticipated*

preferences of others” therefore, policies which are being cooperated need to be regarded by the other parties as realizing their own objectives, as well. Due to that “adjustment” of behaviour, cooperation refers to overcoming of a real or potential conflict instead of a harmony where each actor’s policy is regarded as facilitating its own objectives without any adjustment (Keohane, 1984, pp.51-53). By applying these assumptions, the hypothesis selected for liberalist approach argues that Astana parties have been cooperating with each other better than the Geneva parties due to more convergent preferences in a situation where they were better able to adjust their preferences to meet other actors’ objectives thus, having their preferences more convergent. Hence, the second hypothesis is selected as follows:

H2: Astana negotiations have been more fruitful than Geneva talks because preferences of Russia, Turkey and Iran are more convergent than Geneva parties’.

As for the constructivist section, the concept effectiveness is measured by different types of justice by Albin and Druckman (2014): Procedural (PJ) and Distributive Justice (DJ). Both these concepts have 4 principles that allow them to be measured. Their research indicate that PJ has a direct effect on effectiveness of the agreements which is stronger than DJ since DJ has impact on effectiveness indirectly only through adherence to PJ principles. Those principles for the PJ are fair representation and treatment, voluntary agreement and transparency; which, in the Astana process we may find out due to the relative similarity of norms and values between Russia, Turkey and Iran more than the Geneva actors who are more diverse thus, fair representation and treatment principles lag behind. Even though 4 DJ principles are present in different levels in both cases (equality and proportionality in distribution of resources and burdens, meeting the needs and compensation), DJ has an impact on conditional basis: in adherence to PJ. Therefore, the effectiveness of those peace processes vary from each other and the hypothesis for the constructivist section is formed in this manner:

H3: Geneva process has been less fruitful than Astana process because Russia-Turkey-Iran trio perform better in “Justice” in terms of both PJ and DJ as compared to Geneva parties.

After presenting the theoretical perspectives, their relevant theories and hypotheses, the thesis will interpret the Syrian peace negotiations in the light of the information provided previously. This will take place in the analytical chapter which will be followed by the conclusion part where, along with the answers of the research questions, the hypotheses are evaluated and compared to each other so that the reason of the “fruitfulness” can be accounted.

Empirical Data and Method

The empirical data will be collected on the features of the Syrian Arab Republic, Syrian Civil War and Syrian Peace Process; and will be put into an interpretive narration in the empirical part before the theoretical applications. Features of the Syrian Arab Republic are, as might be expected, belong to the conditions before the Arab Spring since the facts rapidly changed due to the major imbalances occurred after. For the historical data section, there are several primary and secondary sources which are obtained from the Ottoman archives and Encyclopaedia of Islam. Other data on the features such as demographics and economics of the pre-war Syria come from secondary sources such as CIA World Factbook, Baathist sources (journals, state propaganda news and etc.) and information obtained from the neighbouring countries’ data sources (especially regarding the trade volumes, goods, routes and etc.) so that a moderate comparison is possible instead of providing an uncritical and direct information. The characteristics of the Baath regime in Syria are also crucial (e.g. how different and similar to other socialist and pan-Arabic ideologies in the region, the administrative and state structure, its institutions etc). In order to present different angles of those characteristics, the structural features are going to be given as direct information and along with their interpretation by different scholars such as Israeli Shmuel Bar’s informative work on the Baath rule or the documentation of the transnational Baath Arab Socialist Party.

The third type of empirical data is related to the civil war itself. The proxies, affiliations and hostilities within the time framework of the civil war are going to be

brought together by the author. Their relevant information (possibly from over 30 different groups constantly establishing various links with other groups and countries, dissolving or merging in time *or* changing their names) will be based on primary sources from the group declarations, the statements from the states supporting them and the information on their activities provided by their adversaries. Those primary sources are going to be transformed into graphics and illustrations by the author. At last, the information on the peace negotiations will be based on the official procedural files obtained from the UN for the Geneva part and the 3 signatory states' (Russia, Turkey and Iran) pronouncements of the Sochi Agreement that took place during the Astana process. State agencies and institutional declarations have the importance in this regard.

In general, the thesis will be shaped around a very rich set of primary sources while the theoretical applications of the secondary sources are used in order to make use of those data. In other words, the theoretical applications will attempt to reveal what is behind the fruitfulness of one and ineffectiveness of other peace process thus, *success* is the key variable. However, it should not be mistaken that the aim of the thesis is to clarify the factors influencing that success, not to find out which one of those processes are more successful. Due to these, the comparison of those background facts qualitatively- not the general comparison of Astana and Geneva tracks is going to be used. For the purpose of delimitation of the area of research, that comparison will be profiled under the titles of the empirical part; meaning that the factors that are influencing the peace processes will be taken within Astana and Geneva separately by their historical, economical, political and other previously given aspects.

Planned Outline of the Thesis

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2. EMPIRICAL PART
 - 2.1 Historical Facts of Syria
 - 2.2 Geography of Syria
 - 2.3 Demographics of Pre and In-War Syria
 - 2.4 Economics of Pre-War Syria & Current Conditions
 - 2.5 Political Structure of Syrian Arab Republic
 - 2.6 Parties and Proxies Involved in the Syrian Civil War
 - 2.7 Peace Negotiations in Geneva
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3. THEORETICAL PART
 - 3.1 Defining International Negotiations
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 - 3.3 Liberalist Approaches to International Negotiations
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4. ANALYTICAL PART
 - 4.1 Application of Realist Approaches on Syrian Peace Process
 - 4.2 Application of Liberalist Approaches on Syrian Peace Process
 - 4.3 Application of Constructivist Approaches on Syrian Peace Process
5. CONCLUSION

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