

Encounters in the Turkey-Syria Borderland

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By

Bezen Balamir Coşkun
and Selin Yıldız Nielsen

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-1402-1

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1402-7

to the brave people of Syria...

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge our gratitude to many individuals who have helped and supported us throughout the writing of this book. Greatest thanks go to our families and friends for their constant support and encouragement, which have been invaluable. Special thanks go to our dear colleagues Selin Akyüz, Birgül Demirtaş, Zeynep Şahin, Ela Göktürk Aras, Alparslan Özerdem, Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, and Bahar Başer for their feedback and encouragement to transform our ideas into a book project, and to Altug Coşkun and Zeynepnaz Coşkun for their valuable comments on draft chapters. We also thank Tarhan Meltem Oğuzlu, who translated some sections of the background chapters from Turkish into English. The book itself is a product of a transatlantic collaboration between two authors, one in Turkey and the other in California, and a publisher based in the United Kingdom, making this book in itself a proof of the futility of borders. Last but not least, we are grateful to the editorial board and staff of Cambridge Scholars Publishing, who helped us throughout the publication process.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFAD	The Republic of Turkey Disasters and Emergencies Agency
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DGMM	The Republic of Turkey Directorate General of Migration Research
EU	European Union
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and Levant
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
PYD	(Kurdish) Democratic Union Party
YPG	Armed Branch of (Kurdish) Democratic Union Party
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UN Refugee Agency)
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund

INTRODUCTION

As a state, if you share an over 1,600-kilometre border with a certain land, if more than ninety percent of your population shares the same religion with the people of that land, and if you have historical and cultural ties with the states and societies in that region, you cannot resist becoming part of that region. This is the story of Turkey's bumpy relations with the Middle East region. If you are an adult who has grown up in Turkey, the Middle East has always been in your life. You may vividly remember that every evening between 1980–8 you received news from the Iran-Iraq war. In 1991, when you expected your favourite TV show, the broadcast was suddenly cut and you found yourself watching how the United States was bombing Iraq via CNN. Similarly, in 2003, when the United States invaded Iraq once more, you participated in anti-American protests. Today, you may do volunteer work to help the Syrians in your hometown while you hear news about the number of Syrians who drowned that day in the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean. This is the story of ordinary people in Turkey whose lives are intersected with the state of politics in the Middle East. Particularly after 2011, since the civil conflict erupted in Syria, both that and the interactions between Turkish people and Syrian refugees have changed the lives of both Turks and Syrians drastically. Between 2011 and 2018, millions of Syrians have been displaced, approximately three million of them in Turkey and another three million struggle to survive either somewhere in the Middle East or Europe. Gradually, not just politically and academically but also personally, the Middle East has penetrated our everyday lives in Turkey. In this book, we are not going to share our academic work on Syrian refugees. What you will read here are the personal stories of two Turkish scholars who find themselves as well as their country in a hard and rocky place in the Middle East.

While the Turkish state has been dealing with the social, political, and economic repercussions of the Syrian war as well as internal instability, as authors of this book our lives have also intersected with Syrians in Gaziantep, Turkey. We are living proof that, in Turkey, international relations are not international and foreign policy is not foreign at all. Every single event that occurs in the immediate and even distant neighbourhoods touches our personal lives too. Seven years ago, when we were visiting

friends and colleagues in Aleppo freely, we never could have predicted what Syria would become today. When our friends and family members started businesses in Syria, they never thought about the possibility of a civil war. Similarly, millions of Syrians never wished to leave their countries to reside in Turkey. Each foreign policy action has internal repercussions that affect our lives. In this regard, as two university professors who happened to find themselves in Gaziantep during those turbulent times, our lives intersected with Syrians. Thus, we felt the urge to share our observations, experiences, and memories of Syrians in Gaziantep. We believe that it was a notable experience for us to meet with the extraordinary people of Gaziantep and the Syrians there.

Most of our Syrian friends, colleagues, and students have had their own share of war and trauma. They have lost their homes, land, family members, and much more. It is not just us whose lives intersected with Syrians. As mentioned above, three million Syrians live in Turkey, in big cities, small towns, and even remote villages. They are students; they are owners of delicious pastry shops and restaurants around the corner; they are customers of shops, they are working on land, factories, and workshops; some of them are married to Turkish citizens. Beyond the individual interactions between Turks and Syrians, Syrians have brought their political and ideological loyalties and identities. As the most recent developments in Turkey show, whatever happens in Syria has repercussions for Turkey, both internally and externally. Every single political clique, ideological, and military group in Syria has supporters in Turkey. Pro-Assad as well as pro-ISIL groups have emerged and settled in Turkey. As a result, not only does the internal struggle between those groups in Syria have repercussions in Turkey, but the Turkish government's actions are also being responded to immediately. If you visit southeastern provinces such as Gaziantep, Kilis, and Urfa, anyone native to them can show you who is supporting ISIL, who is supporting al-Nusra, and who is supporting PYD/YPG. In Kilis, traditional tea houses sell "Jihad Tea." Until very recently, the headquarters of the Free Syrian Army were located on one of the busy streets of Gaziantep. If you travel between Gaziantep and Kilis, you can see police/gendarmerie checkpoints, or you can see Turkish tanks on the roads. If you live in or visit the tiny towns on the border between Suruc and Kobane (Ayn al-Arab in Arabic), from the top of your house you can watch the clashes between PYD and ISIL live. These are the everyday realities of the Turkish-Syrian borderland.

There has been much academic work on the so-called Syrian refugee crisis. The Syrian civil war and associated refugee crisis have attracted enormous academic interest. Scholars of migration studies, in particular,

have published extensively on the subject. Most of these books emphasise either the host states' political and humanitarian responses to Syrian displacement or the integration of refugees. However, books that deal with the individual stories of Syrian refugees are rare. In this regard, by focusing on the individual stories of Syrians who sought shelter in Gaziantep and their encounters with the host community, this book will contribute to the current literature on Syrian refugees. What we are sharing here is not just a dry scholarly account of the war and the crisis, but an emotional journey of two academics who lived through such turbulent times with Syrians in a borderland. For us, this book is a reflection of our gratitude to our Syrian friends, students, and colleagues. It is also a way of demonstrating to the world that this is not just about numbers of destitute people who escape from a war—this is life itself, and in it there exist personal stories, tragedies, and hope. Our story is designed for readers who wish to know Syrian refugees as individuals, not as a totalising category.

The first part of the book, *Background*, presents historical, legal, and social contexts. The second part of the book introduced readers to the setting of the encounters: Gaziantep, a borderland province where Syrians, Turks, and Kurds have been interacting for centuries. Then, the last part of the book, entitled *Intersecting Lives: Syrians in Turkey*, tells the story of those encounters in Gaziantep. Starting in 2009, the story will cover a short period of joy and prosperity, followed by the period of war, migration, and refugeeship in the urban setting of Gaziantep. The final part also tells the story of Syrians who have been living in refugee camps around Gaziantep. With the exception of the background chapters in part one, the book is based on the authors' personal encounters and observations, as well as their communications with the Syrians in Gaziantep. Partly ethnographic, partly oral history, this book attempts to present a different side of the crisis in Syria.

PART ONE:
BACKGROUND

CHAPTER ONE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SYRIA AND THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

Even though the aim of this book is to share the individual stories and encounters of Syrian refugees, it is believed that understanding historical events and context helps us to give meaning to their experiences. In other words, a sound understanding of the historical context gives us a full appreciation of personal narratives. The historical context enables us to interpret individual experience within the context of the events of the past, rather than merely sharing them with the readers. Against this background, this chapter presents a brief history of Syria and the Syrian civil war, which provides a historical context of the sending country, Syria. As the ethnic and religious divisions have deep roots in Syrian history, knowing the origins of our encounters is never enough. The historical background of their particular ethnic and/or religious identity, as well as the place of this particular identity in the Syrian political spectrum, also provides the context of each individual story.

The chapter begins with a brief history of modern Syria. In this section, the Sykes-Picot agreement marked the start of the modern history of Syria. While Western manipulations broke the Arab dreams of sovereignty, for nationalists the agreement was a chance to consolidate power. The first section covers the period between 1946 and 2000, between the independence of Syria and the death of Hafiz al-Assad, the father of Bashar al-Assad. The subsequent section presents the characteristics and the main events of Bashar al-Assad's rule until the outbreak of the civil war in 2011. Finally, the third section is an up-to-date chronological review of the Syrian civil war.

A Brief History of Modern Syria (1946–2000)

The Syrian Arab Republic is a state bordering Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Israel. Two-thirds of Syria's Golan Heights have been under Israeli occupation since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The capital city of

Syria is Damascus, which has always been one of the symbolically charged cities in the region. Before the current civil war, the population of Syria was close to twenty-four million. There are numerous ethnic groups settled in Syria, such as Syrian Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds, and Turkomans. Besides ethnic diversity there exists a wide variety of religious groups, including Sunnis, Christians, Alawites, Druze, Ismailis, Shiites, Salafis, Yazidis, and Jews. Sunni Arabs constitute the largest religious group in Syria. It was in this “coalition of minorities” that the Assad family based its power for more than four decades (Carpenter 2013, 2).

Even though Syria had been a centre of settlement since the Neolithic era of 10,000 BC, the agreement signed by Mark Sykes and George Picot in 1916 after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire is regarded as the beginning of modern Syrian history. The Sykes-Picot agreement between the United Kingdom and France affected the destiny of the Middle East. The allies exploited Arab leaders’ ambition for sovereignty to extend their spheres of influence in the region. In this context, Prince Faisal took control of Damascus in 1918 with the support of the British Empire.

The Arabs’ desire to establish their independent state was revealed in the General Syrian Congress, which took place in 1919. In the General Syrian Congress, a plan for an independent Greater Syria covering the area of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel was drafted (Fromkin 1989). During the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, Prince Faisal tried hard to convince the United Kingdom and France to recognize Arab independence. Despite Faisal’s efforts, France was given the mandate of Lebanon and Syria while the British mandate was designed for Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine. Faisal was then sent into exile by the French. For Arab nationalists who saw Damascus as the home of Arabs, the Sykes-Picot agreement was viewed as a betrayal of the ideal of Pan-Syrianism. As opposed to the expectations, the divisions, that were envisioned by the French, united the country, and made the gradual spread of nationalism inevitable. It is this feeling of betrayal that drove much of modern Syria’s foreign policy. As stated by Pipes (1990), the division of Syria and the ideal of Pan-Syrianism are among the main reasons for the conflicts among Syrians, Lebanese, Palestinians, Israelis, and Jordanians.

Syrian insurgency between 1920 and 1945 caused the French to withdraw in 1946. The French withdrawal followed decades of political turmoil and chaos in Syria. Shukri al-Quwatli, the first president after French rule, governed during this troubled time. Quwatli’s contested leadership continued until a military coup in 1949. Then, in 1955, he became president again, ruling until the Syrian-Egyptian union.

As a result of the political turmoil and instability, leftist parties emerged to fill the political vacuum. In 1957, the Syrian Baathist Party, which was a left-leaning party with the aim of creating a pan-Arab state, began to control the government. The Baathists joined Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt in creating the United Arab Republic in 1958. In practice, however, the federation principle did not work for the Baathists, and the Republic was dominated by Egypt. Nasser's growing control over Syria caused dissatisfaction among Syrians (Collelo 1987). The United Arab Republic dissolved with a military coup in 1961, and the provisional leaders withdrew Syria from the United Arab Republic. Following the secession, Syria fell into a cycle of coups, political disorders, and protests. Clashes between the civil and military branches of the Baathists reinforced this new wave of political turmoil. The unpopularity of the government in Syria was reinforced with the defeat in the 1967 war. Protests in the streets of Damascus called for fresh leadership. Popular protests and clashes between the civilian Baathists and the military branch also triggered a military confrontation with Jordan in 1970. By refusing to send tanks to support Palestinians against Jordan, Hafiz al-Assad challenged the civilian Baathist government. Two months after the defeat in the Jordanian confrontation, a final military coup resulted in the arrest of the civilian government and installed Hafiz al-Assad to the position of prime minister.

In a short time, Hafiz al-Assad centralised his power and managed to control diverse ethnic and religious groups within Syria, and he set up a semi-Islamic semi-secular state to include ethnic and religious groups other than the Sunni majority. Consequently, both the Sunni majority and the other ethnicities were challenged. Al-Assad's Baath regime supplanted Islam with a romantic-secular form of Arabism. Hafiz al-Assad's non-religious worldview set the stage for the struggle with the Islamist movement that ensued in the 1970s and 1980s. In this sense, Hafiz al-Assad's governments were seen as "the most effective barriers against the spread of radical Islam" in the Middle East (Zisser 1999, 49). Al-Assad supported radical Islamic groups against Israel, but at the same time combatted the fundamentalist factions of Islam which idealised the clerical regime in Iran (Zisser 1999). In this regard, al-Assad rejected "every uncultured interpretation of Islam that lays bare an odious narrow-mindedness and a loathsome bigotry, Islam being the religion of love, progress, social justice and equality for all" (Batatu 1999, 261).

Hafiz al-Assad ruled the country for thirty years until his death in 2000. His rule was identified with a stable government thanks to the heavy hand of his authoritarian regime. During his thirty years of rule, Hafiz al-Assad staged the bloodiest assault by an Arab ruler against his own people

in modern times. In 1982, Hafiz al-Assad's army crushed a Sunni rebellion in Hama, slaughtering an estimated 20,000 of his own people and leaving the city in ruins (*The Guardian* 2011).

Besides internal stability, al-Assad also secured an autonomous foreign policy during the most turbulent times of the Middle East region. During his reign, Syria experienced a long period of political stability. By focusing on the political stability that the al-Assad regime provided for Syria, in comparison to the era of continuous coups and instability, the state-monopolised media also contributed to its durability (Saleh 2003).

The Reign of Bashar al-Assad until the Outbreak of the Civil War (2000–11)

With Bashar al-Assad, the second al-Assad regime began in 2000 after the death of Hafiz al-Assad. When President Bashar al-Assad came to power, Syrians hoped that the country would transform into an open society in terms of politics, economics, and culture (Zisser 2005). In this context, Bashar al-Assad encouraged intellectuals to form cultural and political forums to advance democracy in Syria. President Assad's support for the forums even encouraged Syrian intellectuals to criticise the political system of the country (Zisser 2003). Immediately after his succession to power, Bashar al-Assad made decisions to gain popularity among the opposition, such as releasing six hundred political prisoners, allowing the Muslim Brotherhood to resume political activities, and evacuating Syrian troops from Beirut.

In the realm of economics, Bashar al-Assad presented himself as a progressive reformer, and declared his intent to reform the Syrian economy. At the time of his succession, the Syrian economy was not able to create jobs for the growing population entering the labour market (Baroutt 2011). In his inaugural address, he stressed the need for economic reforms, establishing economic networks, and fighting corruption (Briscoe, Janssen, and Smith 2012). In 2005, Bashar al-Assad announced the adoption of a "Social Market Economy." In this context, private banks, Syrian Stocks and Financial Markets Authority, and two private holding companies, Cham Holding and Syria Holding, were established, and one thousand new laws and decrees were enacted to promote market reforms (Haddad 2012). Bashar al-Assad's liberalising moves served to the benefit of a selected pro-government economic elite that was allowed to share the wealth from profitable private-sector markets such as real estate, telecommunications, banking, and transportation. The economic elite that benefited from liberalisation was mainly composed of Alawites, who were

also in control of public sectors. The promotion of regime loyalists in the economy and the privileges they enjoyed caused fragmentation among the economic and political elite and created resentment against the regime (Briscoe, Janssen, and Smith 2012). Under Bashar's presidency, state-business networks became more powerful and developed to compete with the traditional bourgeoisie of Damascus and Aleppo. His approach regarding the internationalisation of markets and globalisation was also problematic. He was, like his father, not really a fan of globalisation, as he stated during his meeting with the Chinese vice president in 2001: "the nations of the world who work together to achieve peace, security, stability and development, today face a series of challenges topped by the challenge of globalisation" (Zisser 2005, 120). As stated by himself very often, globalisation was a guise for the ones who wish for cultural and economic hegemony to abolish national identities (Zisser 2005).

As mentioned previously, Bashar al-Assad's priority for Syria was fiscal and monetary reform. Thus, he needed to pursue a foreign policy that was more in line with Western interests and to mend ties with the international community. Initially, as pointed out by Hinnebusch (2009), he received a warm reception from several foreign governments. In a short time, President al-Assad managed to improve relations with neighbouring countries, particularly Turkey and Iraq. The heyday of Syrian foreign policy ended abruptly as a consequence of numerous regional developments such as the breakdown of the peace process, the Iraq war, which Syria opposed, and the assassination of Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri (Hinnebusch 2009). Under the pressure of international discourse denouncing Syria as one of the states in the axis of evil, "Syria's Arab nationalist identity was aroused, the regime's old Machiavellian foreign policy instincts revived and the domestic reform agenda was constrained" (Hinnebusch 2009, 8).

Before the war, Syria had experienced considerable economic growth: the annual GDP growth was around five percent, except for 2010 when the country faced the worst drought in its history (Trading Economics 2017). As highlighted by Polk (2013, 19), before the war "nearly 90 percent of Syrian children attended primary or secondary schools and between eight and nine in ten Syrians had achieved literacy." However, Bashar al-Assad still needed legitimacy both internally and internationally. He lacked charisma, and more importantly did not have the experience to carry out all the changes he had planned (Zisser 2005).

Bashar al-Assad attempted to legitimise his leadership with elections (Polk 2013), but the public still did not recognize his legitimacy. Thus, even the election results were not sufficient to prevent the bloodiest civil

war in the history of Syria. Bashar al-Assad's regime was soon perceived as a tyranny because of the lack of political participation of the masses and the severe police measures. Despite his proclaimed intention for reform, Bashar al-Assad extended the police state, and set up a brand new generation of security apparatus (Briscoe, Janssen, and Smith 2012). The so-called Damascus Spring ended in 2001. In under a year, Bashar al-Assad's Baathist government gradually returned to authoritarian methods. At the beginning, Bashar al-Assad did not entirely cut ties with the opposition. For example, he permitted five moderate opposition groups' Damascus Declaration in September 2005. However, the opposition was radically crushed after the Arab Spring in 2010. Then, Bashar al-Assad's response to public protests triggered a major crisis. As stated by Wieland (2012, 1), "the brutal response of Syria's authorities to an eruption of protest in early 2011 propelled the country into the conflict. It was the last and most catastrophic of a series of misjudgements by Bashar al-Assad's regime over the decade of his rule."

Chronology of the Syrian Civil War (2011–17)

Inspired by the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, a wave of unrest began in the city of Deraa in March 2011. Locals gathered around the main streets and demanded the release of fourteen school children who were arrested after writing an Arab uprising slogan on a wall: "The people want the downfall of the regime." The protestors also called for democracy and greater freedom. Security forces quickly responded to the unrest, and on March 18 opened fire, killing four people. In less than a week, the unrest spilled over to other cities. At the end of March the armed forces were commanded to crush the protestors. Tanks shelled residential areas and targeted the homes of the protestors. Neighbourhoods in Deraa were destroyed and dozens of people were killed. However, the crackdown triggered wider anti-government protests, not just in Deraa but also in other cities like Baniyas, Homs, Hama, and the suburbs of Damascus. The regime's army besieged each of these cities and continued to crack down on protests. By mid-May, around one thousand people had lost their lives ("Guide: Syria Crisis" 2012).

At the beginning of the protests, the protestors were only calling for democracy and freedom, not the end of the al-Assad regime. But after security forces cracked down on the peaceful protests, people started to demand al-Assad's resignation. Bashar al-Assad refused to resign. Instead, he announced some conciliatory measures to calm the populace. He called for the end of the forty-eight-year state of emergency in April 2011.

Furthermore, he held a referendum in February 2012 for a new constitution and multi-party elections (“Guide: Syria Crisis” 2012).

To organize an opposition bloc against al-Assad, in October 2011 the Syrian National Council (SNC) was established, dominated by Sunni Muslims. As an alternative to the SNC, the National Coordination Committee (NCC) was formed by dissidents who were suspicious of the Islamist domination of the SNC. At the end of March 2012, all opposition groups, except the NCC, decided to recognize the SNC as the “formal interlocutor and formal representative of the Syrian people” (BBC 2012). In addition to the political opposition blocs, an alternative armed force, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), was established. The aim of the FSA was to topple Bashar al-Assad with force. The FSA was based in Turkey and organized attacks against Syrian security forces throughout the northern provinces of Syria, particularly in Idlib.

In March 2012, the bombardment of Homs left an estimated seven hundred people dead. This was a turning point for the international community. The United Nations and Arab League assigned Kofi Annan as special envoy to Syria. Annan proposed a six-point peace plan and called for a UN-supervised ceasefire. The peace plan was a proposal for the initiation of a political process, the release of detainees, delivery of aid, free movement for journalists, and the right to protest (“Kofi Annan's six-point plan for Syria” 2012). The Assad regime did not accept the ceasefire proposal and announced that Syrian armed forces “would not withdraw until the ‘armed terrorist groups’ had presented written guarantees of a ‘halt to all violence’” (“Guide: Syria Crisis” 2012, 1). Kofi Annan resigned his post after the failure of brokering a ceasefire in Syria.

In 2013, the conflict took a more dangerous turn. Following rumours of Assad’s use of chemical weapons, US President Barack Obama stated that there would be “enormous consequences”, if al-Assad used chemical weapons against his people. He declared it a “redline” for the US administration. Despite the warnings, sarin gas was used twice, on March 19 and August 21. In March 2013, twenty-six people died as a result of a gas attack, while hundreds lost their lives on August 21. On both occasions, the government and the rebel forces accused each other of using prohibited gas (“Syria Civil War Timeline” 2017). The international community, including the United States, blamed the Assad regime for the chemical attacks, but Congress declined Obama’s request for authorisation to strike the Syrian government. However, the United Nation’s investigations regarding the suspicions of Assad’s use of chemical weapons continued through 2015. In August 7, 2015, the UNSC authorised the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to investigate the

reports of the regime's use of chlorine gas against civilians. The investigation found that both the Syrian military and the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Lebanon (ISIL) had used chemical weapons against civilians. However, a UNSC resolution calling for sanctions against the Assad regime to punish its use of chemical weapons was vetoed by Russia and China ("Syria Civil War Timeline" 2017). Chemical attacks continued in 2017. In April 2017, fifty-eight people died as a result of a nerve-gas attack in a rebel-held town, Khan Sheikhoun. Despite allegations, both Russia and Syria denied their involvement in this.

Brutal attacks targeting both Syrian and non-Syrian cities by ISIL were another turning point in the Syrian war. The rise of ISIL and its popularity even among Muslims who are citizens of Western countries drew the international community into the fight against ISIL. In this context, on September 23, 2014, the US-led coalition launched limited airstrikes against them in Syria.

Following the US involvement, Russia has also actively involved itself in the conflict since September 2015, with the Russian air force carrying out airstrikes against Assad's opponents, despite the international community's accusations of the bombing of civilian sites, including hospitals. The Russian involvement has gradually changed the course of the five-year civil war in favour of the Assad regime. At the time of writing the Russian President Vladimir Putin has declared the withdrawal of Russian troops from Syria since the goal of the "complete eradication of terrorists" has been achieved ("Putin Orders Beginning of Withdrawal from Syria" 2017). Despite the Russian President's declarations, however, there is still reason to believe that the war is not yet over. But, in the last days of 2017, as attention has been diverted by US President Trump's move to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel, the developments in Syria have been temporarily sidelined by the international community.

Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, civil wars have increasingly become the dominant form of armed conflict in the contemporary system. The war in Syria fits the definition of a civil war, but considering it as such is misleading since it has long gone beyond the limits of a civil war. The war now shows characteristics of a transnational conflict with the inclusion of "inspirations from events in other countries, links to actors in other countries, as well as ...international interventions" (Gleditsch 2017, 1). Above all, as with all other cases of civil war, the implications of the Syrian war are also transnational—that is to say, the war in Syria has

important implications not just for neighbouring countries but for the international community as a whole. Among the transnational, even worldwide, implications of the Syrian war are the growing numbers of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers, the main focus of our book. The aim of this chapter has been to familiarise our readers with the historical context that left the Syrians in the middle of a long-haul civil war. As mentioned earlier, this particular chapter serves the purpose of providing a historical context for the war and also the individual stories of the Syrian refugees. In a way, we cannot understand their stories in isolation from the story of their homeland. Even though the chapter is organized around the state of politics in Syria, the socioeconomic consequences of political developments have also been pointed out.

Following the historical context of the sending country, Syria, we now turn to the host country. The following two chapters will review the legal context, namely the refugee regime in Turkey, and the social context including political discourse vis-à-vis Syrian refugees and the reception of refugees by host communities.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE BRIEF HISTORY OF ENCOUNTERS WITH ASYLUM IN TURKEY AND SYRIAN REFUGEES

Since April 2011, when a group of 250 Syrians crossed the border and asked for Turkey's protection, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey has increased dramatically. Currently, Turkey hosts around three million registered Syrians. Only one-third of them live in camps, while the remaining millions are spread all around the country. For the first couple of years, southeastern border towns and cities were Syrians' first choice because of the geographic proximity to their homelands. Throughout 2014 and 2015, this trend changed. Now, the majority of Syrians who lost their fate in returning to Syria have started to move to the west of Turkey, aiming to reach Europe. Even though Turkish lands have been open to the refugees and asylum seekers for years, this is the first time the country has received millions of asylum seekers in such a short time. Against this background, this chapter first traces the status of asylum seekers and refugees in international law. The chapter continues with a brief overview of the history of refugees in Turkish land and then concludes with Turkey's refugee and asylum regime and its implications for the latest influx of Syrians in Turkey.

The Asylum Seekers and Refugees as an International Problem

As history shows, all wars and ethnic disputes cause intensive movements of people; thus, millions of people have been seeking asylum in places they consider to be secure. Generally, it is presumed that those people who seek asylum in neighbouring countries and reside in the camps will return to their homelands once the war/disputes end in their own countries. Paragraph 1 of Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines the right of asylum seeking as "everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum for persecution." In addition to cases of individuals seeking asylum for political reasons, large-scale asylum influx

may arise from civil wars, conflicts, and massive disasters. Due to the forced migrations during the Second World War, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees stands out among the universal documents prepared and adopted by all members of the United Nations. This convention was adopted during the conference which took place on December 14, 1950 by the decree of number 429 (V) of the United Nations General Assembly and signed on July 28, 1951 in Geneva. In accordance with Article 43, it went into effect on April 22, 1954. By signing the convention, the signatory state parties agreed on the following principles:

considering that the grant of asylum may place unduly heavy burdens on certain countries, and that a satisfactory solution of a problem of which the United Nations has recognized the international scope and nature cannot therefore be achieved without international cooperation, expressing the wish that all States, recognizing the social and humanitarian nature of the problem of refugees, will do everything within their power to prevent this problem from becoming a cause of tension between States, noting that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is charged with the task of supervising international conventions providing for the protection of refugees.(UN Convention Relating to the Status of the Refugees 1951)

As this convention defined the legal status of people who became refugees before 1951, a new regulation was brought by the protocol in 1967 that reads: “considering that new refugee situations have arisen since the Convention was adopted and that the refugees concerned may therefore not fall within the scope of the Convention.” However, despite the convention and the protocol, sovereign states are recognized as the ultimate decision-makers when considering whether they will accept the refugees, the number of refugees they will accept, and the settlement regulations of refugees.

The convention and the protocol were drafted according to the conditions of the Second World War and mostly for European refugees. Due to the changes in the character of wars and as the disputes intensified outside Europe, the protection of refugees began to cause distressful conditions for the countries that opened their doors to the refugees. Thus, they began to be affected by crises outside their own borders. In other words, as the issue of refugees and asylum seekers emerges as a security concern for states, it also becomes a security and foreign policy issue for governments. In this context, in 2001, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951, the numerous difficulties concerning the protection of refugees that were