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## **Investigating the Syrian Crisis and Divergent Middle Eastern Policies with Recommendations and Solutions Regarding the Turkish-American Relations**

### **Abstract**

*This research article explores how the tensions between Turkey and the USA, two allied nations with a shared history of liberal values dating back to the Ottoman Empire, challenge the conceptual framework through their differing approaches to the Syrian conflict. The primary objective of this study is to analyze how Turkey and the USA address and respond to the Syrian crisis, taking into account their divergent national security concerns and interests influenced by the ongoing global developments. Additionally, the study dwells upon the Turkish societal perceptions posed by the Syrian refugees, drawing on illuminating insights from the existing literature and applying the threat theory perspectives. The study also proposes a set of potential solutions to address these issues, to mitigate the tension, and to enhance a bilateral cooperation. Utilizing a comprehensive literature and document review methodology, this study elucidates*



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*the interplay between the Turkish and American policies and explores the negative perception in the Turkish society, including the impacts on the labour markets, economic stability, and cultural norms. The findings highlight that, within the scope of the Syrian conflict, the USA has predominantly pursued a realist approach rather than seeking resolution through the liberal negotiation strategies. Moreover, the findings accentuate the fact that the negative perception of the Syrians to labour markets, job opportunities, economic stability, national resources, and public safety, as well as their alleged involvement in crimes such as terrorism and theft, negatively impacts the Turkish society's traditions, customs, lifestyle, culture, and moral norms. These cultural differences, along with the other issues mentioned, foster a belief in the superiority of the Turkish society over the Syrian society, contributing to a symbolic negative perception of the Syrian refugees in relation to the Turkish identity and societal cohesion.*

**Keywords:** *Syrian Refugees, Turkish-American Relations, Negative Perception, Refugee Impact, National Security, National Identity Issues*

## **Suriye Krizi ve Farklaşan Ortadoğu Politikalarının Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerine Yönelik Öneriler ve Çözümler ile İncelenmesi**

### **Öz**

*Bu araştırma makalesi, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na kadar uzanan ortak bir liberal değerler geçmişine sahip iki müttefik ülke olan Türkiye ve ABD arasındaki gerilimlerin, Suriye ihtilafına yönelik farklı yaklaşımları üzerinden kavramsal çerçeveyi nasıl zorladığını incelemektedir. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, Türkiye ve ABD'nin, devam eden küresel gelişmelerden etkilenen farklı ulusal güvenlik kaygılarını ve çıkarlarını göz önünde bulundurarak Suriye krizini nasıl ele aldıklarını ve bu krize nasıl tepki verdiklerini analiz etmektir. Buna ek olarak, çalışma, mevcut literatürden aydınlatıcı içgörülerden yararlanarak ve tehdit teorisi perspektiflerini uygulayarak, Suriyeli mültecilerin Türk toplumunda yarattığı algılar üzerinde durmaktadır. Çalışma ayrıca bu sorunları ele almak, gerilimi azaltmak ve ikili işbirliğini geliştirmek için bir dizi potansiyel çözüm önermektedir. Kapsamlı bir literatür ve belge inceleme metodolojisi kullanan bu çalışma, Türk ve Amerikan politikaları arasındaki etkileşimi aydınlatmakta ve işgücü piyasaları, ekonomik istikrar ve kültürel normlar üzerindeki etkiler de dahil olmak üzere Türk toplumundaki olumsuz algıyı araştırmaktadır. Bulgular, Suriye ihtilafı kapsamında ABD'nin liberal müzakere stratejileri yoluyla çözüm aramak yerine ağırlıklı olarak realist bir yaklaşım izlediğini vurgulamaktadır. Ayrıca bulgular, Suriyelilerin işgücü piyasaları, iş fırsatları, ekonomik istikrar, ulusal kaynaklar ve kamu güvenliğine yönelik olumsuz algılarının yanı sıra terörizm ve hırsızlık gibi suçlara karıştıkları iddialarının Türk toplumunun gelenek, görenek, yaşam tarzı, kültür ve ahlaki normlarını olumsuz etkilediğini vurgulamaktadır. Bu kültürel farklılıklar, bahsedilen diğer konularla birlikte, Türk toplumunun Suriye toplumundan üstün olduğuna dair bir inancı beslemekte ve Suriyeli mültecilerin Türk kimliği ve toplumsal uyumu ile ilgili sembolik bir olumsuz algıya katkıda bulunmaktadır.*

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Suriyeli Mülteciler, Türk-Amerikan İlişkileri, Olumsuz Algı, Mülteci Etkisi, Ulusal Güvenlik, Ulusal Kimlik Sorunları

## **Introduction**

The period in the context of the Turkish-American relations that began with the March 1 memorandum in 2002 and continues to the present day can be characterized as one in which the foundations of the relationship were significantly tested. Since 2002, it has become highly evident that the relationship between the two countries has moved beyond traditional diplomatic channels. Key events include the March 1 memorandum, the Süleymaniye incident, arms embargoes imposed on Turkey, tensions over Halkbank, visa issues, the Pastor Brunson case, the Syrian conflict, and the Turkey's decision to purchase the S-400 missile system. The Syrian civil war and the safe zone issue are additional examples of the challenges faced in the Turkish-US relations during the AK Party era. Beyond creating tensions with the US, the Syrian conflict has been a longstanding concern for Turkey in its region. Among the recent issues between the two countries, many experts consider the Syrian situation to be the most troubling for Turkey due to its national security concerns. The tensions and issues in the Turkey-Syria relations extend well beyond the Syrian War that began in 2011. Under the management and the leadership of Hafez Assad, the Syria's support for the PKK terrorist organization added a new dimension to the longstanding problems between the two countries. The root causes of the tensions between Turkey and Syria include the Syria's claim over Hatay, disputes over water sharing, and support for the PKK. Over time, the Syrian issue has evolved from a bilateral tension between Turkey and Syria to becoming one of the most critical areas of the contention between Turkey and the US since 1947. A notable example of the collaborative approach taken by the two countries regarding Syria is the negotiation and establishment of a safe zone, including the creation of a joint operations centre. These initiatives sought to address conflicts and lay the groundwork for the reconciliation through a number of sophisticated diplomatic negotiations. When examining the Turkey's policies within the context of the liberal versus realist approach dilemma in the Syrian conflict, three distinct periods can be identified. The first period, from 2000 to 2011, is characterized by a purely liberal approach, during which Turkey focused on the trade and mutual welfare and prosperity of both societies in its relations with Syria. The second period, from 2011 to 2014, witnessed generally positive relations between Turkey and the US. The third period began in 2015 with the capture of Tel Abyad by the YPG and continues to the present day, marked by the ongoing regional interest-based tensions with

the US and a dominance of the realist approaches. Initially, Turkey sought to address the Syrian issue through the liberal methods with several negotiations and through diplomacy. However, as negotiations yielded unsatisfactory results and the US failed to honour agreements like the Manbij deal, Turkey shifted to a more realist approach. This shift is evident in the Turkey's military operations, which reflect the application of the coercive power to achieve its regional interests.

In recent years, as discussed by Castles & Miller (2008), increasing humanitarian crises, protracted wars, and political instability have led to significant refugee flows, resulting in a sharp rise in the number of people seeking asylum worldwide. As demonstrated by the evidence presented in the study by UNHCR (2014), by 2014, with the onset of the Syrian conflict, the global total of the refugees and asylum seekers had reached 46.3 million. As elucidated by Tunç (2015), Turkey, significantly impacted by the Syrian crisis, has adopted an "open door policy," making it the country hosting the largest number of the Syrian refugees among the Syria's neighbouring states.

As discussed through the evidence demonstrated in the assessment by UNHCR (2011), as the number of the refugees worldwide continues to rise, finding a permanent solution for their plight has become one of the most challenging issues for the international community. Although many refugees prefer to return to their home countries when conditions improve, ongoing conflicts and political instability have made this return impractical, forcing the refugees to remain in the countries to which they have fled. While the international community is obligated to protect and oversee the refugees, as outlined in the 1951 Geneva Convention, citizens in Western countries hosting the refugees often react with intolerance, distrust, and jealousy. There is a prevalent perception that there is a trade-off between the welfare of the refugees and that of the local population (Fakih and Marrouch, 2015). Similarly, in the analysis conducted by Erdoğan (2014), as the Syrian population migrates to Turkey and more the Syrians choose to stay, the negative attitudes towards the Syrian refugees have become increasingly apparent within the Turkish society.

As detailed by Murray & Marx (2013), the foundation of the negative attitudes and behaviours towards the refugees is often rooted in the "perception of threat." This perception may arise from various factors, such as the competition for jobs, differing values between the refugees and the local population, or the sheer number of the refugees. Several theoretical frameworks address this perception of threat, including Integrated Threat Theory, System Justification Theory, and the Unified Instrumental Model of Group Conflict. The research grounded in these theories

has revealed that the perceptions of the threat are pivotal in shaping the negative attitudes and the behaviours towards the Syrian refugees and asylum seekers, as well as influencing the intergroup conflicts. In examining the scholarly work of Oytun & Gündoğar (2015), it becomes evident that in the context of the Turkish society's xenophobic attitudes posed by the Syrian refugees, a nuanced understanding of these underlying threat perceptions is of high vitality. Such an understanding is crucial for mitigating the intergroup conflicts and crafting the policies that foster a peaceful coexistence.

While the literature on the dynamics between the Turkish society and the Syrians frequently explores the negative attitudes of the society towards the Syrians, there is a notable absence of research that systematically examines, discusses, and proposes solutions along with recommendations to the underlying threat perceptions driving these negative attitudes. The existing research body together with the studies on the societal attitudes and behaviours tend to address the threat perceptions towards the Syrians only superficially. This research article seeks to fill this gap in the literature by methodically compiling and analysing the threat perceptions held by the Turkish society towards the Syrians based on a research analysis, offering a more comprehensible understanding than the previously available studies.

## **2. A Review of the Literature**

### **2.1. The Turkish-American Relations: The Tension Over Syria**

As elucidated in Aljazeera (2014), the intensive use of the PKK terrorist organization as a policy tool against Turkey occurred during the rule of Hafez al-Assad, who emerged as a significant figure in the Syrian politics from the 1970s onward. In addition to providing the necessary infrastructure for the PKK to use for shelter, training, and operational activities against Turkey, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, Assad also granted Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the organization, a residence permit in Damascus beginning in 1979. The rise in the terrorist attacks against Turkey originating from Syria caused a considerable alarm in Turkey. In 1998, then-President Süleyman Demirel publicly stated that Turkey might retaliate against Syria. At that time, the Turkish armed forces began to amass the military forces along the Syrian border. On September 16, then-Land Forces Commander Atilla Ateş visited the Reyhanlı district of Hatay and explicitly mentioned Syria, asserting that if Syria did not take the necessary steps, Turkey would have the right to take all the appropriate measures. With both sides on the verge of a war, then-Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak intervened as a mediator between the parties. The Turkish side provided

Mubarak with a comprehensive dossier detailing the relationship between the Syrian state and the PKK, as well as the protection afforded to Abdullah Öcalan by the Syrian intelligence. Through Mubarak's mediation, Syria agreed to expel Abdullah Öcalan, who was subsequently sent to Athens on October 9, 1998. Öcalan's deportation alleviated the tensions between the two countries and ushered in a new era in their relations with the signing of the Adana Agreement on October 20, 1998.

As defined and presented in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (2011), The Adana Agreement is a document comprising five articles. An examination of its articles and overall content reveals that the Syrian government acknowledges the PKK as a terrorist organization and commits to ceasing its support for such organizations, particularly the PKK. Additionally, the agreement establishes a framework for joint cooperation between the parties in combating terrorism. In line with the improved relations between the two countries, the Adana Agreement was succeeded by the Joint Cooperation Agreement Against Terrorism and Terrorist Organizations, signed on December 21, 2010. This subsequent agreement referenced the Adana Agreement and aimed to enhance cooperative efforts in counterterrorism and security. Essentially, it sought to create a more robust legal framework for intensified collaboration between the parties. The agreement consists of nine sections and twenty-three articles and can be viewed as an advanced iteration of the Adana Agreement.

As demonstrated by the evidence presented in Aljazeera (2014), it can be observed that the series of several positive developments in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Syria accelerated in 2000, following Bashar al-Assad's ascension to the power after the death of his father. With al-Assad's rise, there was a notable increase in the high-level engagements between the two countries. In 2004, al-Assad visited Ankara, and later that year, Turkey and Syria signed a partnership agreement that facilitated the free trade. The subsequent year, 2005, saw a visit by then-President Ahmet Necdet Sezer to Syria. In 2008, Turkey played a mediating role in the negotiations between Israel and Syria. This trajectory of improving the relations was, however, disrupted by the onset of the Arab Spring in 2010. The Arab Spring began to impact Syria following the initiation of the protest demonstrations in Daraa, a city on the Jordanian border, on March 15, 2011. These protests rapidly spread to the other cities. During this period, Turkey advised Bashar al-Assad to implement reforms and to refrain from using violence to quell the demonstrations. In August, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu publicly declared that Turkey had exhausted its efforts to influence Syria, given that Assad had disregarded the Turkey's counsel. Additionally, during a visit

to Egypt in September, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan remarked that al-Assad had lost his credibility and reliability.

As discussed in Aljazeera (2014), the period during which relations between Syria and Turkey began to deteriorate also marked a time when the Syrian issue became a prominent agenda item between Turkey and the United States. In the early stages of the anti-regime uprisings in Syria, the attitudes of both Turkey and the US towards the Syrian crisis were notably aligned. A concrete example of this alignment was the second meeting of the Friends of Syria Group, led by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, held in Istanbul in April 2012. At this meeting, which featured an opening address by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Syrian National Council was recognized as the legitimate representative of all of the Syrians. The discussions also focused on strategies for pressuring Bashar al-Assad to end the violence. Clinton emphasized that, despite various challenges, efforts would be made to provide communication and medical aid to the Syrian opposition and that a series of international sanctions should be implemented to deter Assad from further violence against his people. The Syrian State News Agency (SANA) reported that the meeting was not organized by genuine supporters of Syria but by parties engaged in a hostile agenda against the country. Based on the book written by Clinton (2014), the diplomatic collaboration between Turkey and the US, characterized by cooperation and negotiation to address the Syrian crisis, was well-received by the US. In her 2014 book *Hard Choices*, Clinton noted that during her tenure from 2008 to 2012, the approaches of Turkey and the US regarding Syria were harmonized and that there was a shared understanding on the issue.

As reported and highlighted in news broadcasts by The Guardian channel (2014), perhaps the most recent instance of partial cooperation between the parties concerning the Syrian issue was the Ayn al-Arab (Kobani) situation. This event can also be regarded as a significant turning point in the developments in northern Syria. In 2014, the Obama administration provided airlifted weapons and supplies to the YPG, which was engaged in combat against ISIS in Ayn al-Arab, marking the first instance of such aid. The U.S. administration utilized C-130 cargo planes for this purpose, delivering an initial shipment of 24 tons of weapons and ammunition, along with 10 tons of medical supplies. Additionally, the Turkish government announced that it would open its border gates to allow Kurdish militias from northern Iraq to cross into Ayn al-Arab and offer support. To justify the aid, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry stated, “It is morally very difficult to turn our backs on a group fighting ISIS.” Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu described the aid

operation to Ayn al-Arab as part of a broader regional effort against ISIS. In 2015, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) elements, which were trained and equipped by Turkey and the U.S. under the train-and-equip program, engaged in combat in Syria as part of the fight against ISIS. However, U.S. officials believed that the FSA elements were not achieving the desired results. The U.S.'s increasing focus on the YPG, as it sought effective local partners in the region, further exacerbated Turkey's concerns. The emphasis on the YPG contributed to significant strains in Turkish-American relations. Turkey is particularly troubled by U.S. support for PYD/YPG elements in Syria, viewing it as contrary to its regional interests. The Democratic Union Party (PYD), which controls approximately a quarter of Syria, and its armed wing, the People's Protection Units (YPG), emerged prominently with the onset of the Syrian civil war. As regime forces withdrew in July 2012 to address uprisings elsewhere, the PYD/YPG swiftly took control of northern Syria without significant conflict. The YPG's influence expanded further with its involvement in the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS.

As reported by the TRT WORLD channel (2016), it is evident that both Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's statements and the stance of the Turkish government shifted in 2015. That year marked a period of significant change in Turkey's Syria policy. In June 2015, the YPG captured the city of Tel Abyad, which has a predominantly Arab population. This action was aimed at linking the YPG-controlled Jazira canton with Ayn al-Arab, thereby ensuring territorial continuity between the cantons. The YPG's move prompted a strong reaction from Turkey. At a National Security Council meeting on June 29, Turkey declared that any further actions west of the Euphrates would be considered a red line.

In the report prepared and presented by Szuba (2019), one of the events that triggered Turkey's military operations was the YPG's capture of Manbij in 2016. The YPG's control over Manbij and its continued presence there caused significant concern for Turkey. Despite Turkey's persistent diplomatic efforts and the U.S.'s hesitant stance, an agreement known as the Manbij Agreement was reached in June 2018. Turkey has repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with the U.S.'s delay in implementing this agreement. The Manbij Agreement outlined a three-stage process: First, YPG forces were to withdraw from Manbij, dismantle their established structures, and retreat to the east of the Euphrates. Second, control of the area would be assumed by Turkish and American military forces. Third, the administrative and managerial structures set up by the YPG in the region would be dismantled, and new administrative frameworks, comprised of the region's predominantly Arab population, would be established. However, since there were no



significant advancements regarding these agreed-upon issues, Turkey perceived this as a stalling tactic and began to frequently consider the option of a military operation. In the absence of substantial progress on Manbij, President D. Trump proposed the creation of a safe zone approximately 30 km deep. Nevertheless, it became apparent that Turkey and the United States had divergent views on the safe zone.

As demonstrated in the scholarly work conducted by Oytun (2019), it is evident that while Turkey envisions a zone extending up to the Iraqi border that is entirely cleared of terrorist elements and governed under its own sovereignty, the U.S. views this safe zone as a buffer intended to prevent conflicts between the Turkish military and the YPG, and to address Turkey's security concerns. The U.S. does not want the Turkish Army to enter the safe zone and prefers that military control be managed by an international coalition, potentially including countries such as the United Kingdom and France. They propose that local security be maintained by Arab components of the Syrian Democratic Forces and elements associated with the Iraqi KDP administration. Turkey, however, is sceptical about the idea of the Syrian Democratic Forces and Peshmerga elements collaborating for local security and strongly opposes the suggestion of international military control over the area. Turkey believes that such an arrangement would provide international protection and legitimacy to the YPG. Given these opposing viewpoints, achieving a meaningful resolution in negotiations appears challenging. During this period, Turkey has also engaged with Russia regarding Manbij and the area east of the Euphrates. Turkey's insistence on Manbij can be attributed to concerns about the potential establishment of permanent YPG-controlled structures west of the Euphrates. Additionally, some U.S.-based experts critique the U.S. policies toward northern Iraq and the YPG. Mike Doran, a scholar at the Hudson Institute, criticized the U.S. approach to northern Syria as strategically flawed, suggesting that while the U.S. claims to support the YPG, it has effectively supported the PKK. Doran warned that these terrorist elements might be leveraged by Russia and Bashar al-Assad in the future. His views, which have been echoed by several officials, including Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, align closely with Turkey's concerns.

As elucidated by Stein (2019), during this period of conflicting interests, the U.S. accused Turkey of supporting radical groups. Turkey has consistently denied these allegations. Both sides have at times accused each other of undermining regional stability. Disagreements between the two nations have persisted, particularly regarding the establishment of a safe zone. Turkey sought

complete control over a region extending up to the Iraqi border with a depth of 32 kilometres to ensure its national security, whereas the U.S. proposed a safe zone with a depth ranging from 5 to 14 kilometres. Former German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel revealed that, following the onset of the Syrian civil war, President Tayyip Erdoğan had presented Turkey's proposal for a no-fly zone and a safe zone to them. The subsequent refusal to accept Turkey's proposal was later critiqued as a misstep in European political strategy.

In the analysis conducted by Demir (2019), the chaos in Syria has significantly influenced Turkey's actions concerning national security. In response to these concerns and the need to establish a safe zone, Turkey has conducted a series of military operations in Northern Syria. The first operation, Operation Euphrates Shield, occurred between August 24, 2016, and March 27, 2017. This operation, centred on the Jarabulus region, targeted both the PKK/YPG terrorist organization and DAESH elements. Turkey felt compelled to launch this operation in response to attacks by DAESH, which had entered Turkey using false identities and committed acts that provoked widespread outrage. The second operation, Operation Olive Branch, commenced on January 20, 2018, with a focus on the Afrin region. The primary objective of this operation was to dismantle PKK/YPG formations and bases in Turkey's immediate border area, and it is commonly referred to as the Afrin operation. The third operation, Operation Peace Spring, was carried out in Northern Syria in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, which permits any UN member state to exercise the right of self-defence if faced with an armed attack, without waiting for the UN to act to maintain peace and security.

The initial steps towards establishing a Safe Zone, a key demand of Turkey concerning Syria, began on August 5, 2019. On August 7, 2019, Turkey and the U.S. reached the first agreement on the establishment and coordination of the Safe Zone. Following this agreement, the Combined Joint Operations Center was set up and commenced operations in the Akçakale district of Şanlıurfa on August 12. Turkish and U.S. military personnel conducted their first joint patrols on September 8, 2019, in Syrian territory adjacent to Akçakale as part of the Safe Zone establishment efforts east of the Euphrates. However, the Turkish side, deeming the joint patrols insufficient for achieving the desired security outcomes, launched Operation Peace Spring on October 9, 2019. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan publicly outlined the operation's objectives through social media. The operation, which began on October 9, aimed to achieve three primary goals: (1) to eliminate terrorist organizations such as PKK/YPG and DAESH from the region, (2) to establish a Safe Zone in northern Syria under full Turkish sovereignty and control, and (3) to

facilitate the return of the Syrian refugees to their homeland. Following the initiation of Operation Peace Spring, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence led a delegation to Turkey on October 17 to negotiate with President Erdoğan's team regarding northern Syria. After over four hours of discussions, the parties announced a 13-article agreement. This agreement stipulated that Turkey would pause its operation, and YPG forces would withdraw from the 32-kilometer Safe Zone within 120 hours. Article 12 of the agreement provided assurance that the sanctions announced by President Trump through a Presidential Decree would not be enforced, thereby promising that the U.S. would not impose comprehensive sanctions on Turkey, at least in the immediate future (Erdoğan, 2019).

As reported in BBC (2019), the rationale behind U.S. support for the YPG and the anticipated duration of this support remain subjects of considerable debate among experts. It is argued that there is a strategic link between the U.S.'s support for certain groups in northern Syria and Israel's security interests. A fundamental principle of U.S. foreign policy is the safeguarding of Israel's security. Both the U.S. and Israel have maintained a contentious relationship with Iran since 1979. To mitigate potential conflicts between Iran and Israel and to diminish Iran's regional influence, the U.S. views groups like the YPG in northern Syria as a cost-effective military asset. Given the significant influence of the Israel Lobby in U.S. politics and its role in shaping foreign policy, it is likely that policies prioritizing Israel's security and supporting groups such as the YPG will persist for the foreseeable future.

## **2.2.The Syrian Refugees in Turkey**

As articulated by Tunç (2015), the protests known as the “Arab Spring,” which began in Tunisia in 2010, spread to Syria in 2011. The regime's response to these protests was marked by severe violence, leading to numerous massacres. Many Syrians fleeing this intense political violence have sought refuge in various countries, including the United States, European nations, Lebanon, and Turkey. According to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for the Refugees (UNHCR, 2011), there are 4,843,344 registered Syrian refugees and asylum seekers worldwide, with 2.6 million of them residing in Turkey. This forced migration has significantly altered the demographic composition of the cities hosting the Syrian refugees. The top ten Turkish provinces with the highest Syrian populations are Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Istanbul, Gaziantep, Adana, Mersin, Kilis, Mardin, Bursa, and İzmir. Şanlıurfa is home to approximately 383,059 Syrians, while İzmir has an estimated 84,864 Syrians.

The Turkey's refugee policy is grounded in the 1951 Geneva Convention. This convention defines refugee status, outlines the rights of the refugees, and establishes the international community's responsibilities to protect the refugees and find durable solutions. According to the Geneva Convention, a refugee is defined as "a person who is outside his or her country of origin, who has a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, and who is unable or unwilling to seek protection from their home country or who, due to fear of persecution, is unwilling to return there" (UNHCR, 2011). As Şimşek (2018) asserts that in contrast, an individual seeking to be recognized as a refugee but awaiting the outcome of their application is referred to as an "asylum seeker." Although Turkey's refugee law is based on the 1951 Geneva Convention, it applies geographical reservations that affect the definitions of refugee and asylum seeker. Specifically, Turkey only grants full refugee status to individuals fleeing from European countries. In contrast, refugees from non-European countries such as Iraq, Somalia, Syria, and Afghanistan are not granted full refugee status but are instead provided with "temporary protection." Consequently, the Syrians seeking asylum in Turkey are classified under this temporary protection framework rather than being granted full refugee status.

As articulated by Tunç (2015), the number of the Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey continues to rise, and there is an increasing tendency among those who arrive to remain in Turkey over the long term. When considering the refugees globally, it is estimated that approximately one-third may never return to their home countries. According to Erdoğan (2014), even if the conflict in Syria were to end, "the likelihood that a significant portion of the Syrian refugees will choose not to return and instead settle permanently in Turkey is quite high." As the Syrian population in Turkey grows and their stay extends, they have increasingly come to be viewed by the public as "long-term guests," which has led to various social, economic, and political challenges.

The previous studies in the literature indicate that, in the initial years of Syrian migration, the Turkish public's attitudes towards the Syrians were largely positive, driven by a sense of "hospitality." However, as the refugee population grew, this positive sentiment gradually shifted to social tensions, the negative attitudes, and xenophobic reactions (Oytun & Gündoğar, 2015). Erdoğan (2014) discusses that the research on the Turkish society's views regarding the long-term presence of the Syrians reveals that 84% of the population considers the Syrians as temporary guests who should be repatriated once the conflict concludes and believes that they should not be granted citizenship. Additionally, studies on media portrayals of the Syrians show that a substantial portion of news coverage adopts a "negative" perspective, framing issues related to the Syrians as

problematic. News reports frequently focus on negative aspects such as war, social unrest, economic hardship, and inadequate housing conditions, thereby reinforcing adverse perceptions.

As Tunç (2015) articulates the fact that the negative attitudes within society can sometimes lead to conflicts between the local residents and the Syrian refugees. The national and international news reports indicate that tensions have arisen between Turkish citizens and the Syrians in cities with significant Syrian populations, such as Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, and Istanbul, since the onset of Syrian migration. For example, in Gaziantep, Syrians were targeted during protests organized against rising unemployment (Hürriyet, August 14, 2014). In another instance, a Turkish porter in a market harassed and blamed a Syrian worker, alleging that the Syrians were taking away job opportunities (Habertürk, August 8, 2014). These conflicts are not solely driven by economic factors; cultural and security issues also contribute to the friction between the locals and the Syrians. For instance, in İkitelli, Istanbul, hundreds of residents clashed with police, citing discomfort with the Syrian presence and accusations that the Syrians were harassing young Turkish girls. These incidents highlight the negative attitudes and behaviors within the Turkish society towards the Syrians, which can escalate into conflicts.

### **2.3.The Negative Perception in the Context of the Relations Between the Turkish People and the Syrian Refugees**

As demonstrated and discussed in the scholarly work of Murray & Marx (2013), the Syrian refugees can evoke a sense of threat in the societies that host them. For instance, the refugees often require various services such as employment, housing, healthcare, and language education. They may also bring diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious identities, which can sometimes conflict with the prevailing moral values of the local population. Additionally, the refugees might come from regions where highly infectious diseases, like tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, are prevalent, potentially introducing these diseases into their new communities. These potential sources of threat whether real or perceived shape the attitudes and behaviours of host societies towards the refugees. Literature indicates that the perception of threat is a crucial factor influencing attitudes and behaviours towards the refugees.

As elucidated by Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman (1999), in the context of the refugees and asylum seekers, several theoretical approaches explore the perception of threat that underpins the negative attitudes and behaviours from host societies. One such framework is Integrated Threat Theory, which identifies four distinct types of intergroup threats that contribute to the negative

attitudes and discriminatory behaviours: (1) realistic threat, (2) symbolic threat, (3) negative stereotypes, and (4) intergroup anxiety (). In the assessment carried out by Pettigrew & Tropp (2006), realistic threat refers to concerns about physical resources, political and economic power, health, and job opportunities that group members might perceive as being threatened by the presence of the refugees. Symbolic threat involves conflicts between the moral values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, and values of the ingroup and the outgroup. Negative stereotypes are unfounded beliefs that outgroup members possess undesirable traits such as laziness, aggressiveness, rudeness, or dishonesty. Lastly, intergroup anxiety is the unease and apprehension individuals feel in interactions with outgroup members, stemming from uncertainty about how they will be perceived and whether they will be accepted. This theory has been extensively tested and validated in studies on various outgroups, including the refugees and minorities (Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999).

The System Maintenance Theory, as proposed by Jost & Banaji (20014), in recent years, suggests that people have a tendency to preserve the existing socio-political system and status quo. According to the theory, perceived changes to the status quo can directly evoke a sense of threat and competition. In this context, the refugees' cultural and moral values and traditions may be viewed as threats to the status quo, as they can induce social, political, and economic changes. The more individuals perceive that the refugees are being accepted and supported by the system, the more favourable their attitudes towards them are likely to be.

As elucidated by Esses, V. M., Hodson, G., & Dovidio, J. F. (2003), the Combined Instrumental Group Conflict Model offers another theoretical perspective on the negative attitudes and behaviours towards the refugees, emphasizing the influence of economic concerns and values. According to this model, the presence of an out-group, combined with environmental factors (such as instability, fear of war, and economic hardships) and ideologies (like beliefs in the superiority of one's own group or nationalism), can interact to create perceived competition between groups. Groups that are perceived as growing in number or that are significantly different from the in-group are at high risk of being viewed as sources of competition. This perceived competition can encompass both tangible resources, such as job opportunities, and intangible ones, such as symbolic resources, values, and culture. Esses & Jackson (2008) argue that perceived competition can lead to the negative attitudes and behaviours towards the out-group, with the underlying motive being the desire to eliminate the source of competition—namely, the refugees. Research supporting this model has found that perceptions of competition contribute to prejudice and discrimination against the refugees. The threat theories discussed above illustrate that negative intergroup attitudes can be

fuelled by various factors, including numerical differences, cultural dissimilarities, and competition for economic resources, leading to intergroup conflicts.

Understanding the "threat perceptions" underlying the negative attitudes of the Turkish society towards the Syrians is crucial for developing effective policies that address societal concerns, prevent intergroup conflicts, and improve relations between groups. This research aims to explore these threat perceptions in the Turkish society by reviewing relevant literature. Specifically, it will analyse the scholarly articles published in recent years that address these negative attitudes and threat perceptions towards the Syrians refugees in Turkey.

### **3.Purpose of the Study**

The objective of this extensive research article is to first dwell upon the impact of the Syrian crisis on the Turkish-American relations, and then the negative attitudes toward the Syrian refugees living in Turkey. Secondly, the threat perception and related theories that are thought to underline the negative attitudes between these two groups are explained, and thirdly, the attitudes and perceptions of the Turkish society posed by the Syrians are examined considering the relevant studies in the literature within the scope of these theories. Finally, the findings of the study are discussed in light of the threat theories, offering a collection of solutions along with suggestions for the policy makers within the framework of two research questions as follows:

#### **3.1. Research Questions**

- To what extent have the Syrian refugees who have arrived in Turkey impacted the country's cultural fabric and in what ways is Turkey affected by them?
- To what extent has the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey influenced the Turkish-American relations, and what measures have Turkey, and the United States implemented, or what approaches have they adopted, in response to this influence?

### **4.Methodology, Data Collection Tools, and Analysis**

As detailed and elucidated by Weber & Watson (2002), the review literature method is implemented due to its efficacy in accumulating definitive, empirical, and persuasive evidence-based data, and in analysing and interpreting them to contribute to the existing research body in the relevant field. In alignment with the study's objectives, the literature review serves as a systematic approach to aggregating, critically evaluating, and synthesizing data from the extant scholarly literature within the discipline. Within the scope of the findings, this research article aims to shed

light on the Syrian Crisis and the Divergent Middle Eastern Policies: The Impacts on the Turkish-American Relations along with the Perceptions of the Turkish Society's Threats Posed by the Syrian Refugees, offering a collection of policy recommendations and solutions by seeking answers to two research questions formulated under the section of Research Questions.

## **5. The Findings of the Impacts of the Syrian Refugees on the Turkish Society as a Whole**

To find answers to the research questions of the research article, it is discovered that when examining the relevant literature, several key findings emerged to address the research questions central to this study. The threat perceptions underlying the negative attitudes of the Turkish society towards the Syrians can be categorized into five main areas: (1) cultural threat, (2) threat to social and moral order, (3) economic threat, (4) security threat, and (5) threat to access to the basic services. The analysis revealed that 32% of the 25 studies reviewed identified the Syrians as a cultural threat, 20% as a threat to social and moral order, 32% as a security threat, 24% as a threat to access to the basic services, and 48% as an economic threat. This section will discuss these perceived threats in detail, as identified in the Turkish society in the context of the threats posed by the Syrian refugees.

### **5.1. The Cultural Negative Perception Posed by the Syrian Refugees**

The previous studies on the negative attitudes and behaviours of the Turkish society towards the Syrians indicate that the cultural differences between the Syrians and the local population are key factors underlying these negative perceptions. These studies suggest that the societal-level cultural differences contribute to the perception of the Syrians as a "cultural threat." In the assessment of the scholarly article conducted by Erdoğan (2014), it is revealed that "45.3% of the Turkish society perceives a significant cultural distance between itself and the Syrians" and "66.3% do not believe that the Syrians will integrate into the Turkish society." The most notable cultural differences between the Syrians and the difficulty in adapting to the Turkish society underscore the intensity of the perception of cultural threat within the community.

Erdoğan (2014) asserts that the perception that the Syrians pose a cultural threat, due to differences in language, traditions, and dress, is a significant factor underlying the negative attitudes and behaviours of the Turkish public towards the Syrians, particularly in Western cities of Turkey. There is a directly proportional relationship between the proportion of the Syrians living in a city and the local population's perception of the Syrians as a threat and their sense of insecurity. As noted, and articulated by Oytun & Gündoğar (2015, p. 25), "as the demographic profile of the



Syrians diverges from the social fabric of the province, the likelihood of the local population perceiving the Syrians as a threat and experiencing heightened insecurity increases." A study conducted with students at Düzce University revealed that some participants believed the Syrians should remain in camps rather than integrating into urban life, citing the cultural differences as a primary concern (Ankaralı et al., 2017). Similarly, in the analysis of the article produced by Taşdemir (2018), it is found in his study with university students in Eskişehir that participants viewed the Syrians as distinct from themselves in terms of social, cultural, linguistic, and lifestyle differences, which they perceived as threatening. Oytun & Gündoğar (2015) contend that the disparities in language, lifestyle, and culture between groups can occasionally lead to tension and conflict.

As emphasised by Oytun & Gündoğar (2015), in the border provinces, while the Syrians with similar ethnic backgrounds or sect affiliations to the local population may find it relatively easier to gain social acceptance, the cultural differences often lead to the perceptions of threat among the Turkish society. In particular, in the border provinces with the high Syrian populations, the shift in the demographic structure frequently results in the local residents viewing the Syrians as a threat to the cultural integrity of their communities, thereby generating anxiety. This dynamic is notably evident in the border provinces such as Kilis, Hatay, Şanlıurfa, and Gaziantep. In Kilis, where the majority of the population is Turkmen, the predominantly Arab Syrian population exacerbates the feelings of minority status among the local residents, leading to a heightened insecurity and anxiety. Similarly, in Hatay, where a significant number of the Syrian refugees are Sunni Muslims, the Arab Alevis experience a sense of insecurity due to the religious and cultural differences.

Furthermore, in the assessment of a related study conducted by Aktaş & Gülçür (2017), it is found that the primary factor driving the negative attitudes of the participants from Mersin towards the Syrians was the cultural differences. The local population perceives the Syrians as a threat to the cultural environment, fearing that they might alter the local customs and lifestyles. The participants from Gaziantep and Kilis, who expressed concerns similar to those in Mersin, also perceived the Syrians as a threat to the city's cultural fabric, with some even suggesting that the presence of the Syrians contributes to an identity deficit for the city. The concern that the Syrians may disrupt the cultural fabric of the Turkish society significantly influences societal attitudes and behaviours towards coexisting with the Syrians. The research indicates that this apprehension leads

to the negative views on the issues such as neighbourhood integration, intermarriage, and citizenship for the Syrians. In the analysis conducted by Güney & Konak (2015), it is observed that the Turkish society perceives the Syrians as a potential threat to the nation's cultural integrity. There is a prevalent belief that granting a citizenship to the Syrians could undermine the homogeneous cultural structure of the Turkish society, with a preference for their assimilation rather than integration. Similarly, as Aktaş (2017) found that the participants from Mersin avoid any attempts to establish any neighbourly relationships with the Syrians due to the perceived cultural differences, expressing a high level of discomfort at the prospect of living in proximity with them. As observed by Kahraman & Nizam (2016), the local residents often describe the Syrians using negative stereotypes such as "dirty," "rude," "unruly," and "untidy," which contributes to reluctance regarding intermarriage. It is discovered throughout the analysis of the relevant literature review that Süleymanov (2016) supported these findings by noting that while a majority of the local people did not object to their children playing with the Syrian children for the humanitarian reasons (61.1%), more serious and permanent interactions, such as marriage, were considered unfavourably. Specifically, 38% of the participants disapproved of the idea of their children marrying a Syrian due to a set of the cultural differences. In summary, the lifestyle disparities between the Turkish society and the Syrians, driven by a set of the cultural differences, are largely rejected by the Turkish society and perceived as threats to the social and cultural order.

## **5.2. The Syrian Refugees as Posing a Negative Perception to Social and Moral order**

As highlighted and presented in the work conducted by Erdoğan (2014), the Turkish society perceives the Syrians as a threat to the social and moral order due to the differences in socio-cultural practices, such as family dynamics, gender relationships, the social role of women, and the attitudes towards marriage and children. The reaction against the Syrians is partly attributed to changes such as the rise in polygamy, higher divorce rates, shifts in family structures, and instances of abuse following their arrival in Turkey. These changes are often seen as conflicting with the Turkish customs and traditions. Furthermore, there is widespread concern about the Syrians disrupting the social and moral fabric of society. The large influx of children and young, single, and widowed women from Syria has intensified fears that polygamy might become more prevalent and that divorce rates might rise, contributing to family conflicts and amplifying the local hostility, particularly among women (Kaypak & Bimay, 2016). In the border provinces like Kilis, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, and Hatay, where the the Syrian population is substantial, the high frequency of the Turkish men marrying the young Syrian women has caused anxiety among the local women

(Sönmez & Adıgüzel, 2017). As observed by Oytun & Gündoğar (2015), in Kilis, where the Syrians are implicated in about 20% of divorces, women experience significant fear of losing their husbands and sometimes blame the Syrians for seducing their spouses. As noted by Erdoğan (2014), the presence of young the Syrian women generates considerable anxiety among Turkish women, leading to expressions of dissatisfaction bordering on hostility. Furthermore, it is observed by Erdoğan (2014) that men threatening their wives with marrying the young Syrian women if they are dissatisfied triggers domestic conflicts. As reported by Kahraman & Nizam (2016) that the residents of Gaziantep blame the Syrians for rising divorce rates, the spread of polygamy, and the emergence of women and child trafficking. In Gaziantep, the Syrians are often associated with the spread of social corruption and immorality, reinforcing their perception as a threat to the moral order.

As noted by Kahraman & Nizam (2016), the perception of the Syrians as a threat in the Turkish society is partly attributed to the issues such as child marriages, unregistered children, and the nature of marriages with the Syrians. There is a prevalent belief that the Syrians marry off or even sell their young daughters for money, particularly the among residents of the border provinces, which fuels the perception of the Syrians as a threat to the moral and social order. Additionally, the marriages involving the Syrian women are often informal, with the men seeking to marry them through the intermediaries and paying money to the families of the women. This practice is regarded as a form of the exploitation and trafficking of the young girls and women. Erdoğan (2014) also highlighted a social perception that the Syrian women may resort to the prostitution due to the poverty-related issues, further reinforcing the view of the Syrians as a threat to the moral standards. A study involving the Gaziantep residents reflects this perception vividly, with a retired teacher describing the Syrians' impact as: “They entered us like a virus. They made our social fabric cancer” (Ekinci, Hülür, & Deniz, 2017, p. 388).

### **5.3. The Negative Security Perception Caused by the Syrian Refugees**

The previous studies in the literature indicate that the Syrians are perceived as a source of crime and terrorism within the Turkish society, leading to the concerns about security related to the Syrian refugees. In the assessment of a scholarly work conducted by Erdoğan (2014) , it is found that 62% of the Turkish population believes that the Syrians are involved in criminal activities such as violence, theft, extortion, drug trafficking, and prostitution, and that they pose a threat to public order and peace. This perception is even more pronounced in the Southeastern

region of Turkey, where 70% of the local population views the Syrians as a significant security threat.

As observed by Polat & Kaya (2017) that university students from various cities frequently characterize the Syrians with negative traits such as involvement in crime and theft, leading to heightened fear and anxiety among them. Similarly, as reported by Güney & Konak (2016) that the residents of Bolu perceive the Syrians as a security threat due to their association with criminal activities. In a study conducted in Ankara, it was revealed that approximately 60% of the participants believed that crimes such as theft, assault, murder, and injury had increased with the arrival of the Syrians (Taştan, Haklı, & Osmanoğlu, 2017). The participants from Gaziantep also expressed concerns about security, citing the Syrians' involvement in fights, assaults, and child abductions as reasons for their fears. An interviewee from Gaziantep remarked, "They harm people, they start fights, they attack young people, they abduct children. There is a park nearby, you cannot go to the park. They don't let our children go to the park; their priority is theirs. You are afraid to take your children out, you are afraid to send them to the grocery store at night" (Kahraman & Nizam, 2016, p. 821). Furthermore, as noted and emphasized by Sönmez & Adıgüzel (2017), the Gaziantep residents attribute the rise in crime rates to the Syrians. In Elazığ, the majority of participants believe that the Syrians contribute to crime rates through involvement in activities such as murder, extortion, harassment, and prostitution (Budak, 2017). Additionally, as discovered by Karasu (2017) that the irregular migration of the Syrian refugees in Şanlıurfa generates anxiety among the locals, who perceive the Syrians as a source of crime and security threat.

As noted by Erdoğan (2014), it is clear to understand that the perception that the Syrians are involved in crimes such as theft and extortion diminishes the local population's willingness to interact with them, prompting the individuals to take measures to distance themselves and their families from the Syrians and to reduce the social interactions. A study conducted by Topkaya and Akdağ (2016) involving a number of university students in Kilis reveals that the participants were unwilling to live in proximity to the Syrians due to the security concerns. Similarly, as articulated by Kahraman and Nizam (2016), the local residents' reluctance to employ the Syrians stemmed from the fears that the Syrians might commit violent acts against their employers and subsequently flee, thereby posing a security risk. As reported by Erdoğan (2014) that half of the participants who expressed discomfort about being neighbours with the Syrians did so because they believed that the Syrians might harm them or their families.

In addition to the associations with crime, as emphasised by Erdoğan (2014), the Syrians are also linked to begging and terrorism. Begging by the Syrians, particularly in major cities, is perceived by the locals as both an aesthetic and security threat. As mentioned by Oytun and Gündoğar (2015), the perception of the Syrians as posing a terrorist threat is particularly pronounced among the residents of the border provinces, who feel vulnerable to the potential terrorist attacks linked to the presence of the Syrians. These associations with various crimes, begging, and terrorism contribute to the perception of the Syrians as a security threat within society.

#### **5.4. The Negative Economic Perception Arising from the Syrian Refugees**

When examining the economic impacts of the Syrian migration that influence the Turkish society's perceptions of the Syrians as a threat, several key issues emerge as follows: unemployment, the informal economy, state expenditures, the high cost of living in border provinces, and child labor.

Oytun & Gündoğar (2015) note that both the undocumented Syrians and those with work permits affect labor market dynamics by providing low-cost labor, which suppresses wages and exacerbates unemployment among the locals. This situation raises concerns among the native population about job security, the loss of job opportunities, and unfair competition, thereby contributing to the perception of the Syrians as an economic threat. Erdoğan (2014) reports that 56% of the population agrees with the statement that the "Syrians are taking our jobs," with this sentiment increasing to 68.9% in cities with large Syrian populations such as Hatay, Gaziantep, Mardin, and Urfa. In Güngören, as reported by Woods & Kayalı (2017), another area with a high concentration of the Syrians, the locals attribute declining wages and reduced job opportunities to the presence of the Syrians and express dissatisfaction with their presence.

Sönmez & Adıgüzel (2017) found that the residents of Gaziantep perceive the Syrians as a primary cause of the unemployment in the city, with the unemployment itself being a major source of tension between the local populations and the Syrians. Additionally, the participants from Gaziantep reported that the employers prefer to hire the Syrians due to their lower wage demands, which in turn depresses the local salaries and displaces the Turkish workers from their jobs. Consequently, the Syrians are regarded as economic competitors and threats. Similarly, Budak (2017) discovered that a significant portion of Elazığ's population also attributes the rising unemployment and increased rental costs to the presence of the Syrian refugees.

As noted by Erdoğan (2014), while the Syrians are regarded as responsible for job losses and wage reductions among the locals, some employers benefit from hiring them due to their lower wage expectations. Nevertheless, certain employers in Gaziantep have reported that hiring the Syrian workers, who accept salaries as low as 300 TL per month compared to the 1000 TL typically paid to the local workers, exacerbates social tension. Furthermore, the prevalent use of the undocumented workers among the businesses reinforces the perception of the Syrians as an economic threat, as it creates unfair competition between the employers who hire undocumented workers and those who adhere to legal labor practices.

One aspect of the informal economy that has emerged with the influx of the Syrian refugees involves both the refugee children and the Syrian entrepreneurs. The employment of the refugee children in low-wage jobs such as those in bakeries, grocery stores, and restaurants raises concerns among the local population about the unregulated nature of the informal economy and the perception that the child laborers pose a threat to the economic stability. Additionally, the Syrian-owned businesses, which are particularly prevalent in the border regions like Gaziantep, Adana, and Kahramanmaraş, contribute to this issue. These enterprises often evade taxation and do not contribute to the social security systems, leading to the complaints from the local business owners about the "unfair competition" (Erdoğan, 2014).

The investments made by the Turkish state for the Syrian refugees, particularly in the form of social aid, have led to the perceptions among the local people that the Syrians are competitors for the limited resources. A significant portion of the Turkish population, including 60% according to Erdoğan (2014), opposes providing the aid to the Syrians when there are needy individuals within Turkey. Supporting this, Taştan, Haklı, & Osmanoğlu (2017) found that 70% of the participants in Ankara believed that the aid to the Turkish citizens decreased following the arrival of the Syrians. Kahraman and Nizam (2016) reported that the impoverished residents in Gaziantep viewed the Syrians as receiving ample aid from various sources, while Saçan (2017) noted that more than half of the participants in Aydın were displeased that the resources were allocated to the Syrian children rather than the Turkish children. The potential for the Syrians to gain the Turkish citizenship and share in the resource distribution further exacerbates the concerns about the resource scarcity and competition. This sentiment is echoed in the views of the participants from Elazığ, who consider the Syrians as rivals for the social aid (Budak, 2017). Overall, there is a prevailing belief that the Turks are more deserving of the aid provided to the Syrians and that the Syrians are perceived as threats due to the competition for the limited resources.

In the regions with high concentrations of the Syrian refugees, particularly in the border provinces such as Gaziantep, Urfa, and Hatay, the rising cost of living and inflation have exacerbated the perceptions of the Syrians as an economic threat among the local residents. The influx of the Syrians has led to increased rental prices and difficulties in finding housing, which has negatively impacted the local attitudes towards them (Oytun & Gündoğar, 2015). As noted by Kaypak & Bimay (2016), as the Syrians in Batman seek to purchase or rent homes in the city center, housing prices have risen, placing financial strain on the low-income Turkish families. The willingness of the Syrians to pay higher rents or purchase prices than the middle-income locals can afford further intensifies these difficulties. As articulated by Kahraman & Nizam (2016), one significant area of the competition between the Syrians and the locals is the housing market, with the participants from Gaziantep reporting that the rents have increased two to three times since the Syrians arrived, leading to the challenges in securing housing and landlords threatening to rent to the Syrians if the locals cannot pay. Additionally, as highlighted by Atasoy & Demir (2015), in Hatay, the issues such as irregular rent payments by the Syrians, overcrowding, and alterations to the rental properties contribute to the landlords viewing the Syrians as a threat.

### **5.5. The Issues on the Accessibility to the Basic Services Due to the Syrian Refugees**

As elucidated by Atasoy & Demir (2015), a notable area of concern among the Turkish society regarding the Syrian refugees is their impact on access to the basic services, including healthcare, education, and municipal services. The influx of the Syrians has significantly altered the demographic landscape of cities, leading to the increased population growth and higher demand for public services. This sudden surge has strained municipal and health institutions, resulting in perceived inadequacies and unrest among the local residents.

In Gaziantep, as observed by Özsoy (2016) that the locals experience discomfort and unease when sharing the public spaces such as municipal facilities, buses, and refugee camps with the Syrians. Similarly, as reported by Atasoy & Demir (2015) that in Hatay, the residents believe that the influx of the Syrians has overwhelmed the local services such as hospitals, mosques, bazaars, and markets. The issues like the rise in informal housing, traffic congestion, irregular garbage collection, and poor-quality fuel use have further contributed to the local dissatisfaction.

As reported by Kaypak & Bimay (2016), the state hospitals in regions with the high Syrian populations, such as Batman, provide 30-40% of their services to the Syrians, leading to some significant capacity problems and increased patient loads per healthcare worker. This situation has

led to a decrease in the quality of care, with the locals attributing these disruptions to the Syrian presence and viewing them as competitors for the limited resources (Taştan, Haklı, & Osmanoğlu, 2017). The high utilization of the hospital services by the Syrians has exacerbated these issues, contributing to further unrest among the local populations.

Oytun and Gündoğar (2014) highlight that the influx of the Syrian refugees has significantly strained municipal services, with the local governments struggling to manage the increased demand within limited budgets. This situation has led to disruptions in essential infrastructure services, such as garbage collection, public transportation, and water supply and distribution. Consequently, the local residents often attribute these service failures to the presence of the Syrians.

Kaypak and Bimay (2016) support this view by noting that municipalities bear the primary responsibility for accommodating the refugees, yet they frequently lack the necessary service capacity and solutions to effectively address the increased demand. Woods and Kayalı (2016) further elaborate that municipal authorities have reported that the influx of the Syrians, as new stakeholders, places an additional burden on already strained infrastructure, leading to capacity issues. The local communities affected by these challenges tend to blame the Syrians for the disruptions, which exacerbates negative perceptions and diminishes the effectiveness of the local government efforts in managing the refugee situation.

## **6. The Findings on the Syrian Tension within the Scope of the Turkish-American Relations**

The Turkey's primary focus is the removal of Assad, while the United States is reluctant to support this goal due to its desire to negotiate a nuclear agreement with Iran. It is found that a nuclear deal with Iran would be challenging for the U.S. while it is engaged in conflict with Iran in Syria. Additionally, it is also pointed out that the U.S. support for the YPG in the fight against ISIS has further exacerbated the disagreements between Turkey and the U.S. It is noted that Salih Muslim, a leader of the PYD, visited Ankara until 2015 but did not accept the Turkish government's proposals to collaborate with the other Syrian opposition groups. Furthermore, it is highlighted that Turkey intensified its security operations against the PKK after 2015, which led to several indirect clashes with the YPG. It is also noted that the West's approach to Syria shifted significantly with the rise of ISIS. The West prioritized combating ISIS over addressing the Assad regime. It is found that the lack of a clear stance from the United States has complicated the resolution of the Syrian conflict. It is notable that the Western hesitation is attributed partly to the perception of the Iraq War as a mistake. It is argued that the Russia's involvement in Syria has diminished the influence



of both the U.S. and European countries, creating opportunities for Russia, Iran, and Iran-affiliated groups like Hezbollah. Regarding the Turkish-American relations, it is pointed out that the Syrian issue has caused a rift between the military establishments of the two countries although the gap between their foreign ministries has not been as pronounced. Conversely, it is suggested that while Turkey and the U.S. were once close allies, the Syrian conflict has created a significant distance between them, leading to a cooler relationship (Oytun, 2019). It is noted that there are claims suggesting Russia may be behind the Turkey's military setbacks in Syria. It is also emphasised that relying on Russia is risky, as its involvement in the Syrian conflict has increased its dominance on the ground, while U.S. influence in Syria has waned and is unlikely to be restored. Regarding the future of the Syrian issue, which has been ongoing since 2011 and affects the Turkey's regional interests and national security, and the importance of understanding Russia's role in the U.S.-Russia dynamic to grasp the U.S. position is accentuated. It is notably argued that the U.S. and Russia are engaged in tacit cooperation in Syria. The U.S. prefers not to deploy its own military forces directly in Syria and has therefore relied on the YPG as a proxy. Additionally, it is found that the strengthening of the YPG in northern Syria could potentially reduce the Syria's pressure on Israel (Demir, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

#### **The Conclusion on the Perception of the Syrian Refugees as Posing a Negative Perception to the Turkish Society**

As discussed throughout the research article, the previous studies in the literature indicate that, as also noted by Erdoğan (2014), the Turkish society perceives the Syrians as a threat in several domains: (1) cultural structure, (2) social and moral order, (3) economic functioning, (4) security, and (5) access to the basic services. These perceptions underpin the negative attitudes and behaviours toward the Syrians and can be examined through the frameworks of Integrated Threat Theory, System Maintenance Theory, and the Combined Instrumental Group Conflict Model. According to Integrated Threat Theory as elucidated by Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman (1999), the perception of the Syrians as a threat to labour markets, job opportunities, economic stability, national resources, and public safety can be categorized as a “realistic threat.” As argued by Erdoğan (2014), the Turkish society views the physical presence of the Syrians as a threat, with concerns that they are taking jobs from the locals, imposing a burden on the country's economy unfairly utilizing the limited resources, as it is supported by Kahraman and Nizam, 2016, and

negatively impacting the public security through the criminal activities such as terrorism and theft. This perception of the Syrians is regarded as a realistic threat due to the perceived harm to material resources. As articulated by Kahraman & Nizam (2016), in addition to the realistic threats, the Syrians are also perceived as a “symbolic threat.” This perception arises from the differences in traditions, customs, lifestyle, culture, and moral norms between the Syrians and the Turkish society. The divergence in lifestyle, eating habits, gender relations, family dynamics, and moral values leads to a belief in the superiority of the Turkish traditions and values over those of the Syrians. Consequently, the Syrians are regarded as a symbolic threat to the cultural and moral fabric of the Turkish society. Furthermore, the negative stereotypes based on daily interactions between the Syrians and the locals are prevalent. Commonly held beliefs include the views that the Syrians are rude, extortionate, and engaged in criminal behaviour.

Initially, the Turkish society's attitudes towards the Syrians were positive. However, as the number of the Syrians increased, their stay lengthened, and many became the permanent residents, the perception of the Syrians as “long-staying guests” emerged, leading to the concerns that they threaten the status quo. As noted by Jost and Banaji (1994), according to System Maintenance Theory, individuals have a tendency to preserve the existing socio-political system and protect the status quo. In this context, the socio-cultural and demographic changes brought about by the Syrians' lifestyles, values, traditions, and customs contribute to the perception that they pose a threat to the social order. For instance, the increased cases of polygamy and the early marriage of young girls resulting from the unions with the Syrian women are cited as examples of this disruption. Moreover, the perception of the Syrians as a threat is also linked to a competition over the limited resources, such as job opportunities, state aid, and capacity in the basic services. The Turkish society views the Syrians as competitors within a framework of the scarce resources, leading to a high level of dissatisfaction and the negative attitudes. The Combined Instrumental Group Conflict Model explains that groups perceived as increasing in number and differing in beliefs, cultural values, traditions, and moral norms can be seen as sources of competition by the in-group members, resulting in the negative attitudes and behaviours towards the out-group.

According to Pettigrew and Tropp (2011), the perception of threat within a society is closely linked to the contexts and quality of interactions between the Syrian refugees and the local Turks. In environments where the direct contact occurs, such as workplaces, neighbourhoods, municipalities, hospitals, and schools, "negative contact" tends to exacerbate the perception of the threat towards the Syrians. The negative contact occurs in settings where individuals feel

threatened, prefer to avoid interaction, and where competition is prevalent, thereby increasing prejudice between the groups. The social interactions marked by competition, particularly in areas like health, education, municipal services, and labour markets, contribute significantly to the perception of the Syrians as a threat.

The fact that 48% of the scholarly articles reviewed in this research paper identify the Syrians as an economic threat suggests that the economic impacts of the Syrian migration are perceived as particularly disruptive and socially risky compared to other threat perceptions. Given the diversity in sample size, application area, and methodology across the studies, no hierarchical ranking of risks for other threat categories was conducted. It is assumed that each threat area has distinct risk factors that could contribute to intergroup conflicts. Specifically, threat perceptions vary between regions with high Syrian populations and those where the Syrians are a minority relative to the local population. In densely populated Syrian areas, concerns are primarily centred around economic issues, access to the basic services, security, and social-moral order (Budak, 2016). In contrast, in regions where the Syrians are a minority, they are more often associated with cultural and aesthetic concerns (Oytun and Gündoğar, 2015). The policymakers should consider these regional differences when developing solutions to address social concerns and mitigate potential conflicts.

The findings of this study reflect the perceptions of threat at the societal level, and it is an important point to emphasize that perceptions may not always coincide with reality. Indeed, it is thought that some of the perceptions of threat in society are exaggerated or do not reflect reality. Although it is an undeniable reality that the economic effects of the Syrian migration bring various risks, these risks are exaggerated and the contributions of the Syrians to economic functioning (the foreign capital inflow, contribution to exports, economic mobility in border provinces, increase in labour force, etc.) are ignored. Similarly, it is argued that (1) the perceptions that the Syrians pose a security threat by being involved in crimes such as theft and extortion, and (2) the perceptions that the Syrian women are engaged in prostitution and child marriages are very common do not reflect reality. The uncertainty about the number of the Syrians at the societal level, especially in the western provinces, increases anxiety by causing the effects of the Syrians on the socio-cultural and demographic structure of the city to be evaluated exaggeratedly. Considering that the social tensions are formed around perceptions rather than facts, it is important to understand these threat

perceptions and develop the necessary interventions. Unless an intervention is made, it is possible that threat perceptions in society will spread over time and turn into conflicts (Erdoğan, 2014).

The relevant review of literature in this research highlights its limitations, as it may not encompass all possible threat perceptions within the society. This study represents an initial step in exploring societal threat perceptions, and future research is recommended to address the issue more comprehensively using diverse methodologies. Given that the threat perceptions are crucial in shaping intergroup attitudes and behaviours, policies designed to prevent societal conflicts should consider these perceptions. This study provides valuable insights for policymakers to develop both preventive and remedial strategies by addressing the Turkish society's threat perceptions regarding the Syrians. The effective policies should not only focus on the host society but also consider the demands, needs, and threat perceptions of the refugees. The future research should expand on this study by examining the negative attitudes of the Syrians towards the Turkish society and the underlying needs driving these attitudes in order to formulate more holistic policies.

### **The Recommendations on the Perception of the Syrian Refugees as Posing a Negative Perception to the Turkish Society**

Considering the negative attitudes of the Turkish society towards the Syrians and the underlying threat perceptions, it is evident that there is a need to develop policies aimed at improving societal attitudes and behaviours towards the Syrians. Policies intended to facilitate the harmonious coexistence of the Turkish society, and the Syrians should address the perceptions underpinning the negative attitudes, including (1) cultural threat, (2) threat to social and moral order, (3) economic threat, (4) security threat, and (5) threat to access to the basic services.

As Süleymanov (2016) notes that in this context, it is crucial to conduct studies focused on informing and raising awareness among various segments of the local population such as children, youth, women, and men about the Syrian refugees, including their backgrounds, reasons for coming to Turkey, experiences, and contributions. The foundation of "intergroup anxiety," which impedes intergroup contact, often stems from a lack of knowledge or reliance on misinformation. Providing accurate information about the Syrians can reduce intergroup anxiety and enhance sensitivity towards them. Public service announcements that address and counteract threat perceptions may be useful. Support from the national and the local media should be sought to disseminate these messages. It is important to know that that these efforts are conducted by universities or state institutions known for their reliable information production or under their supervision. Additionally, awareness-raising initiatives should address and correct unfounded and exaggerated

threat perceptions, such as claims of increased crime rates attributed to the Syrian refugees, in order to foster a more positive perspective towards the Syrians.

Secondly, many of the perceived threats in society stem from differences in cultural values and lifestyles. To address these perceptions, it is crucial to highlight the shared religious and cultural values between the Turkish society and the Syrians. Developing joint projects that emphasize these common values, and organizing festivals and seminars to showcase similarities, can foster a greater sense of shared identity and understanding between the groups. Thirdly, given the prevailing notion that "the Syrians are taking jobs from the Turkish people" and the resulting sense of competition and threat, creating new employment opportunities can help mitigate potential social conflicts arising from increased competition. Supporting the initiatives that enhance employment opportunities for both the Turks and the Syrians in areas with the high Syrian populations is essential for ensuring fair and equitable integration into the labour market. Additionally, as the Syrians studying in Turkey are expected to enter the workforce, they may increase a competition in professions requiring higher education. Therefore, expanding employment opportunities in fields such as engineering, pharmacy, medicine, and teaching is also important (Süleymanov, 2016).

Fourthly, labour markets not only provide economic support to society but also play a role in reducing prejudice and improving intergroup attitudes by facilitating opportunities for intergroup contact (Özpınar, Çilingir, & Düşündere, 2016). Karaoğlu (2015) found that the participants who have interacted with the Syrian refugees tend to have more positive attitudes towards them and perceive them as less of a threat compared to those without such interactions. Similarly, the Italian employers who have engaged with the refugees, either as employers or in individual capacities, are more likely to support pro-refugee policies and exhibit more egalitarian attitudes compared to those who have not had such contact. Based on these findings, it is recommended that policymakers implement regulations that foster increased interaction between the Syrians and the local community within the labour markets.

Finally, to address access difficulties in basic service areas, it is crucial to develop projects aimed at increasing capacity in municipalities and health services, as well as creating economic opportunities for youth. As elucidated by Tunç (2015), municipalities and health institutions that serve communities in need should (1) enhance coordination and organization of their operations, and (2) improve their preparedness for emergencies and capacity planning. Investing more in the

basic services and the local government infrastructure is a key step towards mitigating potential conflicts between groups. Additionally, to counteract perceptions among the locals that resources are limited, that they will be depleted due to sharing with the Syrians, and that the Syrians pose a threat, projects should be implemented to expand capacity in both of the basic services and labour markets. These initiatives should be communicated effectively to the local population.

### **The Conclusion and Recommendations on the Impact of the Syrian Crisis on the Turkish-American Relations**

Obama's indecision and reluctance to take a definitive stance on the Syrian War suggest a leadership style characterized by hesitation and an avoidance of responsibility. This diplomatic passivity and tendency to maintain the status quo have had significant repercussions for Turkey, contributing to both the refugee crisis and the security operations necessitated by these circumstances. With the Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict in 2015, Turkey gained the opportunity to engage another actor on the ground to counterbalance the U.S. influence. Russia capitalized on the tensions between Turkey and the U.S. over the YPG, manoeuvring to realign Turkey with its own foreign policy objectives. However, the Russia's approach, including its failure to address the Turkey's strategic concerns and the tragic incident in Idlib that resulted in the deaths of the 36 Turkish soldiers, represents a significant lapse in the recent Russian foreign policy. This incident underscores the necessity for Turkey to exercise caution when formulating a foreign policy and placing trust in Russia. In terms of the Turkey-Israel relations, Israel has historically sought to balance the Syrian pressure through its partnership with Turkey, particularly during the periods of the favourable relations between 1996 and 1998. However, the deterioration of the relations with Turkey has led Israel to seek alternative strategies, including leveraging terrorist organizations such as the YPG through U.S. support to exert pressure on Syria. This approach is further influenced by the Israeli role in shaping U.S. Middle East policies. The Turkish security bureaucracy and political elites have expressed concerns over the escalating threats posed by the YPG's advances in northern Syria, particularly following its capture of Tel Abyad in 2015. These concerns are reflected in the statements made to the press following the National Security Council (MGK) meetings since 2015.

The U.S. administration and the Pentagon, despite designating the PKK as a terrorist organization, do not classify the PYD/YPG as such and instead view them as allies in Syria. This divergence highlights the ongoing disagreements between the parties regarding the strategies and objectives in the Syrian civil war. The concerns of a strategically significant country like Turkey

have notably influenced the U.S. administration's efforts to address this issue. The recent statement by the new U.S. Chief of Staff, Mark Milley “The U.S. should prefer to work with the allied states rather than with terrorist organizations” can be interpreted as a positive shift in addressing these concerns. Additionally, the role of the media in domestic political processes warrants examination. The U.S.A media often portrays the Turkey’s operations in Syria, conducted for the security reasons, as the human rights violations to both American and the global audiences. This portrayal may impact the American policymakers and contribute to the tensions between the U.S. and Turkey. The media's critical stance towards Turkey exacerbates discomfort on the Turkish side and adversely affects bilateral relations.

With the onset of the Syrian Civil War, which began in Daraa and can be viewed as an extension of the Arab Spring, the U.S. and European countries initially sought the removal of Bashar al-Assad, whom they labelled as a dictator. Turkey, which had previously maintained the positive relations with Syria, aligned its stance with that of the U.S. and the Western world. However, as the U.S. and European countries struggled to influence the course of the conflict, the Russia’s intervention, Iran’s involvement, and the rise of ISIS led the Western world to shift away from prioritizing Assad's removal. Despite the use of the chemical weapons in Syria during the Obama administration, the U.S. did not take action. The current U.S.A Secretary of State Antony Blinken has acknowledged the past mistakes regarding Syria in a speech at the Hudson Institute. Despite these shifts in Western attitudes, Turkey has largely maintained its initial position throughout the conflict.

A general assessment from the perspectives of the liberal and realist approaches reveals a significant divergence in the strategies adopted by the U.S. and Turkey regarding the Syrian issue. The U.S. has predominantly employed realist tactics, such as economic sanctions and embargo threats, rather than adopting a liberal approach that emphasizes negotiation and diplomacy. In contrast, Turkey initially pursued a liberal strategy focused on diplomacy and negotiations. However, upon failing to achieve substantive results through these means, Turkey resorted to military operations, which align with realist tactics involving the use of force to achieve objectives. The U.S. risks undermining Turkey's contributions to global cooperation in critical areas such as the Baltics, Georgia, Ukraine, and Afghanistan due to the Syrian conflict, which, despite its significance, may be considered a relatively minor issue in the broader context of international

relations. A reassessment by U.S. foreign policy makers regarding the Turkey's strategic value and importance could positively influence the bilateral relations between the two nations.

### **Ethical Text**

Due to the fact that the current research article is produced with the implementation of the literature review as a research method, ethics committee approval is not required. This study does not contain any studies with human participants and/or animals performed by any of the authors.

### **Declaration of Interest**

**Conflict of Interest:** They have no conflict of interest.

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