

# Contemporary forms of warfare – insurgency and counterinsurgency operations

## Case study: Syrian Arab Republic<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*Insurgency and counterinsurgency, as modern forms of warfare, are presented in the paper as two phenomena that are actually present in all phases of human civilization. Due to the interest of a large number of experts, it can be considered a modern phenomenon. Rebellion is one way of expressing dissatisfaction with a certain situation. Some of the factors that encourage this dissatisfaction are economic and social inequality and the violation of human rights and freedoms. Dissatisfaction can be so strong that it encourages an uprising of rebels to overthrow the government. In contrast to this is counterinsurgency, which includes all means of suppressing the insurgency. It is carried out with conventional, regular means by forces trained for this type of combat. Due to its complexity, the civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic is taken as a case study. The paper explains the historical predispositions to the outbreak of the conflict, its further development, the interests of individual external and internal actors, and presents some of the possible solutions to the Syrian issue.*

### Keywords

*asymmetric warfare, generations of warfare, ideological motives, negotiations, conflict, success conditions*

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## Introduction

Modern wars surpass previous ones in every aspect of thinking. They are most often fought as conflicts between different ethnic groups for control over limited resources, personal interests, and wealth. Ever since the period of Clausewitz (1976), war can be considered an instrument or an *extended arm*<sup>2</sup> of politics, which has not changed to this day. From the very beginning of conflict between humans, wars have been fought by the physical competition of one side against the other. With the development of knowledge, skills, abilities, and responsibility – in one word, competence – the techniques and tactics of warfare, the weapons, and the goals changed, but what remained common was the knowledge of the enemy and the reason for his fight. We live in a world where modern asymmetric threats and risks take the initiative and lead the way, requiring security strategies to constantly adapt and change to keep up. Even when the formal state structure breaks down, war can be a political instrument, but only in the hands of a rebel faction. Here we are talking about fourth-generation warfare<sup>3</sup> also known as the insurgent way of warfare or hybrid warfare, which belongs to the modern, or contemporary, way of warfare. This also represents any war in which the boundaries between war, politics, soldiers, and civilians are unclear, or, in simpler terms, a war in which one of the main participants is not the state but a non-state actor. The research subject of the work is insurgency and counterinsurgency as modern forms of warfare, which is explained throughout the work, including comparisons with other, also current, forms of warfare (terrorism, counterterrorism, and organized crime) Unlike conventional warfare, in which two or more state actors are

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2 Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831), a Prussian general and military theorist. In his most important work, *On War*, he mentions that war is the continuation of politics by other means, that is, the extended arm of politics.

3 In short, the theory says that war has developed through four generations: large numbers of manpower (Napoleonic wars), strong firepower (World War I), good manoeuvring (Blitzkrieg, World War II), and the use of insurgent power in the area of operation (the fight against terrorism) (Echevarria, 2005). Some military experts consider fifth-generation warfare to be a combination of guerrilla warfare and barbarism in which criminal organizations, computer hackers, and terrorists play a significant role (Madsen, 2015).

involved, insurgencies are considered unconventional warfare and involve non-state entities. Although insurgencies and guerrilla warfare have been present throughout the history of mankind, new technologies and available methods that insurgents use to achieve their goals give this form of warfare a contemporary dimension.

The fight, or the mode of warfare, can take various forms. The most well-known is the division into conventional and unconventional warfare, depending on whether state actors or non-state entities (e.g., rebels, private military companies, etc.) participate, and into regular and irregular warfare. However, wars can be waged not only by military means, as there is also political, economic, and informational warfare, which do not necessarily include an open declaration of war and the involvement of the army of a country. The breakdown of the type of conflict and form of warfare is shown in Figure 1.

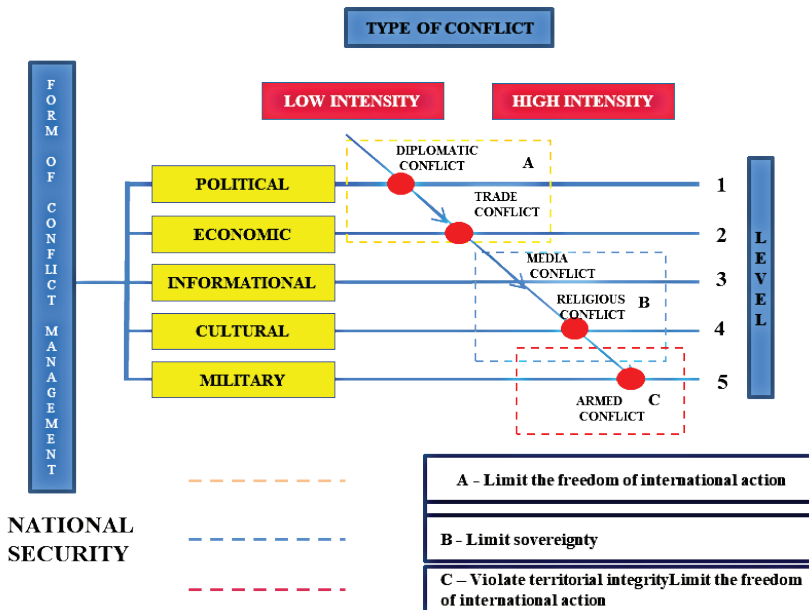


Figure 1. Forms (types of conflict/warfare) in relation to the threat to the national security of a country (adapted from Domazet-Lošo, 2002, p. 319)

Modern warfare using the military element of national power (armed conflict in Fig. 1) is based on concepts, military technology, and methods that have been used since the end of the First and Second World Wars. However, due to the significant and unstoppable development of technology in general, as well as military technology, there are also major changes in the understanding of war and warfare itself. The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century brought significant developments in military technology, but also in technology in general. Moreover, today's battlefield has become a race in technological development; therefore, the conflicting parties must constantly compete with strength and modernization in order to survive above all but also to win. War in new circumstances implies a significant presence of civilians and civilian infrastructure as targets, which reduces the opponent's ability to engage in conflict.

With the invention of nuclear weapons and the increasing emphasis on adherence to international conventions and public pressure due to the large number of casualties, low-intensity conflicts supplant large-scale ones, such as World War I and World War II. Most of the time, these are proxy wars<sup>4</sup>, a relatively new type of warfare fought in the local areas of states with external actors acting as main bearers. Conventional conflicts are conducted in combination with asymmetric warfare tactics. In other words, it is a situation in which weaker parties attack a stronger opponent against whom conventional warfare cannot achieve its goals. It is a type of warfare in which a weaker opponent fights a stronger one.

## Conceptual definitions

### *Insurgency*

There are numerous definitions as well as numerous theories that deal with the term "insurgency". The simplest definition is that it is an organized

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<sup>4</sup> Proxy or intermediary warfare is fought by two rival great power countries that, using a third country, both strive to achieve their own goals and prevent the opposing side from achieving theirs (Mumford, 2013).

movement with the aim of deposing the constituent government from power through subversion and violence (Kilcullen, 2010). In other words, it is a military-political struggle organized to weaken the control and legitimacy of the existing government by taking over and increasing the political power of rebel groups. Rebellion can be considered a social movement – social in nature and socially motivated. The initiators of the rebel movement carry out violent activities against the official government as a result of dissatisfaction with the politics and activities of existing political practices. The goal of the activities of such groups, which can be defined as insurgent, is to oust the existing government from power in order to achieve the desired political changes. In addition to conventional means, the insurgents also use unconventional means to change the rules of the game in favour of the policies they promote. Social Movement Theory (SMT)<sup>5</sup> deals with such social movements.

The theory has several approaches, and among the first is the classical one, whose representatives are Gustav Le Bon (1896), Herbert Blumer (1951), and Neil Smelser (1963). By considering insurgency and the important question, “What motivates people’s determination and willingness to take action to gain social, political, and legal advantage over the ruling political regime?” we can interpret Le Bon’s theory (1896) of collective behaviour. He concluded that the behaviour of individuals as members of a mass or a group becomes primitive, irrational, and prone to spontaneous violence. This transformation occurs under certain conditions. Once an individual fits into a group, they gain a sense of anonymity and become convinced that they cannot be held responsible for their behaviour in the crowd.

Under such conditions and with the feeling of invisibility within the group, critical reasoning is hardly possible. An unconscious personality appears in that individual, a personality dominated by destructive instincts and primitive beliefs. At the same time, political violence does not occur only because of one exceptional event but is the result of disillusionment with the politics of the ruling party, which has been accumulating for months,

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<sup>5</sup> Social Movement Theory (SMT) is an interdisciplinary field of study within the social sciences that aims to explain the reasons for social mobilizations, in what forms they occur, and what political, social, and cultural consequences they can cause (Le Bon, 1896).

years, and even decades. Such accumulated problems and disagreements between the opposing parties are enough for a small spark to start the fire of rebellion. A rebel group can therefore also be considered a crowd made up of individuals who lose a sense of responsibility for their actions and become prone to violence.

Insurgency tactics are based on creating an atmosphere of terror in countries, but insurgency itself requires organization and management. The insurgents operate in well-coordinated and organized groups, and the reasons for the insurgency are related to the main issues within the state, whether political, economic, social, or other in nature. The activity of the insurgent organizations can be described as organized and/or violent; that is, they pose a challenge to the established government. Their primary goal is to bring about political change (Romaniuk & Webb, 2016). The importance of these changes lies in their effect on socioeconomic, political, religious, cultural, and ethnic divisions within and between countries. Insurgencies have shaped our history and will certainly influence the future. It is an intricate part of the development of states, social structures, political institutions, economic agreements, and cultural formations throughout history. The diversity of state and non-state responses to insurgency witnessed during numerous historical events reflects on the modern era, specifically the threats and challenges posed by contemporary insurgency.

In order for insurgents to achieve their goals, they need the support of the environment in which they operate, i.e., they need people to act (their sympathy, approval, reaction to provocation, or just support), survive, and implement their strategy. They also find new members among the local population, gather information about international forces, find sources of funding and supplies, and collect information about current needs. Sometimes they do not need the active support of the local population, but their passivity or intimidation is sufficient as long as the government or external actors do not block access to the population. Then the insurgents are in trouble, which leads to the key to the success of the counterinsurgency fight, which is to cut off any ties the insurgents have with the local population.

## *Counterinsurgency*

The art of counterinsurgency boils down to creating specific measures adapted to the environment in order to suppress insurgency and strengthen the resistance of a certain threatened society or government. Countermeasures must evolve rapidly to keep pace with rapidly evolving insurgency techniques. Counterinsurgency is within the circle of the constant struggle for adaptation. As a result, various counterinsurgency theories emerged in the early 1950s, when researchers concentrated on modernization and economic development because government institutions were unable to keep up with social changes that caused disorder and instability (Đurkin, 2011). For counterinsurgency to be effective it must consist of learning, developing, and applying new and modern techniques within a high-threat environment, and it must be used before the adversary takes those same steps. The key is to change with the environment. Therefore, counterinsurgency is never static but rather evolves alongside the environment.

You can never know everything completely, so the knowledge that counterinsurgent organizations have is only a captured fragment of reality that immediately ceases to be valid (outdated information). However, in accordance with this knowledge, counterinsurgency organizations must act. Đurkin (2011) points out that there been a greater emphasis on understanding counterinsurgency (COIN) operations since 2007, particularly in terms of the joint effort of the civilian and military sectors, the understanding and safety of the local population, and the training of local security forces. The goal of counterinsurgency operations is to restore people's hope for a normal life and to win their support for the establishment of a new government that will benefit them, and that benefit will be in the form of security, economic prosperity, and an improvement of living standards in general, which is what is foreseen by counterinsurgency strategies.

Direct military attacks on insurgents are extremely risky. Not only is the safety of the civilian population at risk, but also the possibility of their support in the fight against the insurgents, which is crucial. Also, there is a risk of exhaustion of forces, materially and physically, during searches, expulsion of

opponents, etc. In order to separate the insurgents from the local population, it is necessary to assist the population in any way possible, such as by training local security forces, implementing local government reform, implementing security measures, providing economic and industrial incentives, building schools and other facilities, and so on. The population-centric method of acting in peace operations is more demanding than the adversary-centric one and requires more time and resources. At the same time, the population-centric paradigm is aimed at strengthening the legitimacy of the government while at the same time limiting the influence of the rebels. Kilcullen (2006) notes that the counterinsurgency efforts to achieve the aforementioned factors employ an integrated approach with four major components:

1. Political function. This is the key to establishing a framework for political reconciliation and government reform, around which all other counterinsurgency operations are conducted.
2. Economic function. This function provides the necessary services to encourage long-term economic development. At the same time, it increases trust in the government and reduces the unemployment of young people, who are the most suitable for recruitment.
3. Security function. This does not include only the military element but the entire security sector, including the legal framework, civilian oversight, and the judiciary.
4. Information function. This function refers to the successful implementation of information activities, including intelligence work and influencing the local population.

The aforementioned functions enable the government to establish control and consolidate power. Likewise, Kilcullen lists several conditions for the success of counterinsurgency operations. First, the local population should see a government that controls social, economic, political, and security institutions as legitimate. Then, the rebel movement and its leaders must be marginalized and separated from the rest of the population. The armed rebel forces should, as a last step, be completely disbanded, demobilized, and reintegrated into the new constitution of the country.



In other words, the goal of counterinsurgency operations is to use the biased minority of the local population to gain a neutral majority and neutralize the opposing minority in the process. Counterinsurgency options are limited and come down to choosing the terrain, removing the rebels from that area with minimal damage to the population, maintaining peace and stability, and convincing the population that pacification will result in the cessation of military activities.

## **Civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic**

The war in the Syrian Arab Republic began in the spring of 2011 and is still ongoing. The conflict is between the government of President Bashar al-Assad and the rebels. Western forces and Arab allies back the rebels in the hope of ousting the ruling Baath party. According to data (BBC News, 2019), more than 465,000 Syrians have been killed, one million have been injured, and more than 12 million have been displaced, which is almost half of the population. More precisely, around 6.2 million Syrians are internally displaced, while 5.7 million have fled. The events and crisis affect numerous surrounding countries and even the whole of Europe in relation to the transport and care of migrants. In the desire for a better life, acceptance, and a stable future, a large number of migrants decide to make the long journey to the West. Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey have accepted around 93% of refugees and are fighting the biggest exodus in recent history. Warring parties make it much more difficult and even prohibit the provision of assistance to the needy, especially those who live in hard-to-reach areas.

Just before the conflict broke out, Syria was plagued by high rates of unemployment, corruption, and a lack of political freedom under the rule of President Bashar al-Assad, who succeeded his father Hafez in 2000. In March 2011, pro-democracy protests escalated in the southern part of the city of Deraa, inspired by the Arab Spring<sup>6</sup> in neighbouring countries. The Arab Spring began in Tunisia on December 18, 2010, with the self-

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6 The Arab Spring (2010-2011) was a one-of-a-kind wave of protests that began on 18 December 2010 in Tunisia and spread to North Africa and the Middle East.

immolation of a local Tunisian merchant, Muhammed Bouazizi, because of the corruption and humiliation he experienced at the hands of the local police and government (Gulf News, 2011). This event fuelled the already simmering Arab discontent. As a result of the unrest, the Tunisian, Egyptian, and Libyan governments were overthrown. Encouraged by these events, a large-scale protest soon broke out in the south of Syria, in the aforementioned city of Daraa. Initially peaceful protests turned violent in March 2011, after 15 boys were forcibly detained and tortured for drawing graffiti in support of the Arab Spring (Al Jazeera, 2018a). One of the boys succumbed to injuries caused by the torture, further inflaming the protests. The Syrian government tried to suppress the protest through violent means (arrests, torture, and murders), after which the protesters, along with many others, demanded the resignation of President Assad. The unrest spread and grew stronger, with government forces violently suppressing it. Opposition supporters took up arms, at first to defend themselves and later to liberate their security areas. Bashar al-Assad did not agree to the demands of the rebels and publicly announced the suppression of the so-called “terrorism” supported by external actors (BBC News, 2019), as he called the protests. Soon, the general violence turned into a civil war.

Today, it is no longer just about the conflict between those who are for or against Assad. The war has long since passed that stage. Various actors are involved, each with their own agenda and viewpoint, which makes the conflict considerably more complicated and prolongs the time for its resolution. External actors are named as the biggest culprits for spreading hatred between Syrian religious groups, inciting the Sunni Muslim majority against the Alawites, of which President Assad is a member. Both conflicting parties committed numerous crimes and hostilities, thus destroying the possibilities of communication and any hope for reconciliation. This also made it easier for jihadists, that is, members of the Islamic State (IC) and Al-Qaeda, to expand into the territory of Syria, which will be discussed later. The whole story is further complicated by the Syrian Kurds, who demand the right to self-government but do not want to directly confront Assad’s forces.

## *The historical course of the conflict in Syria*

Syria was a French colony between the two world wars. The French colonizers did not respect religious freedom but supported and helped only Christian families, for example, by giving them nicer farm plots. It was not until 1941 that the independence of Syria was declared. Independence was achieved only in 1946 (Erlich, 2014). The Gulf War, conflicts with Israel, and the unsuccessful unification with Egypt in 1958<sup>7</sup> are just some events that marked modern Syria. Arab nationalists dominated the first 25 years, as did socialists from the political party BAA, whose representatives were also in power in neighbouring Iraq. Furthermore, Israel occupied the strategically important Golan Heights in the Six-Day War in 1967, which is still a stumbling block despite numerous negotiations on the return of the area to Syria. Then-President Hafez al-Assad, a member of the minority Alawite sect, carried out a coup d'état in 1970, which ended the period of instability.

Hafez al-Assad, through a combination of concessions and political repression, remained in power until he died in 2000, when he was succeeded by his son Bashar al-Assad. Speaking to the local population, Erlich (2014) concludes that Hafez was more respected than his son, Bashar al-Assad. People were more satisfied during Hafez's reign. He ensured that everyone received a good education and equal medical care. He built schools in all villages to make them more accessible for children. After the arrival of Bashar al-Assad, the situation changed, and equality was lost, especially in the fields of health and education. At one point, Bashar was so dissatisfied with his father's popularity that, in 2011, he ordered the removal of all monuments erected in his honour. Protests arose, during which protesters stood guard around the monuments to prevent them from being removed.

It is important to emphasize that after liberation from French rule, all religious communities in Syria, primarily the majority consisting of Christians and

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7 UAR (United Arab Republic), a state that consisted of Egypt and Syria, existed for a short time, from 1958 to 1971. Instead of a federation of two Arab nations, the UAE became an Egyptian-dominated state, leading to Syrian discontent and eventual disintegration (Podeh, 1999).

Alawites<sup>8</sup> (followers of Islam), lived in peaceful coexistence. Although there are conflicts in the surrounding countries on the issue of religion and ethnicity, Syria did not seem to be affected by this phenomenon. Moreover, many citizens of Syria, different in religion and ethnicity, were marrying and creating families. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Syria assumed the form of “Arab socialism”<sup>9</sup>. Although education and favourable medical care were provided, problems arose in other aspects of society. The army and government nationalized all important industries and businesses in Syria and shared the lucrative profits, which also strengthened corruption. The workers lost control over the economy, and so-called socialism existed only on paper, while kleptocracy<sup>10</sup> and corruption lived in reality.

When Bashar al-Assad took power in 2000, he faced economic disarray and possible social unrest. Syria has become the second-poorest country in the Middle East. Only Yemen had a lower GDP per capita at that time (The World Bank, 2001). During Bashar’s time, the government privatized certain state-owned companies and lowered taxes on the most important goods, following the economic model promoted by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Furthermore, representatives and supporters of the BAAS political party cheaply buy industrial entities or obtain licenses to open new ones, such as telephone companies. The business elite that supported Assad opened private banks, insurance companies, and airlines, thus profiting greatly. Government policy achieved economic growth and earned the loyalty of businesspeople. However, as stated, the new liberalization policy increased systematic and rapidly developing corruption. Even the President admitted that corruption was a major problem in Syria (Al-Sheikh & Hamadah, 2006). Businesspeople, economists, etc., are crucial for the

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8 Alawites are an Islamic community that lives primarily in Syria but also in Lebanon and in the Golan Heights. About 11% of Syria’s population (approximately 2.1 million people) belongs to the Alawites (Golde, 2016).

9 Arab socialism is a political ideology based on a mixture of socialism and pan-Arabism (a pan-Arab movement that strives for the political and cultural unification of Arabs). The name was coined by Michel Aflak to distinguish Arabic from Marxist socialism

10 Kleptocracy is a form of political and state corruption in which the state and government increase the personal wealth and political power of their officials and the ruling class to the detriment of the wider population.

survival of Syria and support for Assad. On the other hand, the Islamic State, the extremists of the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>11</sup>, and other Islamist groups want to impose the Islamic State, including in Syria. That is unacceptable to most Syrians because Syria has always been a multicultural and multi-religious country.

Although the government's neoliberal policies benefited a few powerful businesspersons (supporters of the government), they hurt the state's economy. The policy increased power in mostly Sunni rural areas. The state stopped subsidizing the textile industry and other industries, while at the same time, cheap Turkish goods were imported tax-free. The national economy experienced a complete breakdown. Unemployment continues to rise, factories are closing, and domestic producers are powerless against cheap imports. The Syrian political blueprint from 2006 to 2011 was supposed to improve the economic situation, but it did not (Samenow, 2013). In addition, the climatic conditions since 2001 have also not been favourable to the local population. The lack of rainfall has made agriculture unsustainable. Because of this, farmers and peasants leave the villages and come to the cities, where it is difficult or impossible to find work. As elsewhere in the world, slums, hunger, discontent, etc., arise (Erlich, 2014). Among the poorest places is Hasaka, the future centre of fierce insurgent movements. The civil war worsened an already bad economic situation. International sanctions, the loss of most exports, and the destruction of infrastructure caused by the war brought Syria to its knees. By 2011, about 425,000 barrels of crude oil had been extracted daily in Syria, and by the end of 2013, the extraction stopped completely after the rebels took control of the sources (EIA Beta, 2014). This is why a large number of Syrians still blame the rebels for the economic situation, not Assad's politics.

The decline of the economy coincided with the decline in other activities, including tourism. Constant discontent and protests became the order of the day. The most dissatisfied were the youth, who could not get to work, and the

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11 The Muslim Brotherhood, or Society of Muslim Brothers, is the largest and most influential Sunni Islamist organization. It was founded in 1928 in Egypt. Numerous other terrorist organizations emerged from it, the most famous of which is Hamas (Hamid, 2017).

police were frequently detaining and harassing them. The lack of freedom and economic problems, as well as the deterioration of the government's attitude towards the protesters, fuelled the anger of the Syrian public. Soon, in 2011, the conflict fuelled by the Arab Spring escalated. As previously indicated, this movement toppled governments and presidents in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, giving hope to Syrian pro-democracy activists. Thus, the success of the Arab Spring in the surrounding countries fuelled the rebel movement in Syria as well. In July of that year, deserters from the Syrian Army formed the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a rebel organization with the goal of overthrowing the government. After that, Syria entered a civil war in which the armed conflicts were not just sectoral but also ethnically divided. Most Syrians are Sunni Muslims, while Alawites dominate the official Syrian security forces. Global warming is also considered a cause of the strengthening of the 2011 uprising. Several droughts hit Syria from 2007 to 2010, increasing poverty and forcing one and a half million people to migrate from rural to urban areas (Femia & Werrell, 2012).

Life has become especially difficult for Christians in Syria, who are well off, i.e., in a better economic situation than the rest of the population, primarily the Muslims. Kidnappings of Christians, mostly students, for ransom are becoming more common (Erlich, 2014). As the authors already mentioned, after the First World War, when the French came to power, the Christians were at an advantage. They earned higher incomes, were more educated and managed larger areas of better land. However, one should not ignore the fact that Christians also participated in the fight against the colonizers and helped found the political party BAAS in the 1940s, under the administration of Hafez al-Assad. Some Christians reached leading positions in politics, the army, and business circles. After the outbreak of the civil war, many Christians fled to the surrounding countries, for example, Lebanon and Turkey. Most of those who stayed in Syria were Assad's supporters. Christians sympathized with calls for democracy but were worried by Islamist extremists who considered them infidels. The government that promised to do something about it did very little, or not enough, to make them feel safe.

## The situation in Syria

Since the conflict began, many other organizations have emerged alongside the Syrian insurgent groups and joined the fight. That often causes problems because they conflict with each other. Among the opposition forces is the previously mentioned FSA, the armed group formed in 2011 by deserters from the Syrian army with the support of the USA, Turkey, and several Gulf countries<sup>12</sup>. The FSA often clashed with the Syrian army, with varying degrees of success. In December 2016, the Syrian army achieved its biggest victory against the insurgents by recapturing the strategically important city of Aleppo (Harris, 2018). Since then, the FSA has controlled a limited area in northwestern Syria, while the government controls the largest cities. Syrian insurgents withdrew in 2018 from the last insurgent stronghold near Damascus. After that, with the support of Turkey, the FSA took control of Afrin (Figure 2) near the Turkish-Syrian border from Kurdish insurgent fighters who wanted the independence of their territory.

ISIS appeared in the northern and eastern parts of Syria as early as 2013 after expanding its activities outside of Iraq (Stern & Berger, 2000). It quickly gained international acclaim for its brutal warfare and killing of victims. The media often covers ISIS executions, and they use almost any means to recruit fighters from around the world. Other larger groups are fighting on the side of the rebels in Syria: Jabhat Fatah al-Sham<sup>13</sup>, Hezbollah (with the support of Iran), and the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces.

In Syria, fighting is taking place on several fronts. Among others, in Idlib where Syrian and Russian fire intensified in 2018 after al-Sham fighters shot down a Russian plane (BBC News, 2018). Idlib has become one of the stronger strongholds under the control of the opposition, i.e., the rebels against the Assad regime.

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12 The term "Gulf countries" refers to six countries of the Persian Gulf on the Arabian Peninsula, namely Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE.

13 Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (Al-Nusra Front or Jabhat al-Nusra) – better known as Al-Qaeda in Syria – is a jihadist organization that fights against the Syrian government, formed in 2012. The goal is to establish an Islamic state on Syrian territory.

The area is strategically important, not only for the Syrian government but also for the Russian government, due to its proximity to a Syrian airbase owned by Russia.



Figure 2: Territorial division in Syria

Source: Available from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2015/05/syria-country-divided-150529144229467.html> (Accessed 22nd May 2019)

Another important area of struggle is the city of Homs in the west of the country, which is also the main industrial center. As such, Homs is a target for insurgents and Syrian forces. It was initially under the control of the Syrian government. Since 2011, it has been the target of American and Israeli forces. British and French forces participated in these airstrikes as part of international operations, after which the Syrian government lost



control over Homs. Since 2014, it has been back in the hands of the Syrian government. Yet, fighting between the insurgents and the army continued in its neighbourhoods and the neighbouring Hama (BBC News, 2019). In addition to Homs, the Syrian government controls Damascus, Aleppo, Tartus, Latakia, Palmyra, and Alba Kamal. Furthermore, the city of Afrin in the Aleppo region is also important. Afrin is the area of conflict between the USA and Turkey, two countries that cooperate on the issue of Syria. In January 2018, Turkey and the SDF conducted a military operation in the Afrin area against the Kurdish insurgents supported by American forces, i.e., the YPG. In March of that year, they managed to occupy the target territory. This incident heightened fears of an American-Turkish conflict. Turkey is very sensitive when it comes to the Kurds and does not hesitate to suppress their influence and any aspirations to create an independent Kurdish state.

The cities of Ar Raqqa, Al Qamishli and Al Halakha are under the influence of the Kurds in Syria. ISIS forces control the Abu Kamal area, which is surrounded by government forces from the west and Kurdish forces from the east (Chughtai, 2019). Today, the last stronghold of the opposition is located northwest of Idlib and in parts of Hama and western Aleppo. According to estimates, it is home to 2.9 million people, including children, who live in camps and tent settlements in poor conditions (BBC News, 2019).

The latest information is that ISIS forces have been defeated. More than 60,000 people (mostly family members of fighters) have left the eastern part of Syria since operations to take control of the territory began (Al Jazeera, 2018b). A very complicated war is being waged in Syria, with sides that cooperate but also undermine each other, supporting each other's opposing sides. The fact is that a war within a war is going on in Syria, with an unclear ending.

## **International measures in Syria**

As for the Syrian Civil War, peace talks between the Syrian government and the opposition have been ongoing since the beginning of the conflict. The goal is to reach an agreement on the establishment of a military demarcation line, the political transition in Syria, and the fate of Bashar al-Assad. The first

peace talks in 2012 were held in Geneva under the auspices of the UN. After that, a series of negotiations took place, all of which failed. The last round of negotiations was held in December 2017, but it failed due to the impossibility of agreeing on the fate of Assad in the transitional government. In January 2018, Syria's influence in the Black Sea was discussed in Sochi, Russia, but the opposition blocked it, claiming it was an attempt by Russia to undermine UN efforts to establish an agreement. At the same time, the international community is constantly working to block radical Islamism, which has also gained momentum in Syria.

Among the Islamist forces, there is a large number of indoctrinated young fighters who see participation in jihad as their duty to serve Islam. However, radical Islam has gone too far and accepts violence and terrorist activities as the basis of functioning, which the original Islam does not support (Romaniuk & Weeb, 2016). Therefore, the contemporary Arab world, including Syria, is exposed to political violence supported by radical Islamist groups. The growing number of Arab, foreign, and radicalized Islamist fighters in Syria is an existential threat to other Muslims in the country. The solution to the conflict in Syria cannot be only a religious issue; it should be sought through political, economic, cultural, and military action. It is up to international organizations to try to create favourable conditions for reaching an agreement and a final solution to the Syrian issue.

## **Conclusion**

Although insurgency has been present in all phases of human civilization as a form of warfare and a way to achieve goals, it is also a contemporary phenomenon that occurs all over the world. Most cases indicate that the roots of the conflict, or its source, go back far into the past. As a result, some cases seem intractable. Every insurgent conflict is motivated by ethnic, religious, political, socio-economic, and other factors, which makes it unique and different from others. In general, counterinsurgency operations are carried out using conventional, regular means. Forces must be trained for this type of combat. The action requires major social and political changes, as insurgency rarely occurs in stable and efficient societies.

Insurgency and counterinsurgency must not be equated with terrorism or counterterrorism. Insurgencies have specific political goals: the overthrow of the legitimate government and the establishment of a new structure that would take over the responsibilities of the government. In general, the essence of insurgency is the struggle for control over a certain political space between state and non-state actors, each of which seeks to maximize its advantage in a chaotic and competitive environment. Rebels, convinced of the correctness of their actions, mostly turn to violence, subversion, and terrorism. Therefore, terrorism is one means to achieve the aforementioned rebel goals. Terrorism involves illegal violence, covert operations (to carry out terror), and murders to draw attention to the problems of certain groups. On the other hand, counterinsurgency seeks to suppress insurgency by applying the basic principles of counterinsurgency operations, such as presence, patience, persistence, and professionalism. As a successful method of dealing with the problem of insurgency, counterinsurgency must be adaptable, comprehensive, and cohesive with other activities carried out for this purpose.

In order to understand the Syrian situation, it is important to know that Syria is a country that does not have strategically significant resources like minerals and is a relatively small producer of oil. Likewise, there are no major seaports or military bases, except for the Russian naval base at Tartus. Syria is important because of its favourable location, as it borders Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan. Consequently, whoever controls Syria will have long-term influence throughout the region. The USA and Russia are aware of this fact and are trying in every possible way to gain control. Syria's threat stems from its current location, therefore. Also, Syrian territory is crucial for the construction of natural gas pipelines. Qatar, as a country rich in gas, wants to build gas pipelines from its sources through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria all the way to Turkey. That would make that gas available to the European market and allow it to compete with Russian gas, which would automatically lead to a new conflict. What started as peaceful protests turned into a multi-year crisis and conflict with no end in sight. Syria has become an arena of international conflicts conducted through regional and local forces. After the escalation of the conflict and increasingly present

interventions from outside, it became clear that it was a proxy war. Syria has lost all options for solving the problem independently, and it now concerns international decision-making circles.

A significant problem today is the increasingly frequent occurrence of insurgencies and the need for a quick response in a highly unstable environment. Therefore, the subject of this research and the case study of the civil war in Syria confirm counterinsurgency as an effective method to combat insurgency, not independently but in conjunction with other means. For this to be possible, it is crucial to understand the essence of counterinsurgency, which relates to the research objective. Equally, it is necessary to recognize the importance of the local population, on which the success of the counterinsurgency depends.

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## **Suvremeni oblici ratovanja – pobunjeništvo i protupobunjeničke operacije studija slučaja: Sirijska Arapska Republika**

### **Sažetak**

*Pobunjeništvo i protupobunjeništvo kao suvremeni oblici ratovanja prikazani su u radu kao dva fenomena koja su zapravo prisutna u svim fazama ljudske civilizacije. Zbog interesa velikog broja stručnjaka možemo ih smatrati suvremenim fenomenom. Pobunjeništvo je jedan od oblika izražavanja nezadovoljstva određenom situacijom. Neki su od čimbenika koji potiču to nezadovoljstvo ekonomska i društvena nejednakost te kršenje ljudskih prava i sloboda. Nezadovoljstvo može biti toliko jako da potiče ustanak pobunjenika na rušenje vlasti. Nasuprot tomu nalazi se protupobunjeništvo, koje obuhvaća sva sredstva suzbijanja pobunjeništva. Provodi se konvencionalnim, regularnim sredstvima i snagama koje su osposobljene za takvu vrstu borbe. Zbog kompleksnosti, u radu je za studiju slučaja uzet građanski rat u Sirijskoj Arapskoj Republici. U radu se objašnjavaju povijesne predispozicije izbijanja sukoba, daljnji razvoj, interesi pojedinih vanjskih i unutarnjih aktera te su prikazana neka od mogućih rješenja sirijskog pitanja.*

### **Ključne riječi**

*asimetrično ratovanje, generacije ratovanja, ideološki motivi, pregovori, sukob, uvojeni uspješnosti*